

House to meet from April 20

AMALI MALLAWARACHCHI

The Committee on Parliamentary Business is scheduled to meet on Monday (19) with the participation of party leaders under the patronage of the Speaker of the House.

The meeting will be held at 2.00 p.m. at the Parliament premises. **▶ TO PAGE 02**

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STATE MINISTER CABRAAL DEBUNKS "CHINESE COLONY" THEORY



State Minister Ajith Nivard Cabraal points to a map of Port City. Picture by Dushmantha Mayadunne

PORT CITY UNDER LOCAL JURISDICTION

US ENVOY'S MONEY LAUNDERING FEARS REFUTED

SHIRAJIV SIRIMANE

State Minister of Money & Capital Market and State Enterprise Reforms Ajith Nivard Cabraal came out strongly against comments made by US Ambassador to Sri Lanka and Maldives, Alaina B Teplitz who said that Sri Lanka may be creating a haven for money launderers and other nefarious actors through the Colombo Port City development.

Ambassador Teplitz was quoted on Saturday warning Sri Lanka of unintended consequences of 'nefarious actors' **▶ TO PAGE 02**

COMMISSION TO MANAGE PORT CITY 83,000 EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES BIGGEST-EVER FDI PROJECT

SHIRAJIV SIRIMANE

State Minister of Money & Capital Market and State Enterprise Reforms Ajith Nivard Cabraal yesterday dismissed allegations that the Colombo Port City would be a "Chinese Colony", pointing out that it will be administered under Sri Lankan law.

Addressing a news conference in Colombo, State Min-

ister Cabraal said all civil matters of the Port City would be executed under the Sri Lankan law. The Sri Lanka Police will maintain law and order in the Port City. Given the global outlook of the Port City, there would be an International Arbitration Council for dispute resolution.

"Moreover, the Sri Lankan Government is seeking to

approve draft legislation for a Colombo Port City Commission from Parliament to govern and manage the Colombo Port City. This is aimed at making Port City Sri Lanka's first service-oriented specialised economic zone.

There will also be a 5 to 7 member committee comprising experts and intellectuals with diversified knowledge

appointed by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to govern and manage the Port City," Cabraal said.

He stressed that in addition out of the 178 hectares of marketable land in the Port City, the Sri Lankan Government will own and manage and make profits from 62 hectares of land and hence it is a wrong perception to pin the Colombo Port

city as a Chinese colony," he added.

The State Minister recalled that it was the previous government that introduced several agreements to the Port City administration, even signing a final document just two days prior to the Presidential elections. "Hence this Bill has not been brought to Parliament in a hurry."

Cabraal said that the Colombo Port City would be a catalyst for economic revival as it would provide over 83,000 high paying employment opportunities and will completely change the economic fabric of the nation. "It would be the single biggest investment in the history of Sri Lanka attracting not only Chinese but other investors from all over the world." **▶ TO PAGE 02**

AG gives nod to Bill

Attorney General Dappula de Livera has informed the Presidential Secretary Dr. P.B. Jayasundera that the Port City Economic Commission Draft Bill is not inconsistent with the Constitution. Earlier, Dr. Jayasundera has written to the AG on the above issue. "I have to advise you that the provisions of the Bill are not inconsistent with the Constitution. The Bill is not subject to any prohibition or restriction imposed by the 13th Amendment to the Constitution and may be enacted by Parliament," the AG wrote.

National Oil Anointing Ceremony today

S.M.WIJAYARATNE Kurunegala Corr

The National Oil Anointing Ceremony for the Sinhala and Tamil New Year will be held today at the auspicious time of 7.16 a.m. at Peliyagoda Vidyalankara Pirivena under the patronage of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. **▶ TO PAGE 02**



Activities of six political parties temporarily suspended

AMALI MALLAWARACHCHI

The activities of six political parties have been temporarily suspended by the Election Commission (EC), its Chairman Nimal Punchihewa yesterday (16) said.

The EC has arrived at this decision as these political parties have sought legal action to resolve their internal conflicts. **▶ TO PAGE 02**



The "Nekathata Pelayak" main programme was held under the patronage of Environment Minister Mahinda Amaraweera at his home garden in Angunakolapelessa yesterday morning. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa presented a white sandalwood sapling to the Minister for this programme on Thursday. This is a new auspicious time added to the Sinhala and Tamil New Year. The new ritual was observed by planting saplings facing east at the auspicious time of 6.40 a.m. yesterday. Pictures by Hambantota Special Corr Rohana Ariyaratna

Govt. ready to introduce further amendments to Port City Bill - Mahindananda

The Government is ready to bring in further amendments to the Colombo Port City Economic Commission Bill in line with a Supreme Court verdict, Agriculture Minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage said.

Addressing a press conference yesterday to respond to the allegations against the proposed Bill, the Minister said the Government would not present any Bills that contravene the Constitution or existing laws.

He said the Government would withdraw any clause if the Supreme Court determines that it goes against the Law, adding that the Government would stand by the Supreme Court's opinion on the Bill.

He also strongly refuted the claims that the proposed Bill would allow money laundering. "I am ready for a debate on this with anyone. We have a Money Laundering Act and all transactions are subject to that law," he said. **▶ TO PAGE 02**

STF opens fire at Cab defying orders at checkpoint

The Special Task Force (STF) of Police yesterday morning opened fire at a Cab that defied orders to stop at a checkpoint in Point Pedro in Jaffna, Police Spokesman DIG Ajith Rohana said.

The checkpoint had been set up by the STF to protect a natural sand deposit from illegal sand miners in the area. Two persons, who were suspected to have been inside the Cab when the incident took place, had been admitted to the Point Pedro hospital later with gunshot injuries.

"The STF is implementing a special roadblock to protect natural sand mounds in Point Pedro and to prevent illegal sand mining.

At around 7.30 a.m. a Cab was moving towards the road block from the sand mound and the STF officers had ordered it to stop. As the driver did not obey the orders, the STF officers had dragged two nail boards as obstacles. **▶ TO PAGE 02**

Port City Bill contradicts One Country, One Law Concept - Sajith

AMALI MALLAWARACHCHI

The Colombo Port City Commission Bill contradicts the One Country, One Law Concept promoted by the present Government, Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa said yesterday.

Premadasa observed that the country and the Port City cannot have two legal systems. **▶ TO PAGE 02**



Thirty road deaths in two days

DINULI FRANCISCO

Thirty persons had been killed and 150 persons had sustained injuries in road accidents within two days, Police Spokesman DIG Ajith Rohana said yesterday.

Sixteen deaths were reported on Thursday, and eight of those fatalities had happened due to the road accidents that occurred on that same day and the other eight fatalities had occurred due to road accidents on the Sinhala and Tamil New Year Day. DIG Ajith Rohana said that 12 of the



deceased were motorcyclists. Among the deceased were two passengers, one pedestrian and a motorist.

He highlighted that Sri Lanka has recorded the highest number of road accidents on April 14 and April 15, adding that 14 deaths were reported on Wednesday.

He also noted that there may be an increase in the number of road accidents occurring during the weekends and requested drivers and pedestrians to take precautionary measures to prevent such accidents.

783 DRUNK DRIVERS ARRESTED

DINULI FRANCISCO

Police had arrested 783 drunk drivers during special islandwide operations held to nab drunk drivers during the festive season. From 9 a.m. on April 14 to 6 p.m.

on April 15, the Police had arrested 783 drivers. Out of them 534 were motorcyclists, 180 were three-wheeler drivers, and 43 were car drivers. Two bus drivers and 10 lorry drivers were also among the apprehended. **▶ TO PAGE 02**

Port City Bill violates Govt's mandate - JVP

The proposed Colombo Port City Economic Commission Bill goes against the mandate received by the Government, JVP Leader Anura Kumara Disanayake said. Speaking at a press conference at the JVP Headquarters in Battaramulla yesterday, he said the incumbent Government came to power with the pledge of building a national economy and protecting national assets. **▶ TO PAGE 02**



Prince Philip's funeral today

A ceremonial funeral for Queen Elizabeth II's husband Prince Philip who died at the age of 99 will take place in St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle today (Saturday).

The ceremony, which begins with the procession at 2:40 pm (1340 GMT) and a national minute's silence at 3:00 pm, will be a royal funeral like no other because of the global health crisis.

A bespoke Land Rover hearse will carry Queen Elizabeth II's husband Prince Philip to his final resting place.

He had always requested a no-fuss funeral but only 30 mourners will be present at the service because of coronavirus restrictions, which have forced a hasty revision of

arrangements. Only his wife of 73 years, and mostly close family will attend. The ceremony will be broadcast live on television and the public has been asked to stay away because of the pandemic.

One aspect of the Prince's funeral that will go according to plan will be the inclusion of a Land Rover designed to Philip's specifications to drive his coffin to St George's Chapel in the sprawling castle grounds.

The vehicle, painted a specific shade of green favoured by the military and Prince Philip, will have a central role in the funeral as it will be followed on foot by members of the royal family in procession. **▶ TO PAGE 02**

Comprehensive probe into harmful substances in food - COPA

The Committee on Public Accounts (COPA) informed officials of the Ministry of Health to conduct an immediate and comprehensive inspection regarding harmful substances in food including imported food items such as coconut oil given that such authority is vested with the Ministry of Health.

The Chairman of the Committee on Public Accounts Prof. Tissa Vitharana informed the officials that laboratory facilities for food testing should be improved and laws pertaining to food security should be amended expeditiously.

State Minister Lasantha Alagi-

yawanna, the former COPA Chairman pointed out that the situation has worsened due to the lack of proper coordination among food testing laboratories.

The Committee on Public Accounts held in Parliament to review the Auditor General's Report of the Ministry of Health for the year 2017/2018 and Current Performance stated that a number of issues have arisen due to the non-implementation of a proper program for food security in the country.

Member of Parliament Dr. Harini Amarasinghe emphasized that cos-

metics imported into the country contain highly harmful chemicals.

The Committee was of the view that it was very important to formulate a proper regulatory system for the importation of beauty products and instructed the officials of the Ministry of Health to take immediate action on this regard.

Given that the rules of the Ministry of Health are in force for food, the Chairman of the Committee, Prof. Tissa Vitharana emphasized the need to take immediate action to check the quality of food.

According to the Combined Plan of the Second Health Sector Devel-

opment Project, the total allocation for innovations during the five-year project period was Rs. 346 million, but as at December 31, 2017, Rs. 399 million had been approved for 34 innovation research proposals. The Committee paid special attention to this matter.

It was disclosed at the meeting that the research projects carried out by a single person have led to the ineffectiveness of the research projects.

The contract for the construction of the 7-storey Millennium Ward Complex at the Colombo South Teaching Hospital, Kalubowila was

awarded to a private company on August 14th, 2006 with a contract value of Rs. 398 million. Although it was scheduled to be completed on March 19th, 2008, the committee observed that the contract with the respective contractor was ended as the work had not yet been completed.

The Committee paid special attention to the failure in recovering Rs. 51 million paid to the contractor by that date.

The Committee directed the Secretary to the Ministry of Health to take immediate action to recover this amount.

The project to construct a new building complex for the Ministry of Health was awarded to CECB on October 29th, 2014 at a levy inclusive contract value of Rs. 3,896 million, the committee disclosed that the building plan had not been approved by the Municipal Council before the beginning of construction and that no feasibility study had been conducted for the project.

The Committee expressed its displeasure over the fact that 224 fingerprint machines purchased by the Ministry in 2006 at a cost of Rs. 31.71 million have been inactive for more than 15 years.

Prince Philip's first car an attraction at GFH

An 86-year-old car that once belonged to Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, is now the centrepiece of a seaside museum in Sri Lanka. The Prince, whose funeral will be on Saturday, was a car aficionado who bought the 1935 Standard Nine for 12 pounds when he was based in Colombo with the British Navy in 1940.

"When he came back in the early 1950s, he came and saw the car," said Sanjeev Gardiner, who has kept the vehicle at his Galle Face Hotel (GFH) in Colombo.

According to Gardiner, the prince acknowledged that the Standard was the first car he bought.

He also became a patron of the Standard Motor Car club.

Mr Gardiner's hotel, one of the oldest in the former

British colony, has built a museum around the silver and black sedan, preserving it for the enjoyment of guests and tourists.

At the time he bought it, the prince reportedly failed to beat down the asking price for the second-hand car, though he did manage to get a payment plan of two equal instalments within a month.

According to museum records, he first drove the car from Colombo to a naval base in Trincomalee, 260 kilometres away.

The car, which has 93,040 kilometres on it, has been restored several times and can still be driven. But Mr Gardiner said the prohibitive insurance cost means it is not taken out anymore.

The vehicle was bought by Gardiner's father Cyril in the early 1950s.



Galle Face Hotel Chairman Sanjeev Gardiner poses with the 1935 Standard Nine vintage car owned by Prince Philip. - AFP

Mr Gardiner said his father also loaned the royals the Cadillac used by Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip during their first official Sri Lanka visit in 1954.

Prince Philip, who died at the age of 99 last week, was known to love cars and often chose to drive himself.

But in 2019, he surren-

dered his driving licence at the age of 97 after a collision that flipped his car and injured two other people. During the Duke of Edinburgh's funeral procession on Saturday, a bespoke Land Rover Defender that he helped design will bear his coffin to St George's Chapel. (AFP)

Police mobile patrols to monitor quarantine rule breakers

DINULI FRANCISCO

The Police stated that constant mobile patrols would continue to monitor individuals who do not adhere to quarantine rules and regulations in a bid to contain COVID-19.

Police Spokesman DIG Ajith Rohana stated that Officers In Charge of Police stations have been instructed to conduct motorcycle patrols and foot patrols in the respective areas. He

further stated that police officers are deployed in uniforms and in civilian clothes to conduct surveillance operations and monitor the situation in their respective areas.

In addition to that, any New Year related activities and functions must be conducted under the approval of Medical Health officers and the Police.

If any guest houses or halls are

taken for functions, adherence to health guidelines is a must.

The Police urged the public to strictly adhere to health guidelines, maintaining social distance, wearing face masks and washing hands to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

He also noted if any person is found breaking quarantine rules and regulations the Police are compelled to take legal action against them.

US\$ 1.4 trillion lost every year to tobacco use - WHO

The World Health Organisation's (WHO) new technical manual on tobacco tax policy and administration shows countries ways to cut down on over US\$1.4 trillion in health expenditures and lost productivity due to tobacco use worldwide.

Improved tobacco taxation policies can also be a key component of building back better after COVID-19, where countries need additional resources to respond and to finance health system recovery.

"We launched this new manual to provide updated, clear, and practical guidance for policymakers, finance officials, tax authorities, customs officials

and others involved in tobacco tax policy to create and implement the strongest tobacco taxation policies for their specific countries," said Jeremias N. Paul Jr, Unit Head for the Fiscal Policies for Health team in the Health Promotion Department at WHO. "We hope this document sheds light on the significant advantages to raising tobacco taxation. The data and insights provided here should be an eye opener for policymakers worldwide," he said.

The 'best buy' highlighted in the manual not only saves money, but saves lives. The human and economic costs of tobacco are on the rise - 8 million people died because of tobacco last year. In

2018 only 38 countries, covering 14% of the global population had sufficiently high tobacco taxes - which means taxing at least 75% of the price of these health-harming products. By implementing proven policies like tobacco taxes, the costs created by the tobacco industry to local communities and nations can be avoidable. It is a win for population health, revenue and for development and equity. Tobacco taxes Save lives, Mobilize resources, Address health inequities, Reduce health system burdens and costs, and Target non-communicable risk factors for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). - www.who.int

Govt. ready to introduce further amendments to... From page 01

The Minister said the Colombo Port City would be a turning point for Sri Lanka, observing that Singapore achieved fast development by facilitating foreign investments.

"We are doing everything above

board. The Bill has been presented in line with the tax, land and financial laws of the country. The Port City will be an economic hub. We have facilitated a one stop shop for the purpose. That is why the Opposition is not happy with

it. There are foreign countries behind criticism against this Bill. Those who speak against it are being paid money," he commented.

Commenting on the recent remarks by MP Wijeyadasa Rajapaksh, the Min-

ister said he could have first inquired about the matter at the Government Group Meeting. "He never attends the Government Group Meetings, even though he is a Government MP. He criticized the 20th Amendment in the same

manner, but ultimately voted for it. It is not fair to behave in this manner just because he was deprived of a ministerial post. National affairs should not be confused with private matters," he said. Responding to allegations that the

Colombo Port City does not come under the purview of the Colombo Municipal Council, Aluthgamage said the Katunayake Free Trade Zone also does not come under any Local Government Body.

US Envoy's money laundering... From page 01

who may try to misuse a China-backed Colombo Port City's business rules as a permissive money laundering haven amid concerns of tax leaks.

State Minister Cabral said that this is a very unjust and unfair comment. "Government and several other bodies will and have taken every effort under international laws to scrutinize investors and can assure the public that such activities would not take place."

He challenged the Ambassador to

provide him with even one instance of such a 'shady' activity.

Cabral said that the Ambassador should also note that small countries with less than 650,000 population have heavily invested in the US.

"Cayman Islands with a population of less than 65,000 and Luxembourg (660,000 population) have invested over US\$ 1,839 billion and 1,772 billion respectively in the US. We don't have such tiny countries investing in Sri Lanka."

House to meet... From page 01

The committee is to take up proposals and bills to be scheduled in the agenda for the Parliamentary week starting from April 20, 2021.

During the previous committee meeting, a debate was considered on April 08, 09 on the report of the Presidential Commission Inquiry appointed to probe inci-

dents of Political Victimization which was later rescheduled.

Thus, at the meeting held on Monday (19), there is a possibility of taking a final decision on scheduling a debate on the said Commission report.

If such a decision is taken, the debate might be scheduled for April 23 and 24.

Port City Bill violates Govt's... From page 01

He added that economic liberalization does not sit well with the previously stated policies of the Government.

He accused that by implementing the Port City Bill, the Government is giving in to a geopolitical project of China.

"At present, there are issues between India and China. If Sri Lanka allies itself with one country and falls victim to its geopolitical programme, Sri Lanka will have to brace itself for threats from the other country," he said.

"The proposed Bill states that seven main enactments including the Municipal Council Ordinance, Board of Investment of Sri Lanka Law, Strategic Development Projects Act have no application within the area of authority of the Colombo Port City. Exemptions and incentives have been granted to the Colombo Port City from or under 14 enactments including the Inland Revenue Act, Value Added Tax Act. Most of them are financial legislations. The Colombo Port City does not come under any Local Government body or Provincial Council.



"This area extending to 1,115 acres does not come under an administration appointed by the people. It is managed by a 5-7-Member Commission appointed by the President. The people have to pay taxes for any item they purchase within the Port City premises when they return to the country. The payment of salaries for those who work in the premises will be done in foreign currencies, most probably the Yuan. We are of the view that this Bill violates the Constitution and other existing laws of the country. Hence we went before the Court seeking a declaration that the bill requires the approval by people at a referendum in addition to a special majority of Parliament," the JVP Leader said.

He pointed out that out of the seven-day period allowed for petitioning, the courts were functioning only one day amidst the Sinhala and Tamil New Year celebrations, adding that the timing of the presentation of the Bill could be a deliberate attempt by the Government to discourage the citizenry from petitioning against the Bill.

783 drunk drivers... From page 01

Police Spokesman DIG Ajith Rohana stated that operations are being conducted round the clock and Breathalyzer tests are being carried out to identify whether the drivers are under the influence of alcohol or have consumed any narcotic substances. In addition to that blood tests will also be carried out.

Moreover, he added that under the legal provisions of the Motor Traffic Act, if the drivers refuse to take a Breathalyzer test, it is presumed that the driver is under the

influence of alcohol or narcotics and legal action would be taken against them.

He also noted that if the person is found guilty of drunk driving the court can impose a fine of Rs.25,000 along with six-month imprisonment. The Court can also cancel or temporarily suspend the driving licenses.

The Police during this same period had also taken legal action against 2,844 individuals for various other motor traffic offences.

STF opens fire at Cab defying... From page 01

The driver had not stopped the Cab despite the tyres being punched. According to the statements of the STF officers, the driver had attempted to run over the STF officers," the Police Spokesman explained.

He said the STF officers were compelled to use force in terms of

the Penal Code. "They had fired at the Cab, but it had disappeared. After an hour, it was revealed that two persons had been admitted to Point Pedro hospital with gunshot injuries. The statements of the STF officers were recorded. The Police are conducting investigations," he added.

Port City Bill contradicts One... From page 01

Premadasa made these observations at an event held in Sellakataragama to distribute rice to 700 families, as a part of a programme to assist the needy who celebrate the Sinhala-Hindu New Year season during the pandemic.

Premadasa pointed out that the country needs a national leader like Nelson Mandela and Lee Kuan Yew, not a Hitler as some politicians have suggested.

The Opposition Leader observed that due to the pandemic situation, people find it difficult to celebrate the New Year as they are burdened by numerous economic hardships.

"We started a mobile service that looks into the economic difficulties of people due to pandemic. When we analyzed the Sellakataragama area, we could note that there are many who earn a living from self-employment. Plus, these employments were dominantly connected with the devotees who visit Kataragama. With the pandemic situation, people have not been able to continue with these



businesses. So it is important that we assist them during this trying time," Premadasa said.

The Opposition Leader said: "A minister has claimed that the country needs a leader who epitomizes Hitler. I strongly recommend people to go through Hitler's history and understand the terror he caused. Do we need undemocratic politicians in this country? As a community can we deal with dictators who traumatize people? I saw Maha Sangha who blessed the election of this present Government has requested not to spread unethical opinions like this. We believe that we need a disciplined leader and a community that follows this quality. We need one law in one country. If we look at the Colombo Port City Economic Commission Bill, it seems to violate this very concept of one country, one law. If this bill is passed, we will get one law in the country and another in Port City. We need a disciplined society and a disciplined leader who capitalizes on humanity, not otherwise."

National Oil Anointing ... From page 01

Indigenous Medicine Promotion and Rural and Ayurvedic Hospitals Development and Community Health State Minister Sisira Jayakody told the *Daily News* that a programme to plant one million herbal plants too would commence today coinciding with this national ceremony.

State Minister Jayakody added that these events are organized to bless the people with good health in the New Year.

Port City under local... From page 01

He said the Government debt service last year saw a paradigm shift where the foreign loans were reduced from 65% to 40% and the Government hopes to reduce this further through attracting Foreign Direct Investments (FDI).

In a bid to woo global investors to the Port City, several investment protection laws, concessions, tax holidays, tax-free salaries, longer

leases of land had been provided. In addition, to speed up project approval process a 'single window concept' too has been created.



Activities of six political... From page 01

"The said political parties will be kept inactive until the Court proceedings are concluded," Punchihewa told the *Daily News*. Punchihewa further said that the Election Commission can consider activating such a party if it withdraws the case and comes to an agreement internally as well. "These six political parties were temporarily suspended from carrying out any political activity as they have filed cases before the Court regarding internal matters such as the appointment of their Secretaries and Chairmen. As a result, these parties will not be able to contest in elections until the relevant legal proceedings are concluded," Punchihewa pointed out.



Prince Philip's funeral... From page 01

The Queen will follow behind Philip's hearse in procession to the chapel in a Bentley.

All guests, including the Queen, who is 95 next week, are required to wear face masks, sit apart and observe social distancing rules in line with government regulations.

A small choir of four will sing pieces of music he chose during the 50-minute service.

The 30 guests include heir to the

throne Prince Charles, his second wife Camilla, and the monarch's three other children, and eight grandchildren, as well as all their spouses.

Others include the children of the queen's late sister Princess Margaret, and three of Philip's German relatives.

Mourning will wear formal day clothing, which reports said was to avoid awkwardness over which princes are entitled to military uniform. - AFP



Measures to help detained Lankan women in Saudi - Namal

Sports Minister Namal Rajapaksa has assured a solution to Sri Lankan women wrongfully detained in Saudi Arabia.

Responding to a tweet by a journalist, Rajapaksa tweeted saying he will inform the Foreign Ministry and speak to the relevant authorities to see how best they can resolve this matter as fast as they can.

The Amnesty International South Asia highlighted that at least 41 Sri Lankan women migrant workers have been detained in Saudi Arabia for as long as 18 months.

"Three women have young children with them, and one woman is known to be in urgent need of medical care. None of the women have been informed of any charges against them, nor have they been granted any legal support to better understand the length or reason for their

detention. Sri Lankan authorities must proactively take measures to ensure their immediate repatriation so that these women are able to return home and reunite with their families," the Amnesty International said on Thursday.

"The 41 Sri Lankan women migrant domestic workers are currently detained at the Exit 18 Deportation Detention (Tarheel) Centre in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Prison officials have repeatedly promised the women that they will be repatriated in recent months, but they all remain in detention as of April 2021," the statement said.

"The Sri Lankan Embassy in Riyadh has



been in touch with the detained women and has offered multiple reassurances, however it is concerning that no one has yet been repatriated. The Government must ensure that the costs of repatriation, such as airfare and any COVID-related quarantine requirements, are covered as many of the detainees cannot afford them.

The Sri Lankan Government has an obligation to protect the human rights of all of its migrant workers in Saudi Arabia and to work in a timely manner to ensure that these detained workers are released and safely returned to Sri Lanka," the statement added.



People walk along a flooded road in the heavy rains.

Heavy rains in Kandy

Several houses in Kandy were inundated due to heavy rains experienced on Thursday, Disaster Management Centre (DMC) Media Spokesman Pradeep Kodippili said.

He said the Kandy DMC with the support of the Tri-Force personnel was involved in emergency operations in the area.

In the 24 hours ending at 7 a.m. yesterday, the highest rainfall of 134 mm had been recorded from Algama in the Kegalle District. Dunumale Estate in the same district had experienced 103 mm rainfall. Kandenuwara in the Matale District had received 107 mm rainfall, while Morahena and Nillambe in the Kandy District had received 104 mm and 101 mm rainfall respectively.

The Meteorology Department predicted fairly heavy falls above 75 mm in the Eastern, Central and Uva Provinces today as well.

"Showers or thundershowers will occur at several places over most parts

of the island in the evening or night. A few showers can be expected in Western and Southern coastal areas in the morning too. Misty conditions can be expected at some places in Central and Sabaragamuwa Provinces during the morning. General public is kindly requested to take adequate precautions to minimize damages caused by temporary localized strong winds and lightning during thundershowers," the weather bulletin said.

The DMC Spokesman also said that eight accidents caused by lightning had been reported in the last three months.

The National Building Research Organisation (NBRO) on Thursday issued a landslide early warning for several areas in the Kandy, Kegalle and Matale Districts. The warning is effective till today evening.

He requested the public to be vigilant over pre-landslide signs and immediately evacuate if such signs appeared.

Celebrating Earth Day: The voice of the next generation

This year marks the 51st anniversary of World Earth Day and a webinar is designed to commemorate the occasion and to support the worldwide efforts to conserve and revitalize the environment of the blue planet.

This is the 17th of a series of virtual zoom panel discussions hosted by America Sri Lanka Photographic Art Society in Los Angeles California, USA (ASPAS); Member of Photographic Society of America (PSA) and The International Federation of Photography of Art in France (FIAP).

The objective of the series is to showcase the beauty of world fauna and flora and promote environmental conservation in the context of nature photography and tourism, with a special focus on the grandeur of Sri Lanka's natural habitat.

The America Sri Lanka Photographic Art Society Los Angeles, led by its president, Suriya Jayalath Perera, has organised this webinar to bring together ten young people from the U.S., the U.K., Canada, and Sri Lanka to voice their concerns and present their ideas on the occasion of the Earth Day 2021. Youth from ages 6 to 18, will address the entire gamut of environmental issues from climate change to plastic pollution. It would be a truly groundbreaking event, and you can be a part of it by virtually joining them on Sunday April 18. The webinar will be moderated by Medini Ratnayake.

The young panellists and the topics they speak at the webinar include, Them Perera (16), North Hollywood Highly Gifted Magnet, Los Angeles, U.S.A. on Air Pollution, Mihiri Kamiss (17), St. Joseph's High School, Edmonton, Canada on Plastic Pollution, Hasala Kalendra Ranwella (12), Ananda College, Colombo, Sri Lanka on Loss of Biodiversity, Dhilena Wickramasinghe (16), Ponderosa High School, Eldorado Hills, California, USA on Global Warming and Climate Change, Theruni Abesinghe (12), Bishop's College, Colombo, Sri Lanka on Forest Ecosystem, Alosha Samaraarachchi, (9), Hillwood College, Kandy, Sri Lanka on Oceans and Marine Life, Akash Perera (17), St. Joseph's Catholic High School, Barrie Ontario, Canada, on Water Pollution, Nihara Dumbukola (11), Woodbridge high school South Woodford, London, the U.K., on Plastic Pollution, Akira Alagi-



yawanna (12), Wycherley International School, Colombo, Sri Lanka on Oceans and Marine Life and Farah Shamim (12), Woodford county grammar school London, the U.K. on Global Warming and Climate Change.

Earth Day marks the anniversary of the birth of the modern environmental movement in 1970 which gave voice to an emerging public consciousness about the state of our planet. Each year on April 22, more than a billion people celebrate Earth Day to protect the planet from pollution and deforestation and environment related issues.

At a previous ASPAS webinar, Dr. Peter H. Sand, former Secretary-General of ICUN, stated, "Pandemics such as coronavirus are the result of humanity's destruction of nature, the illegal and unsustainable wildlife trade, as well as the devastation of forests and other wild places, are the driving force behind the increasing number of diseases leaping from wildlife to humans." The ASPAS webinars are intended to offer a platform to discuss a more balanced relationship with these ecosystems and the tools that can help us reach this objective, so that future generations can continue to enjoy and benefit from them sustainably and responsibly.

In the decades leading up to the first Earth Day, the world was consuming vast amounts of leaded gas through massive and inefficient automobiles. Industry belched out smoke and sludge with little fear of the consequences from either the law or the press. Air pollution was commonly accepted as the smell of prosperity. Until this point, the world remained largely oblivious to environmental concerns and how a polluted environment threatens human health. Since, the great

challenge for the environmental community is to combat the cynicism of climate change deniers, well-funded oil lobbyists, reticent policy makers, and a disinterested public. In the face of these challenges, Earth Day prevailed and established itself as a major movement for global action for the environment.

Over the decades, it has brought hundreds of millions of people into the environmental movement, creating opportunities for civic engagement and volunteers in 193 countries. Earth Day engages more than 1 billion people every year and has become a major steppingstone along the pathway of engagement around the protection of the planet.

Now, the fight for a clean environment continues with increasing urgency, as the ravages of climate change become more and more apparent every day. As the awareness of our climate crisis grows, so does civil society mobilization, which is reaching a fever pitch across the globe today. Digital and social media are bringing these conversations, protests, strikes and mobilizations to a global audience, uniting a concerned citizenry as never before and mobilizing generations to join together to take on the greatest challenge that humankind has faced.

It is quite apparent that the youth of our world should also be engaged in this vital conversation as an absolutely indispensable partner.

Governments have recognized this for decades and many have introduced some level of climate and environmental education into their education systems. But the truth is that impact of climate and environmental education is in some cases weak, cursory, and still in many countries non-existent. In the decades since the launch of

the global environmental movement, it is estimated that more than 3 billion young people have graduated from high school having learned little or nothing about one of the greatest issues that will shape their lives and their livelihoods for decades to come.

The time is now, indeed it is long overdue, for a massive environmental literacy campaign that can create a generation of citizens, workers and leaders who really understand why and how to stop climate change and environmental degradation, ensuring that every student around the world completes their formal education as an environmental and climate literate citizen. A citizen who is ready to take action and speak up for change and build knowledge and skills for the growing green sector of clean energy, efficient transportation, sustainable business and making themselves competitive for new jobs.

The youth must also equip themselves with the knowledge and skills needed to build a better future and be stewards of this planet. They must learn that to sustain a functional society and economy, natural resources must be used wisely and efficiently while protecting the ecological systems to ensure clean air, clean water, and food security for all.

But just as vitally, we need to equip future generations with the knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm to survive and indeed thrive in the decades to come. And that begins in school. Even world leaders recognized that pivotal role as far back as 30 years, when the countries that forged the original United Nations climate change treaty in 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit enshrined climate education as an essential part of a national response to a global emergency.

Educationists believe every school in the world must have compulsory, assessed climate and environmental education with a strong civic engagement component. They have also pointed out that the onus for developing environmental consciousness in youth could not be the sole responsibility of schools as the young people need the help of adult allies. There is a role for everyone, parents, relatives, and society to support youth voices and stand alongside them.

Join live on Sunday April 18, at 8.30 P.M. <https://www.facebook.com/aspausa/live>

Troops recover remains of missing father and son

Troops of the Security Forces-Central after a 18 hour-search yesterday recovered the remains of the father and son who were carried away in a strong current in the Haldumulla Welu Oya at Haldumulla, Kalupahana on Thursday (15) evening. The father and son were having a bath with the daughter in the waterway.

The four-member family from Marahagama was proceeding to Badulla for the New Year holidays when they stopped over for a bath at Welu Oya. Reports said that the mother of the family had gone to a nearby shop to buy some snacks, while the father, son and daughter had gone for a bath and were caught in a strong current and drifted away.

However, the daughter had managed to save her life by holding on to some shrubs and was rescued with the support of civilians but her father and the brother were swept away in swelling waves due to the heavy rainfall experienced in hill country areas in the preceding days.

On the instructions of Army Commander Gen. Sahavendra Silva, troops of the SFHQ-Central on the guidance of SF Commander-Central began a search and rescue operation on Thursday evening. It is believed that the father and son had drifted down the waterway towards low-lying areas before their bodies were recovered yesterday morning.



Troops of the Security Forces-Central carrying the remains of the father and son who drowned in the Haldumulla Welu Oya at Haldumulla, Kalupahana on Thursday.



TISL files petition challenging Colombo Port City Bill

Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL) on Thursday filed a petition with the Supreme Court challenging the Colombo Port City Economic Commission Bill, highlighting three key corruption concerns.

"TISL urges that the Bill is in violation of several key articles of the Constitution and that it creates pathways for corruption,

by facilitating or enabling illicit financial flows, and money laundering," the TISL said in a statement.

"TISL draws attention to the lack of transparency in ownership of the 'off-shore' businesses that will be set up at the Port City, since ultimate owners of businesses registered need not be disclosed. Access to such information by law enforcement is crucial.



"TISL is concerned about the lack of transparency in relation to the operations of offshore banks in the Port City, that could be free from the pur-

view of the regulatory framework applicable to local banks, posing a risk of turning the Port City into a secrecy jurisdiction.

"TISL is deeply concerned also, that the bill leads to the evading of Parliamentary oversight on public funds and matters within the port city, thereby creating a serious gap in public accountability," the statement added.

Police, Army team rescue trapped civilians

SIGIRIYA SPECIAL CORR.

The Police Life Saving Unit with the assistance of the Army saved the lives of 13 civilians trapped in Heen Ganga after a seven-hour rescue operation.

The 13 civilians, who were on a

trip and had a party near the Heen Ganga area in Hasalaka Road. They had been trapped due to a sudden increase in water level at Minipe lake on Thursday night.

Troops with the help of area residents were able to save all the civil-

ians who were drunk during that time. They are residents from Negombo, Maligawatte, Mahiyangana and Hebarawa.

The Police said the water level had increased around 4.30 p.m. due to heavy rains in the area.

Police seize 128 kgs of 'ICE', 13 arrested

The Police had arrested 13 suspects for the possession of the narcotic substance 'ICE' during raids carried out since April 10, Police Spokesperson DIG Ajith Rohana said.

He said approximately, 128 kilograms of ICE had been seized during these arrests.

The Police Narcotic Bureau on Thursday arrested a suspect (28) in Hunupitiya, Wattala for the possession of 2.4 kilograms of ICE.

Previously, on April 10, the Police arrested a suspect in Wattala for the possession of 113 grammes of 'ICE' and 101 grammes of Heroin. Following interrogation of the suspect, 15 kilograms of ICE had been found in the Ja-Ela area on April 11. Six suspects including two female suspects had been arrested during the raid.



Some of the seized boxes of 'ICE'.

Five suspects were arrested in Rathgahawatte in Sapugaskanda on April 12 for possessing 110 kilograms of 'ICE'.

The Police request the public to

give information related to narcotic substances to Hotline 1997. The Police said that the individuals who provide useful information would be rewarded.

Daily News



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SATURDAY, APRIL 17, 2021

Party labels and extremism

Some weeks ago the National Election Commission (NEC) announced that it would not register political parties carrying religious or ethnic labels. The Commission said it would also peruse manifestoes of political parties to ensure that they do not contain religious/ethnic material. The NEC perhaps was acting on the recommendations of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry (PCol) on the Easter Sunday carnage. The PCol had called for the banning of political parties which are identified by ethnicity or religion.

However, now we have the Ministerial Oversight Committee (MOC) appointed by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to make recommendations after studying the PCol Report, suggesting the overturning of the ban proposed by the PCol on political parties bearing ethnic or religious labels. According to media reports, in the MOC's opinion, the current Sri Lankan society is divided on religious and ethnic lines and that this mindset should be changed ideologically and attitudinally instead through the introduction of new laws. It has opposed the PCol recommendation to ban political parties carrying religious/ethnic labels on the grounds that it was not practical.

There is of course something to be said for the MOC's opinion. It is next to impossible to change a mindset wedded to a political ideology that is religious or ethnocentric. But it is also true that only those political parties in the peripheries, that are regionally based, that attach ethnic or religious labels to their political parties. Being regional parties they seek to exploit the religious/ethnic sentiments of their constituencies as a means of entering Parliament and calling the shots in the formation of Governments. The main parties too had not been vehement in their opposition to such tactics and let the *status quo* prevail. It is this very accusation that was levelled at the Yahapalanaya Government - that of tolerating Islamic extremism with an eye on the next election, with disastrous consequences. Regional parties bearing religious/ethnic labels, with time, became militant and radicalized to the extent that they posed a danger to national security, a fact which has dawned on all following the Easter Sunday carnage. This is true of both the parties in the North and the East with ethnic labels which gave rise to the LTTE and ISIS-inspired movements. This no doubt is the reason why the PCol recommended the banning of political parties with religious/ethnic labels.

In the South, though, it is a different story. Those that carried labels denoting the supremacy of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism were rejected outright by the masses at elections. That is why parties such as Sinhale Maha Sammatha Bhoomiputhra Pakshaya and recently the Bodu Bala Sena suffered humiliating defeats at the hustings. Therefore, the argument of the MOC that it was difficult to erase an entrenched mindset based on religion or ethnicity in the voting pattern of Sri Lankans simply falls apart.

On the contrary, it is political parties that had no religious or ethnic labels attached to them such as the United National Party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna, Lanka Samasamaja Party and Communist Party that always carried the day. True, some of these parties may have had ideologies or personalities that catered to nationalist or religious sentiments. But the suggestion that parties carrying religious or ethnic labels necessarily posed a threat to national security and hence should be banned hardly bears scrutiny, if one were to follow this argument. On that score the MOC's argument against banning such political parties holds true. Besides, even a cursory study of past national elections would indicate that religion or ethnicity hardly played a part in the Southern polity. Politicians such as A. C. S Hameed, M. A. Baker Markar and M. H. Mohamed all represented Sinhala Buddhist majority electorates and always prevailed over their Sinhala Buddhist rivals. In that sense, it is not a question of changing the people's ideology per se as suggested by the MOC. It could be based on other factors such as socio-economic factors, threat to national security etc. that may sway the people to vote for a particular political party. The personality of the candidates in the fray too could count in some instances.

Based on these arguments it would seem that there is no rationale in banning political parties bearing religious or ethnic identities. Instead, all efforts should be directed at promoting reconciliation and national unity. After all, leaders of all ethnic groups were in the vanguard with the Sinhala leaders in the Independence struggle and helped bridge the communal gap. Ideally there should be no political parties based on religious or ethnic identities since this would bring about suspicion and exacerbate ethnic and religious divides. However, banning such entities is not the answer. In any event, banning such parties would be no guarantee that the concerns entertained by the PCol that this would promote extremism, would be laid to rest. After all, the radical militancy of the JVP in 1971 and 1988-89 had nothing to do with religious or ethnic labels. In that context, even ideological changes suggested by the MOC would not help.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Hatred, racism, and extremism should have no place in this world. - Angela Merkel



UN Headquarters in New York

The growing criticism against the Security Council is directed largely at its collective failures to resolve ongoing conflicts and political crises in several hot spots, including Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Iraq, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Ukraine and Libya — and its longstanding failure over Palestine.

A new Cold War threatens world peace

THALIF DEEN

A new Cold War — this time, between the US and China — is threatening to paralyze the UN's most powerful body, even as military conflicts and civil wars are sweeping across the world, mostly in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America.

The growing criticism against the Security Council is directed largely at its collective failures to resolve ongoing conflicts and political crises in several hot spots, including Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Iraq, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Ukraine and Libya — and its longstanding failure over Palestine.

The sharp divisions between China and Russia, on one side, and the Western powers on the other, are expected to continue, triggering the question: Has the Security Council outlived its usefulness or has it lost its political credibility? The five big powers are increasingly throwing their protective arms around their allies, despite growing charges of war crimes, genocide and human rights violations against these countries.

Last week, Yasmine Ahmed, UK Director at Human Rights Watch, called on Britain "to step up as penholder on Myanmar and start negotiating a Security Council draft resolution on an arms embargo and targeted sanctions against the military".

Over 580 people, including children, have been killed since the February 1 coup: "it is time for the Security Council to do more than issue statements and begin working towards substantive action," she warned.

But in most of these conflicts, including Myanmar, arms embargoes are very unlikely because the major arms suppliers to the warring parties are the five Permanent Members of the Security Council, namely the US, UK, France, Russia and China.

Democracies and autocracies

US President Joe Biden has described the growing new confrontation as a battle between democracies and autocracies.

In a recent analytical piece, the *New York Times* said China's most striking alignment is with Russia, with both countries drawing closer after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. The two countries have also announced they will jointly build a research station on the moon, setting the stage to compete with US space programmes.

"The threat of a US-led coalition challenging China's authoritarian policies has only bolstered Beijing's ambition to be a global leader of nations that oppose



UN Security Council

Washington and its allies," the *Times* said.

Ian Williams, President of the New York-based Foreign Press Association and author of 'UN told: The Real Story of the United Nations in Peace and War', told IPS that in the early years, with a secure majority in the General Assembly (GA), the US could pretend virtue and eschew using the veto. The embattled Soviets resorted to it over and over.

"But as with so much UN and international law, the Israeli exception had the US making up for lost time. Now the Russians have been catching up with vetoes for Serbia and Syria".

China, he pointed out, avoided using the veto unless Taiwan or Tibet was mentioned. In the old days there was a hint of an ideological element — Third World and Socialism versus Imperialism.

"But now it is entirely transactional, veto holders looking after their clients and allies, so no one should entertain illusions about China and Russia acting in a progressive and constructive way. But the US is in no position to point fingers about Syria while it protects Saudi Arabia and Israel".

"We can hope that the majority of members will grow indignant enough to try to effect indignation. But sadly, historical experience suggests many governments have almost unlimited tolerance for mass murder in far-away countries of which they know little," he noted, including Darfur, the Balkans, Rwanda and now Myanmar.

The breakthrough would be the US saying, end the Occupation and then inviting others to join in a reaffirmation of the Charter.

"But since I don't really believe in the tooth fairy, I would have to settle for a coalition of the conscious-stricken in the GA united for peace — and international law and order", said Williams, a senior analyst who has written for newspapers and magazines around the world, including the *Australian*, *The Independent*, *New York Observer*, *The*



UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres

Financial Times and *The Guardian*.

Asked about the killings in Myanmar, and the lack of action in the UNSC, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told reporters on March 29: "We need more unity in the international community. We need more commitment in the international community to put pressure in order to make sure that the situation is reversed. I'm very worried. I see, with a lot of concern, the fact that, apparently, many of these trends look irreversible, but hope is the last thing we can give up on."

Vijay Prashad, Executive Director, Tricontinental Institute for Social Research, who has written extensively on international politics, told IPS the United Nations is an essential institution, a process, in many ways, rather than a fully-finished institution.

The agencies of the UN — including WHO, UNICEF, UNHCR, he said, provide vital service to the world's peoples; "and we need to make these institutions more robust, and we need to ensure that they drive a public agenda that advances the UN Charter's main goals (namely to maintain peace, to end hunger and illiteracy, to provide the basis for a rich life, in sum)."

The Security Council is a victim of the political battles in the world, he argued.

"There is no way to build a better framework to handle the major power differentials," said Prashad, author of 30 books, includ-

ing most recently 'Washington Bullets' (LeftWord, Monthly Review).

"It would be far better to empower the UN General Assembly, which is more democratic, but since the 1970s we have seen how the US — in particular — undermined the UNGA to take decision making almost exclusively to the UNSC".

Ever since the fall of the USSR, he said, the UN Secretary-General has become subservient to the US government ("we saw this shockingly with the treatment of former Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali").

The new 'Group of Friends to Defend the UN Charter', which includes China and Russia, is a positive development, said Prashad.

US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield told reporters on March 31: "And then in terms of working with my counterparts in the Security Council, I know that there are areas — and this is a discussion that I've had — with both my Russian and Chinese colleagues — we know that there are red lines".

Human Rights values

"There are areas where we have serious concerns, and we've been open and we've been frank about those concerns. In China, what is happening with the Uyghurs, for example. With Russia, in Syria, and there are many others. We know what the red lines are", she added.

"We tried to bridge those gaps, but we also try to find those areas where we have common ground. We've been able to find common ground on Myanmar. With the Chinese, we're working on climate change in, I think, a very positive way. We're not in the exact same place, but it's an area where we can have conversations with each other."

"So as the top U.S. diplomat in New York, it is my responsibility to find common ground so that we can achieve common goals, but not to give either country a pass when they are breaking human rights values or push-

ing in directions that we find unacceptable," she declared.

Meanwhile, harking back to a bygone era, during the height of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union in the 1960s, the United Nations was the ideological battleground where the Americans and the Soviets pummeled each other — either on the floor of the General Assembly hall or at the horse-shoe table of the UN Security Council.

Perhaps one of the most memorable war of words took place in October 1962 when the politically-feisty US Ambassador Adlai Stevenson (1961-65), a two-time Democratic US presidential candidate, challenged Soviet envoy Valerian Zorin over allegations that the USSR, perhaps under cover of darkness, had moved nuclear missiles into Cuba — and within annihilating distance of the United States.

Speaking at a tense Security Council meeting, Stevenson admonished Zorin: "I remind you that you didn't deny the existence of these weapons. Instead, we heard that they had suddenly become defensive weapons. But today — again, if I heard you correctly — you now say they don't exist, or that we haven't proved they exist, with another fine flood of rhetorical scorn."

"All right sir," said Stevenson, "let me ask you one simple question. Do you, Ambassador Zorin, deny that the USSR has placed and is placing medium and intermediate range missiles and sites in Cuba?" "Yes or No? Don't wait for the translation: Yes or No?". Stevenson insisted with a tone of implied arrogance.

Speaking in Russian through a UN translator (who faithfully translated the US envoy's sentiments into English), Zorin shot back: "I am not in an American courtroom, sir, and therefore I do not wish to answer a question that is put to me in the fashion in which a prosecutor does. In due course, sir, you will have your reply. Do not worry."

Not to be outwitted, Stevenson howled back: "You are in the court of world opinion right now, and you can answer yes or no. You have denied that they exist. I want to know if ...I've understood you correctly."

When Zorin said he will provide the answer in "due course", Stevenson famously declared: "I am prepared to wait for my answer until hell freezes over."

(Thalif Deen is the author of a newly-released book on the United Nations titled "No Comment — and Don't Quote Me on That." The 220-page book is filled with scores of anecdotes — from the serious to the hilarious — and is available on Amazon and at the Vijitha Yapa bookshop in Sri Lanka.)

- IPS

The US will withdraw all its troops from Afghanistan before this year's 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks, finally ending America's longest war.

"It is time to end America's longest war," President Biden said in a speech from the White House room where US airstrikes were first declared in 2001.

"We cannot continue the cycle of extending or expanding our military presence in Afghanistan hoping to create the ideal conditions for our withdrawal, expecting a different result," said Mr. Biden, the fourth president to oversee the war.

"While we will not stay involved in Afghanistan militarily, our diplomatic and humanitarian work will continue," he continued, adding: "We will continue to support the government of Afghanistan."

At least 2,500 to 3,500 US troops are part of the 9,600-strong NATO Afghan mission.

US and NATO officials have said the Taliban, a hardline Islamist movement, have so far failed to live up to commitments to reduce violence in Afghanistan.

In Kabul, Afghan officials say they will continue peace talks in preparation for the withdrawal.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani tweeted he had spoken on the phone with Mr. Biden on Wednesday, and that the country "respects the US decision and we will work with our US partners to ensure a smooth transition". He added that Afghanistan's defence forces "are fully capable of defending its people and country".

The drawdown of US troops delays by around five months an agreement with the Taliban by former president Donald Trump to pull troops by May 1, amid a growing consensus in Washington that little more can be achieved.

The US president has judged that a conditions-based approach, which has been the approach of the past two decades, is a recipe for staying in Afghanistan forever.

Iran - nuclear move

Iran has said it will start enriching uranium to 60% purity, a move bringing the fissile material closer to levels suitable for a bomb, after accusing Israel of sabotaging a key nuclear installation.

This came soon before the resumption of talks in Vienna aimed at reviving Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with major powers - the JCPOA; an accord Israel fiercely opposed, after the former US President Donald Trump abandoned it three years ago.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is an agreement reached by Iran and the P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) on July 14, 2015. It was endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 2231, adopted on July 20, 2015. US President Trump took the US out of the JCPOA three years ago, and imposed sanctions on Iran, for its nuclear enrichment activities.

The talks on revival of the JCPOA in Vienna is a virtual conference, where the US is not present directly, but does associate with it. The other JCPOA members have virtual participation.

Iran's Foreign Minister said the blast in the underground Natanz plant, that it blames on Israel, was a "very bad gamble" that would boost Tehran's leverage in the talks to salvage the nuclear deal.

Israel, which the Islamic Republic does not recognise, has not formally commented on the matter.

US President Joe Biden has said Iran must resume full compliance with curbs on its enrichment activity mandated by the deal, which won the lifting of all international sanctions against Tehran, before Washington can rejoin the pact.

Ukraine tensions

US President Joe Biden has told Russian President Vladimir Putin to ease mounting tensions with neighboring Ukraine, joining a pushback against a build-up of Russian troops along the Ukraine border, which has raised alarm among NATO allies.

White House revealed that President Biden had proposed a summit between the two leaders at a neutral venue.

The Kremlin said the two men had agreed to "continue dialogue" without saying whether Putin had agreed to what would be their first meeting since Biden came to power.

The Russian buildup at the Ukrainian border has caused mounting alarm in the West in recent days, with the United States saying that troop levels are at their highest since 2014, when war first broke out with Moscow-backed separatists.

"President Biden reaffirmed his goal of building a stable and predictable relationship with Russia consistent with US interests, and proposed a summit meeting in a third country in the coming months", the White House said.

Referring to the call, the Kremlin said "both sides expressed their readiness to continue dialogue on the most important areas of ensuring global security."

Putin similarly held a summit in Finland in 2018 with then US President Donald Trump, who caused a furor at home by appearing to accept



US to withdraw all troops from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021.

US TROOPS TO EXIT AFGHANISTAN: BIDEN

ON MY WATCH

BY LUCIEN RAJAKARUNANAYAKE

the Russian leader's denials of election meddling.

The Biden-Putin call came as Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba met in Brussels with top officials of NATO nations, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken and NATO's chief, Jens Stoltenberg.

"Russia's considerable military build-up is unjustified, unexplained and deeply concerning - Russia must end this military build-up in and around Ukraine, stop its provocations and de-escalate immediately," Stoltenberg said at his meeting with Kuleba.

Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu hit back that Moscow has deployed troops to its western borders for "combat training exercises" in answer to NATO military moves. "In response to the alliance's military activities that threaten Russia, we took appropriate measures," Shoigu said in televised remarks, adding the exercises would be completed within two weeks.

Ukraine - which applied to join NATO in 2008 - is pressing Western powers for "practical" support as it seeks to deter any new aggression from Moscow.

Some NATO members remain deeply reluctant to heed Ukraine's appeal to speed up its push for admission as they seek to avoid ratcheting up the tension.

Fighting subsided in 2020 as a ceasefire agreement took hold last July, but clashes have picked up again since the start of the year, with each side blaming the other.

In a clear sign that Washington is looking to bolster its military backing for European allies, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced it was sending some 500 new personnel to Germany.

US in Europe

Top US officials are in Europe this week seeking to shore up allied support on countering Iran and China, as well as recent Russian moves at the Ukraine border. US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin arrived in Berlin on his inaugural tour of Europe, while Secretary of State Antony Blinken went to Brussels for talks on Ukraine and NATO troops in Afghanistan.

Nearly a year after President Donald Trump ordered thousands of troops to leave Germany, capping a series of setbacks for US relations with major allies, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin began an inaugural tour of Europe to shore up partnerships that are a cornerstone of the post-World War II order.

Austin arrived in Berlin against the backdrop of a newly emerging crisis with Iran, which on Monday blamed Israel for a recent attack on its underground Natanz nuclear facility, which imperils ongoing talks in Europe over Tehran's tattered nuclear deal.

Also at stake in Austin's visit is the future direction of US defence commitments in Europe at a time of growing concern about Russian mili-

tary intervention on NATO's periphery, including a buildup of Russian forces near Ukraine's border.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken went to Europe to discuss with US allies the Ukraine situation as well as the US withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan.

In a meeting on Tuesday with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, Blinken affirmed the United States' "unwavering support" for Ukraine's territorial integrity as it faces aggression from Russia.

Austin arrived in the German capital on Monday night and held talks Tuesday with senior government officials, including German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer. He announced he would be expanding the US military presence in Germany by 500 troops and had stopped planning for large-scale troop cuts ordered by the Trump administration.

He will visit NATO headquarters in Belgium and meet with British defence officials in London. He began his trip Sunday in Israel, where he underscored US defence support in meetings with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Benny Gantz.

Austin assured German officials of intentions by the Biden administration to keep troops in Germany, subject to discussion as part of a months-long global review of the basing of US troops. Last year, Trump ordered the number in Germany reduced by about 12,000, to about 24,000.

Austin will meet with Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, who declared on President Joe Biden's inauguration day that the arrival of a new administration marked "the start of a new chapter for the trans-Atlantic alliance."

In his first speech to an international audience, Biden in February declared to the Munich Security Conference: "America is back, the trans-Atlantic alliance is back, and we are not looking backward. We are looking forward, together."

US - Taiwan

Three diplomatic representatives of US President Biden have arrived in Taiwan to give support on the US president's commitment to Taiwan and its democracy.

The delegates were former US Senator Chris Dodd, former Deputy Secretaries of State Richard Armitage and James Steinberg.

The dispatch of the "unofficial" delegation comes as the United States and Taiwan mark the 42nd anniversary of the Taiwan Relations Act, for which Biden voted when he was a US senator.

The State Department said on Friday it was issuing new guidelines to enable US officials to meet more freely with officials from Taiwan, a move that deepens relations with Taipei amid stepped-up Chinese military activity around the island, which China claims as its own.

Former President Donald Trump



US President Joe Biden



Russian President Vladimir Putin



United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet



Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro

angered China by sending several senior officials to Taiwan, and his Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, announced days before the Trump presidency ended in January that he was lifting restrictions on contacts between U.S. officials and their Taiwanese counterparts.

Taiwan is China's most sensitive territorial issue and a major bone of contention with Washington, which is required by U.S. law to provide the island with the means to defend itself.

"The United States is committed to engaging Taiwan and deepening our cooperation on shared interests in line with the U.S. 'one-China' policy," a Biden administration official said, referring to the long-standing U.S. policy under which Washington officially recognises Taiwan.

US officials say preserving the status quo across the Taiwan Strait would be part of talks with Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga when he visits Washington for talks with Biden later this week.

Myanmar

As the killings of protesters rise above 720 in Myanmar, the public have not participated in the annual Water Festival and fears continue to rise of a civil war in the country.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, says she fears "the situation in Myanmar is heading towards a full-blown conflict," adding that "states must not allow the deadly mistakes of the past in Syria and elsewhere to be repeated."

"There too, we saw peaceful protest-

ers, some of whom armed with hunting guns and air guns. A journalist who originally came from the township says those semi-armed protesters now connect with - and recently received training from - armed groups in India.

The European Union's top diplomat said Russia and China were hampering a united international response to Myanmar's military coup and that the EU could offer more economic incentives if democracy returns to the country.

Myanmar's ethnic armed groups have attacked a police station in Shan State, in northeast Myanmar, killing 14 police officers. The site is located along a highway linking Mandalay, the country's second largest city, and Musee, a city on the Chinese border. If the clashes continue in this area, it could affect trade with China.

According to media reports, the attack was carried out by a joint force of the Arakan Army, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army.

The three forces issued a statement at the end of March saying that they will cooperate with the protesters for "self-defense against the Myanmar army" if killing of civilians is continued.

COVID - India

As the COVID-19 cases continue to spread, this week saw India become the country with the second largest infections globally, followed by Brazil.

India added over two lakh new COVID cases in 24 hours, an unprecedented figure, to take its toll to over 14 million, and has been the world's worst-hit country since April 2, forcing states scrambling to impose curbs to control the virus.

Delhi will go into a weekend curfew to tackle the record rise in COVID cases over the past few weeks. Auditoriums, malls, gyms and spas will be shut down and cinema theatres will be allowed with a third of the capacity. Eating out will be closed and only home deliveries will be allowed. Weekend markets will be allowed but with restrictions.

Delhi reported 17,282 fresh cases of COVID-19 on Wednesday in the highest single-day surge in the capital since the pandemic erupted. Delhi's rate of people testing positive has climbed to nearly 16 per cent, up from 12.4 per cent on Monday.

Strains of the COVID virus in India with "double mutations" have been found in patients in 10 states and this could be responsible for rising infections and a faster spread in these states.

Maharashtra, Delhi, West Bengal, Gujarat, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh are among the states where double mutant strains were found, playing a role in the rapid rise in COVID-19 cases.

Sources said that Delhi has a mix of the UK strain of the virus as well as strains with double mutations. In Punjab, the British strain was found in 80 per cent of people with COVID. Around 60 per cent of the cases in Maharashtra have the double mutant strain, although capital Mumbai hasn't reported this. Eighteen to 19 states, or 70 to 80 districts in the country, have reported UK strain of the coronavirus, sources said. The presence of the South African and the Brazilian variants is limited to a few districts.

India's new coronavirus infections hit a record as crowds of pilgrims gathered for a religious festival - the Hindu Kumbh Mela - where crowds gather to take a holy dip in the Ganges river.

Hundreds of thousands of Hindus gathered to bathe in the Ganges on Wednesday, the third key day of the weeks-long festival, in the Himalayan city Haridwar.

In response to concerns raised earlier this week that the Kumbh Mela, or pitcher festival, could turn into a "superspreader" event, the state's Chief Minister, Tirath Singh Rawat, said "the faith in God will overcome the fear of the virus".

From reporting less than 10,000 cases per day earlier this year, India has been the world's worst-hit country since April 2, with health experts blaming a widespread failure to heed curbs on movement and social interaction.

The surge across India is particularly alarming because the country is a major vaccine producer and a critical supplier to the UN-backed COVAX initiative. That programme aims to bring shots to some of the world's poorest countries.

Brazil too continues to have a high spread of COVID-19, with hospitals across the country facing major shortages of facilities, including Oxygen.

President Jair Bolsonaro has refused to act on the latest calls for a national lockdown, saying it would damage the economy and calling regional governors who enforced local lockdowns "tyrants."

It is the latest in the political feud between Bolsonaro, who has consistently played down the threat of the coronavirus, and governors of cities and states requesting more radical action and support.

Brazil has recorded more than 13 million COVID-19 cases and 361,884 deaths, the third highest numbers in the world after the US and India.

Lack of treatment has left people exposed to 'world's most dangerous bacteria': WHO

IN LOVING MEMORY



D.N.A.D JOSEPH

April 17th

It's hard to bring back the old days
When we were all together
But loving thoughts of your kind ways
Remain with us forever

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by
Wife, daughters, son-in-law and
granddaughters

A lack of new treatments for common infections has left people dangerously exposed to the "world's most dangerous bacteria", the UN health agency said on Thursday.

The alert from the World Health Organisation (WHO) is delivered in a report showing that none of the 43 antibiotics in development today sufficiently addresses the growing threat posed by 13 priority drug-resistant bacteria.

"The persistent failure to develop, manufacture, and distribute effective new antibiotics is further fuelling the impact of antimicrobial resistance and threatens our ability to successfully treat bacterial infections," said Dr. Hanan Balkhy, WHO Assistant Director General on Antimicrobial Resistance.

Those most at risk are young children and those living in poverty, but antibiotic-resistant infections can affect anyone, said WHO partner AMR. According to WHO, three in 10 newborns who develop blood infections die, because the antibiotics that are used to treat sepsis are no longer effective.

Bacterial pneumonia, another preventable illness which has developed resistance to available drugs, is also a major cause of childhood mortality among under-fives. WHO's annual Antibacterial Pipeline Report, notes that almost all antibiotics available today are variations of those discovered by the 1980s.

"We rely hugely on them in all areas of our lives, from having a tooth out at the dentist, to organ transplants and cancer chemothera-

py. But after reviewing antibiotics that are in the clinical stages of testing, as well as those in development, the report highlighted a near static pipeline of production," Hail-eyesus Getahun, WHO Director of Antimicrobial Resistance Global Coordination, said. He likened it to the "Achilles heel" of global health security.

"Opportunities emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic must be seized to bring to the forefront the needs for sustainable investments in research and development of new and effective antibiotics.

"We need a global sustained effort including mechanisms for pooled funding and new and additional investments to meet the magnitude of the antimicrobial threat," he added.

Only a few drugs have been given early-stage approval by regulators in recent years "and most of these agents...offer limited clinical benefit over existing treatments, WHO said, with the warning that the "rapid emergence of drug-resistance to these new agents" was a certainty.

This was despite the fact that "some promising products" were in different stages of development, as only a fraction of these will make it to market in a sector hampered by the small return on investment from successful antibiotic products, which has limited the interest of most large pharmaceutical companies. "Overall, the clinical pipeline and recently approved antibiotics are insufficient to tackle the challenge of increasing emergence and spread

of antimicrobial resistance," the UN agency concluded.

To promote investment in antibiotics development, WHO and partner Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative (DNDi) have set up the Global Antibiotic R&D Partnership (GARDP) to develop innovative treatments.

The UN health agency has also been working closely with other non-profit funding partners such as the CARB-X to accelerate antibacterial research.

Another important new WHO-partnered initiative is the AMR Action Fund, that was set up by pharmaceutical companies, philanthropists, and the European Investment Bank; its aim is to strengthen and accelerate antibiotic development through pooled funding. (UN News)

OBITUARY



K.G. YASASENA PERERA

Beloved husband of late Mrs. Kamala Ranasinghe, loving father of Dr. Sampath Perera, father-in-law of Hansalie, grand father of Nishara, Shilpa and Esme (All in Australia) passed away peacefully on 15th April 2021.

The remains lie at Mahinda Panagoda Parlour, Thalagama and Cremation at Thaladena Cemetery on Saturday 17th April 2021 at 5 p.m.

COVID-19 pandemic leading to 'an even more unequal world': Deputy UN Chief

The COVID-19 pandemic is leading to "an even more unequal world", the Deputy UN Chief said on Thursday, speaking at the closing session of the Financing for Development (FFD) Forum, with many lower-income countries now seeing development gains reversed.

Deliberations throughout the four-day long forum highlighted the "full scope" of the COVID-19 impact, said UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed.

"The worst health and economic downturn in our lifetime has laid bare and exacerbated the vulnerabilities in our economies and societies, leading some to describe COVID-19 as the inequality virus," she added.

Developing countries have faced "ballooning debt burdens" and constrained fiscal budget, and high borrowing

costs, with a limited ability to respond to the pandemic. The diverging world that we are hurtling towards is a catastrophe for all of us. It is both morally right and economically rational to help developing countries overcome this crisis," Mohammed said.

To prevent the risk of a "lost decade for development", she upheld that extraordinary levels of public spending "continue to be critical to keep vulnerable economies afloat", as do structural transformations for protecting the global economy against future crises.

Rapid access to vaccines for all citizens of the world is a top priority, she said, noting that the average number of people inoculated in Africa remains under one percent. "This is a moral blight on the international community," she said, calling on governments, development

partners and private sector actors to "finance equitable vaccination for all, as a matter of utmost urgency".

It is also crucial to alleviate debt and liquidity pressures by continuing and expanding the Debt Suspension Initiative to include vulnerable middle-income countries and small island developing States.

"Eligibility for debt relief must be based on actual need rather than GDP, especially as the world hurdles towards a climate catastrophe," she said, adding that governments should not be forced to service debt "at the expense of responding to their own populations".

Moreover, the pandemic has underscored the importance of front-loading investments in social protection measures, to protect against future shocks. "Governments need to priori-

tise the wellbeing of their populations, including by heavily investing in free education, universal healthcare and strong healthcare systems", said Mohammed, also underscoring the importance of "decoupling livelihoods from the volatility of the global economy" and securing a guaranteed income.

To achieve these objectives, the world needs to redirect finance to where it is most needed, "with a strategic eye" to preventing future shocks from mutating into a disasters on the level of COVID-19, warned the Deputy UN Chief.

"Governments must strengthen the planning of sustainable investment...and we must address the incentives and bottlenecks to unlock private capital to invest in sustainable development," she added. The senior UN official acknowledged that



today's challenges go beyond COVID-19 and include the climate crisis, drought, hunger and heightened insecurity, "all of which are being exacerbated by the long-term economic effects of the inequality virus".

Recovery efforts must tackle all these challenges "head-on", said Mohammed, urging all participants to take "immediate action for a timely and adequate global response that would put us back on track for a prosperous, sustainable and equal world and the implementation of Agenda 2030". (UN News)

OBITUARY NOTICE



BORN

17

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06

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1962

DIED

14

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04

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2021

DESHABANDU, DESHA SHAKTHI, DESHA KEERTHI, LION MR. I.K. KUMARA JAYASINGHE

(Chairman, Saranga Enterprises in Tangalle and Thalawathugoda, All Island Justice of the Peace, Past President of Hambantota District Chamber of Commerce, Tangalle Traders Association, Ruhunu Karaliya and Lions Club, Tangalle, Treasurer - Tangalle Hospital Committee)

Eldest son of retired Deputy Commissioner of Cooperative Development late Mr. Titus Jayasinghe and Mrs. Jayasinghe, beloved husband of H.Y. Pushpamala, loving father of Tharaka (Assistant Manageress, Bank of Ceylon, Kotte), Thanuree, Malmee Savin (Student - Gateway International School, Rajagiriya), father-in-law of Sajuna Abeyratne (Attorney-at-Law) and Praveen Guruge (Pilot - Viet Jet Airlines), ever-loving grandfather of Ayuni Kiyana, loving brother of Deepani Jayasinghe, Saman Jayasinghe (Southern Motors, Tangalle), cousin of Tennyson, Vijayanthimala, Pushpakumara, late Udhayakumara and Athulakumara.

Cremation takes place at 4.00 p.m. on Saturday, 17th April 2021 at Danketiya, Tangalle.

Bereaved family members, relations and friends.

No. 11, Tissa Road, Tangalle.
0777920515 / 0773465095

'Stern action against those spreading fake news on social media'

Stern action is to be taken against those uploading fake news on social media platforms, Public Security Minister Admiral (Retd.)

Sarath Weerasekera said. Speaking to the media after attending an event held in Mulleriyawa on Thursday, the minister said instances

of fake news on social media would be investigated.

He added that the freedom of expression guaranteed in the Constitution

must not be abused. Weerasekera said the Government would monitor fake news on social media platforms.

Seven more COVID-19 deaths reported yesterday

Seven more COVID-19 deaths were reported yesterday, increasing the total fatalities in Sri Lanka to 615. Meanwhile, 129 more tested posi-

tive for the virus by 6:00 p.m. as well, raising the confirmed cases to 96,078. Furthermore, the recoveries' count

stood at 92,611, while 2,852 active cases are still under medical care at hospitals and other treatment centres.

WHO Global Compact to speed up action to tackle diabetes

The World Health Organisation's new Global Diabetes Compact aims to bring a much-needed boost to efforts to prevent diabetes and bring treatment to all who need it.

The Compact is being launched today at the Global Diabetes Summit, which is co-hosted by WHO and the Government of Canada, with the support of the University of Toronto. During the event, the President of Kenya will join the Prime Ministers of Fiji, Norway, and Singapore; the WHO Global Ambassador for Non-Communicable Diseases and Injuries, Michael R. Bloomberg; and ministers of health from a number of countries as well as diabetes experts and people living with diabetes to highlight the ways in which they will support this new collaborative effort. Other UN agencies, civil society partners and representatives of the private sector will also attend.

"The need to take urgent action on diabetes is clearer than ever," said Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organisation. "The number of people with diabetes has quadrupled in the last 40 years. It is the only major Non-Communicable Disease for which the risk of dying early is going up, rather than down; and a high proportion of people who are severely ill in hospital with COVID-19 have diabetes. The Global Diabetes Compact will help to catalyse political commitment for action to increase the accessibility and affordability of life-saving medicines for diabetes and also for its prevention and diagnosis."

One of the most urgent areas of

work is to increase access to diabetes diagnostic tools and medicines, particularly insulin, in low- and middle-income countries. The introduction of a pilot programme for WHO prequalification of insulin in 2019 has been an important step. Currently, the insulin market is dominated by three companies. Prequalification of insulin produced by more manufacturers could help increase the availability of quality-assured insulin to countries that are currently not meeting demand.

In addition, discussions are already underway with manufacturers of insulin and other diabetes medicines and diagnostic tools about avenues that could help meet demand at prices that countries can afford. Insulin is not the only scarce commodity; many people struggle to obtain and afford blood glucose metres and test strips as well.

In addition, about half of all adults with type 2 diabetes remain undiagnosed and 50% of people with type 2 diabetes do not get the insulin they need, placing them at avoidable risk of debilitating and irreversible complications such as early death, limb amputations and sight loss.

Innovation will be one of the core components of the Compact, with a focus on developing and evaluating low-cost technologies and digital solutions for diabetes care.

The Compact will also

focus on catalysing progress by setting global coverage targets for diabetes care.

A "global price tag" will quantify the costs and benefits of meeting these new targets. The Compact will also advocate for fulfilling the commitment made by governments to include diabetes prevention and treatment into primary health care and as part of universal health coverage packages. (UN News)

Obituaries

REV SISTER - PIA MARKUS - Safe in Arms of Jesus - Rev sister Pia Markus of sisters of the Holy Cross Convent Jaffna, dearly beloved daughter of late George Ernest of Ratnapura and late Mrs Ida of Matara, loving sibling of late Patience Perera, Rita Nissangarachchi, Anton Markus, sister-in-law of late Susantha, late Benedict and of Edna. Remains were laid to rest on 10th April 2021 after celebration of the Holy Mass at the Convent Chapel. Friends and relations please accept this intimation. 028574

DE COSTA HENRY - Beloved husband of Jaya, beloved father of late Dennis and of Vernon and Noel, father-in-law of Camini and Renuka, grand father of Angelo, Radhika, Nelushi and Amali, expired. Remains lie at Boralesgamuwa Florists, Boralesgamuwa from 9 a.m. 17th April for burial at General Cemetery Boralesgamuwa at 5 p.m. on Saturday 17th April 2021. 028871

Dr. A.M.M. Sahabdeen

Dedicated Civil Servant



I recall my first meeting with Dr. Sahabdeen on a sunny morning in 1978: I remember encountering a smiling personality in his mid-50s, in a smart blue safari, with polarised sunglasses to match, alighting from his vehicle at the VIP car park of the NSB Head Office in Colpetty. He was there to attend the monthly board meeting of the Directors.

As a staff member, I stood near the entrance. As he passed me, I greeted him; and he greeted me back, which left a deep impression on me. It reflected his humility.

After my retirement from the bank in 2005, I joined the Sahabdeen Foundation after a successful interview and recalled my past meeting with Dr. Sahabdeen. I found Dr. Sahabdeen to be a person of

gentle, calm outlook and deep intellect.

February 21 of every year is an unforgettable and memorable day for all the family members of the late Dr. Sahabdeen, both in Sri Lanka and overseas. It marks the day, in 2017, when all activities came to a standstill upon the hearing of his passing.

Dr. Sahabdeen was born to a middle-class family in the suburbs of Gampola, as the eldest of eleven siblings. He maintained an excellent record throughout his schooling career. He graduated with an Honours Degree in Philosophy from the University of Ceylon. His adult life began at the age of 25, firstly in the Ceylon Civil Service administration, where he had an exemplary and prestigious career.

Simultaneously, he maintained a deep interest in Philosophy and obtained a Doctorate in it from the University of Peradeniya in 1985. The Sufi Doctrine in Tamil Literature was the subject of his doctoral thesis.

There were many sides to Dr. Sahabdeen's career as a civil servant, for he held many prestigious Government appointments over a span of nearly 30 years. He brought his experience and knowledge into many Presidential Commissions such as those of taxation, banking, industrialisation, and the Delimitation Commission.

He also served the community's interests in many ways, being the Chairman of the Muslim Law Amendments Commission, as well as being involved in the Broadcasting Commis-

sion in his early days. Dr. Sahabdeen's vision of educating the underprivileged resulted in the setting up of the A.M.M. Sahabdeen Trust Foundation, where numerous scholarships were offered to underprivileged students, as well as for post-graduate research students.

The setting up of Pahamune House facilitated a residential programme for external graduate students, including funding to pursue higher studies. The Scholarship Awards was a well-respected awards scheme for people who excelled in different areas in the SAARC Region. Dr. Weeramantry, Dr. Yunus, and Sir Arthur C. Clarke were

There were many sides to Dr. Sahabdeen's career as a civil servant, for he held many prestigious Government appointments over a span of nearly 30 years...

Dr. Sahabdeen's vision of educating the underprivileged resulted in the setting up of the A.M.M. Sahabdeen Trust Foundation, where numerous scholarships were offered to underprivileged students, as well as for postgraduate research students.

some of the esteemed recipients of this award.

Dr. Sahabdeen's farsighted vision and objectives, which he realised through the establishment of the Sahabdeen Trust Foundation and the setting up of the Pahamune House Rehabilitation Centre in the aftermath of 2004 Tsunami, gave him utmost satisfaction and joy. He and his family were the custodians of over 250 orphaned schoolchildren.

They provided free education, as well as food and lodging to those whose parents were either dead or missing after the tragedy. Over 9,000 grants and financial endowments have been given through the foundation as of today.

During the latter part of his years, Dr. Sahabdeen spent much of his time in philanthropic work. He also wrote three books: 'The Sufi Doctrine in Tamil Literature', 'The Circle

of Lives', and 'Beyond the Horizon'. It was a great honour and privilege to associate myself with his philanthropic work and listen to some of his thoughts on matters related to life in general.

Dr. Sahabdeen married Ruchia Halida, daughter of late M.S.M. Jabir, former Chairman of the Beruwala Urban Council. They were blessed with two children.

Rizana Marikkar

Chandrakha Mendis

She was a sincere mother

It has been four years since you passed away suddenly and left us in sorrow. You were sincere, generous, and compassionate; you never complained about anything.

You were concerned about others, especially your sisters and their children. It was wonderful to know that you had given up all your worldly possessions, be it jewellery and other valuables.

As a teacher, your commitment to your students was exemplary. Silent and humble, you were always dedicated to their education and helped them in many ways. Moreover, you never forgot to wish your friends and relatives on their birthdays.



Though you were bedridden and found it difficult to talk, your mind remained razor sharp; you could recall any incident with accuracy. Although born to a Buddhist family,

You were concerned about others, especially your sisters and their children... As a teacher, your commitment to your students was exemplary. Silent and humble, you were always dedicated to their education and helped them in many ways.

you never forgot to attend church on special occasions such as Christmas, and to listen to Christmas carols. You observed *sil* every Poya day until it was difficult for you to walk.

You have completed your race on earth and have fulfilled your obliga-

tions. So, thank you, elder sister, for all that you have done for us. We take comfort in Rabindranath's Tagore's words, "Death is not extinguishing the light. It is only putting out the lamp because the dawn has come."

Your loving family and friends

Niranjan Wijesinha

A devout Christian

It is with deep sorrow that I write this appreciation in memory of my cousin brother Niranjan Wijesinha, who was called to rest with the Lord at the age of 74 on October 4, 2020, following a brief illness.

Niranjan was born on December 1, 1945, as the eldest son of Edwin and Alfreda Wijesinha of Matara. He has three younger sisters: Devika, Niranjala, and Dharshini. Niranjan was educated at S. Thomas' College and was qualified in the Motor Trade field. He was employed at Associated Motorways, Kalutara; Rowlands Limited, Maharagama; and Mahajana Retrades (Tyres) Limited, Grandpass.

Niranjan married Neliya Wickramasinghe of Dalugama, Kelaniya, in 1981, and was blessed with three children: two daughters and one son. They have been brought up with good manners and are now well-established in life. My cousin was a good entertainer. He was great at singing and playing the guitar, and was also in the Choir at St. Francis de Sales' Church

Niranjan was educated at S. Thomas' College and was qualified in the Motor Trade field... He was great at singing and playing the guitar, and was also in the Choir at St. Francis de Sales' Church in Dalgama with his two daughters. He was a jovial person who was always with a pleasing smile.

In 2019, Niranjan's son Shyamal got married to Dr. Nishela de Silva, while

his second daughter Shinska married Shanaka Perera, which gave him much joy and happiness.



However, time passed by until he suddenly fell ill in March, 2020, and was hospitalised. He was hospitalised again in September before passing away peacefully in October, surrounded by his loved ones. We miss your presence, dear Niranjan, but your memory will live on in our hearts.

Oh, most merciful Father, grant him Eternal Bliss in Heaven! Let the Perpetual Light shine upon him. May his soul rest in peace. Amen.

Shanthal Wickremasinghe

Ranga Wickramarachchi

A Good Samaritan

How strange, our lives perpetually
Face the unexpected so frequently
Two and a half decades ago,
A young man and I used to pass
Facing each other,
At the end of the school interval,
Along the dimly-lit
A/L Bio Science corridor
Of Royal College
I, a teacher, friendly but
restrained,
He, a Bio Science pupil,
Reserved and immersed;
In studies to be somebody
In our feudal-minded middle-class
society
After a long period
Of government service,
A poor teacher and pensioner, I
became
Ending up in paucity in necessities
Then, lately, the Mighty Nature
Pushed me from frying pan

And into the fire,
Stealthily sprouting
the malignant carcinoma
In my prostate gland
Soon, into my waste fluid sac it
bored
Brandishing the blood-red flag
Haematuria!
With no Midas Touch,
Paying popular surgeons lavishly
Then, while looking for help
High and low, unexpectedly,
The young man who used to pass
me
Along the dimly-lit
A/L Bio Science corridor,
Showering mercy on me,
Like a Good Samaritan,
Gave an appointment
For a consultation,
Tendering his services
As a dedicated knight
To vanquish my enemy,
The carcinoma

Surrounded by a host of surgical
staff
Inside a freezing operation theatre,
Lying on a surgical bed,
Under spinal anaesthesia,
I felt the heavenly bliss of relief
In the hands of my pupil:
Ranga Wickramarachchi,
Son of Asclepius.

O.C.G. Senapathi,
Retired teacher



Virtual B2B meeting between Carrefour Oman and eight Lankan exporters held

The Sri Lankan Embassy in Oman, jointly with the Sri Lanka Export Development Board (EDB), organised a virtual B2B meeting between Carrefour Oman and eight prominent Sri Lankan fruits and vegetables exporter companies, to boost Sri Lankan exports of varieties of fruits and vegetables to Carrefour Oman hypermarket chain, which has more than 12 outlets in the Sultanate of Oman.

Opening the virtual B2B meeting, Sri Lanka's Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman Ameer Ajwad highlighted that Sri Lankan fruits and vegetables are popular among the consumers in Oman and that they have high demand in the Omani market. Direct engagement between Sri Lankan exporter companies and well-established popular hypermarket chains such as Carrefour, will help to boost Sri Lankan exports



Participants at the B2B virtual meeting.

of fruits and vegetables in to the Omani market.

Sri Lankan fruits and vegetables exporter companies, namely Trade Lanka Agricultural Enterprises (Pvt.) Ltd., Ellawala Horticulture (Pvt.) Ltd., Nidro Supply (Pvt.) Ltd., Deshan International Imports and Exports, Nelna Group, C.R.

Exports (Pvt.) Ltd., Jagro (Pvt.) Ltd., and Development Interplan Ceylon (Pvt.) Ltd., participated during the virtual B2B meeting with Carrefour Oman and agreed to export consolidated consignments of Sri Lankan fruits and vegetables.

Carrefour Oman Country Manager Alain Enjal-

bert and General Manager (Food) Pierre Rahal participated in the B2B virtual meeting as well.

Deputy Director Prasanna Jayasinghe, Assistant Director of EDB Gayani Wijethilake, and First Secretary of the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman Dilini Abeyesekara also participated.



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MIRAN PERERA

The Aluth Avurudda is celebrated in the month of *Bak* according to the Sinhalese calendar. The name *Bak* derives from the Sanskrit word *Bhagya* meaning fortunate. The month of *Bak* corresponds to April in the Gregorian calendar which is commonly used in Sri Lanka as it is in other parts of the world.

The Sinhala 'Aluth Avurudda' or the 'Pudhuvardam' as Hindus call it is based on mythology steeped in customs and rituals to be observed in conjunction with astrological phenomena, conforming to the 'Uttara Bharatha Shastra' (North Indian School of thought).

This festival marks the dawn of 'Saka Era' when Valagambahu alias Vattagamani Abhaya was the king of Sri Lanka. The *Bak* festive season centres around a National

cultural event which is unique in a number of ways. The Sinhala Tamil New Year is probably the only major traditional festival that is commonly observed by the largest number of Sinhalese and Tamils in the country.

The Sinhala Aluth Avurudda is the only solar festival of the Sinhalese based on the transition of the *Meena Rashi* (Pisces) to the *Mesha Rashi* (Aries) of the Zodiac and hence it is known as the *Suryadeva Mangalle* or festival of the Sun God. The festival cannot be described as ethnic because it is celebrated by both the Sinhalese and the Tamils yet not by all of them. Only Sinhalese Buddhists and Tamil Hindus participate in it.

The Christians in both communities have little to do with it. On the other hand, it is a non-religious celebration in that not all Buddhists or all Hindus in the world take part in it. Only the Sinhalese Buddhists and Tamil Hindus do.



Annual celebration of SOLAR FESTIVAL



Another fact that adds to its secular character is that the festival focuses on an event that has no connection with religion or race.

The reverence for ancestral ways backed by customs, ceremonies, rites and rituals has compelled man from antiquity to adhere to basic principles of morality the way of life possessed with good feelings and the practice of forethought including the maintenance of the social order and the ungrudging cooperation in all matters needed to maintain solidarity peace and prosperity among the community.

Thus, this National annual festival in April has made every householder begin a new life with a new outlook in the ensuing year by lulling hatred in the fullness of spirit.

The Aluth Avurudda is part of our rich cultural heritage which includes among other treasures the historic dagabas, tanks, sculptures, paintings, and specimens of ancient literature. In terms of traditional astrological belief, the Sun is said to complete one circular movement across the 12 segments of the Zodiac in the course of the year taking a month to traverse each constellation.

The arbitrary beginning of this circular solar progress is taken to be Aries which is conventionally represented by the zodiacal sign of the ram. Having travelled from Aries to Pisces the Sun must pass from Pisces to Aries to begin a new year.

The Solar New Year is reckoned from this transit or Sankranti which comes a week or two after the beginning of the new year according to the Sinhalese calendar.

Many traditions have come down to us through the ages because they are ingrained in our history and culture. For thousands of years our ancestors, the inhabitants of this island built up a highly organised agrarian civilization based on the principles of harmonious co-existence with nature, non-violence, tolerance and peace.

The Aluth Avurudda wonderfully demonstrates our National ethos with its characteristic emphasis on the renewal and reaffirmation of goodwill within families and among neighbours and in the series of ritualistic practices and observances that are meant to revitalise an essential link between man and nature.

The sighting of the new moon was the first of the Avurudu rites. Then came bathing for the old year as it was called followed by the *Nonagathaya* period which being considered inauspicious for any form of work was entirely devoted to religious observances and play.

Cooking and partaking of milk rice, starting work for the New Year, anointing the head with oil and leaving for work were the other practices. All these rites were performed at astrologically determined auspicious moments. According to the astrological phenomenon, the solar system was in existence in Greece followed by the Romans and the Hindus.

The injunction of the *Punya Kalaya* is a later innovation which has two phases. The first phase is strictly meant for religious observances and the second phase begins with the lighting of the hearth.

The transition of the Sun from Pisces to Aries is known popularly as *Sankrantiya* - the holy period when all work must cease. The Aluth Avurudda centres on the transit of the Sun from Pisces to Aries.

It is remarkable for Sinhalese Buddhists to thus celebrate the beginning of the solar new year rather than that of their own new year. So the Aluth Avurudda appears to be in homage to the Sun God important for agricultural people.

Some consider the anointing of the head with *Nanu* and bathing thereafter is the most important injunction for health and longevity. Before the approach of the new year during the time of our kings the royal physicians and astrologers had certain duties to perform.

The farmer had to superintend the preparation of 1,000 small pots of juice or *Nanu* of selected wild medicinal plants.

These were sent to the palace to be distributed among the temples in the neighbourhood.

Today the *Nanu* is made of *Kohomba Kola*, *Imbul Kola*, *Divul Kola* and *Amukaha*, mixed with either coconut oil or gingelly oil added with lime juice. This *Nanu* is usually prepared in temples or even at home. Usually a grandfather in good health is selected to anoint the head while saying '*Kalu Kaputa Sudu Venaturu, Kikili Bijuva Pelavenaturu*' (until the pestle bears tender leaves let thy age be increased from 120 to 220 years).

Although belief in astrology and other occult sciences is contrary to the spirit of Buddhism in the villages it was the Buddhist priests who prepared the medicinal oils in the temples and applied these on the heads of people while chanting *pirith* so as to ensure health for the whole year. These Aluth Avurudu traditions touched every important aspect of lives, health, economy, religion and recreation.

Children and adults walk in gay abandon about the village dressed in their new clothes visiting friends and relatives amidst the cacophony of 'Raban' playing and the sound of firecrackers set off everywhere.

The aroma of savoury dishes and the smell of sweetmeats arise from every household. Visitors are plied with all sorts of sweets. Amidst all this visiting, playing and merrymaking everybody is careful to be at home for the observance of the rites at the appointed times.

The principal injunctions to be observed during the new year are (1) Looking at the moon to mark the new year (2) Bathing to mark the passing year (3) *Punya Kalaya* (4) Lighting of the hearth, eating kiribath (5) Transacting business of commencing work (6) Anointing the head with *Nanu* or herbal medicated oil and bathing thereafter (7) Leaving home for work in the

New Year. Of these the injunctions compulsorily followed are (3), (4) and (5).

Above all lighting the hearth at the auspicious time is strictly followed by housewives irrespective of caste or religion in order to keep the fires burning without a breach as a sign of prosperity.

During the *Punya Kalaya* or the time set apart for religious observances all mothers consider it compulsory that they should take their children to the nearest temple along with other women of the household. They think that they should spend the time in temples.

But as we usually observe the majority of the men keep aloof and prefer to stay at home, making use of the interval for outdoor activities. The new year has made man to follow certain rituals at different times, to fix him on a time scale based on stars, planets, asterisms etc... prognosticating good and avoiding evil.

Although there is usually little conspicuous seasonal change experienced in the course of the year in Sri Lanka except for a relatively hot August and relatively cool December, the month of *Bak* is associated with a certain vernal atmosphere an unusual freshness in nature enhanced by spring blossoms and azure skies despite occasional showers.

This is also the time the ripened paddy is gathered in which gives rise to a perversive sense of plenty especially to rural Sri Lanka. During New Year children enjoy their school vacation. The elders install *onchillas* and *katuru onchillas* to swing for pleasure which are mostly used by women and young girls. The 'rabana' is a kind of drum usually played by elders and old women using different strokes to show how clever they are.

It is placed on three logs with burning charcoal underneath to heat the skin for better sound. Others organise themselves in playing games such as *Ankeliya*, *Kalagedi Sellama*, *Olinda Keliya*, *Mewara Keliya*, *Udekki Sellama*, *Leekeli Sellama*, *Polgehima*, *Katti Penima*, *Dadu Keliya*, *Kottapora Sellama* (pillow fighting) etc... which keep the whole village in a happy mood.

The exchange of betel leaves is a way to end hatred. Children who are employed offer new clothes to parents which are accepted with blessings. Most of those who still follow the Avurudu customs do so as a concession to tradition out of a sense of nostalgia.

The Sinhala New Year festival still remains a powerful symbol of renewal of hope for the future and reaffirmation of our bond with nature and our commitment to the time honoured values of our fore bearers. It is truly a celebration of life.

In the face of the inexorable advance of modernism and globalisation facing our country, making a threat to cultural obliteration and loss of national identity, the adherence to tradition following ancient customs of the Sinhala New Year reinforce values enshrined in our society.

Avurudu amidst a global pandemic

ARJUNA SENEVIRATNE

As we move deeper into the month of April and must, almost automatically, consider its traditional song and dance, our thoughts are collectively overshadowed by this other consideration. Both, in the minds of many have to do with the unseen, the unknown and the frightening. On the one hand, we want to engage in activities we normally won't be doing like cracking out the crackers, lighting weird shaped lamps, beating drums and engaging with family members and strangers in weird, ritualistic ways wearing new, bright clothes all to ward off the unseen inimical lurking behind Pisces and Aries and invite benevolents waving from behind the sun and the moon.

On the other, we are told to engage in activities we normally would not want to like staying indoors, staying away from the fridge, staying close to hot drinks, washing hands, engaging with family members and strangers in weird, ritualistic ways wearing masks or space suits or both, all to ward off some unseen inimical lurking in the throat of one's best friend or watching one with vicious anticipation from one's spouse's car bonnet. As we move deeper into the month of April we must, almost necessarily, consider its traditional song and dance, this time glorified twice over by two entirely different but superbly complimentary and congruent set of unknowns and vagaries.

The key here is unknown and vague. Very few know that Avurudu is a harvest celebration and not a Buddhist or Hindu religious ritual. Most think it is the Sri Lankan version of the bacchanalian. Few thought quarantine was a form of voluntary self-denial of bad habits until the authorities literally had to point a gun and say, "quarantine is not valentine" and put everyone under enforced house arrest.

Very few urbanites know that Avurudu achieved social sanctity and relevance to our farmers because they toiled in the field, worked the land, planted things and reaped the reward of their labours. It is they who are justified in giving thanks and giving gifts to one another to commemorate a bountiful harvest, and, for those that way inclined, giving alms to the clergy of their new produce, and, transferring the good karma of meritorious deeds to their departed. Or, when their crops failed, convert the celebration into an understanding of climate change, failure of science to predict the lack of rain, karmic causality, inability of agrochemicals to do much more than poison the earth, God's will and similar religious instruments for dealing with setbacks while resolving to bear the hardship, giving and sharing of what little they have and, either

feeling strengthened by their sacrifice or, for those that way inclined, holding those acts of merit gained despite their suffering as a forfeit to create the spiritually valid enabling conditions for better times next year.

Very few know that the Venetians forced ships to stay isolated outside port for 40 days (quarantina) during the Black Death or bubonic plague of the 14th Century that also originated in China and attacked Italy first among the Europeans before decimating a third of its population. Nor do they know that the only way to stem this almost unstoppable, unseen and deadly juggernaut of death was to take themselves out of the ecosystem of disease transmission either out of desperation or enforcement or social responsibility.

COVID-19 has done something that other world-threatening crises such as the food crisis, the energy crisis, the climate crisis, the environment crisis, the conflict crisis

and the religious crisis tried hard to do but never actually got any global traction.

It has proved to the world that the world is in serious trouble.

It has proven to the urbanites that their white-collar jobs, their ties and designer shoes, their desk jobs and their debt-ridden wealth display are useless. It has shown the world that there is a very good reason to stem exclusively profit-oriented industry. It has told the world to recognise the song of birds, listen to the tune of the bread man, speak to one's neighbours, engage in family activities. It has actually made people aware that the simpler life removed from the complications of competition, gain, fame and pleasure is actually a great way of being. It has proved to the urbanites the truth of the fact that health is indeed the greatest profit and happiness, the greatest wealth. It has demonstrated that growing one's own food and sharing one's where-withal with the community is more important than 10-foot tall walls, roller doors and SUVs.

In fact, for the first time in a long time, the urbanites are actually justified in celebrating Avurudu because they too are now societally engaged and agriculturally enabled.

They, in fact, have reason to, "thank whatever determinants, dynamics, deities, defences, deployments, displacements, devices, dogmas and dodges for the fact that we are still alive."

As urban life progresses suddenly non-linearly with swirls and clouds of unseen particles proximating everyone to disease and death, as urbanites growl and grumble at the speed at which their comfort zones were assaulted and violated, as urban travails are suddenly reduced to the mundane through the COVID treatment of social astigmatism, let us be thankful that as a col-



lective, either through force or necessity or sheer darn desperation, we have been awoken from our social slumber, we have been recharged by our recognition of the ultimate levelling of human existence, we have been made to renew our licence to live through the payment of our dues to the country.

Avurudu is ultimately a celebration of renewal. COVID-19 has sloshed a big bucket of deep cleanser over our urban population. We have been washed cleaner if not completely free of social sickness. It is truly a time to celebrate.



Adoption of Lankan babies

A relentless quest to find biological parents

SONAKSHI DATTA

This is the story of Priyangika Samanthie who is originally a Sri Lankan but was adopted by a Norwegian couple and was taken to Oslo. She helps individuals get reunited with their biological parents who were made victims of a sinister 'adoption lobby' running in Sri Lanka. And, her own story of reuniting with her biological mother is worth a read.

Priyangika was three when she stumbled upon the fact that she was an adopted child. When asked about how she got to know the reality, she revealed, "Before I answer this, I would like to tell you that some of the articles that are online are misleading; some of the information is not correct. I tried to make them change it but it is poor journalism. So, when I was three, I got to know about my adoption because I started having questions when my family and I went to the stores or anywhere else. I could tell that everyone has a relationship with their biological parents because they looked alike. And, I could sense that something was odd about our situation. And it got me thinking after which my adoptive parents started speaking to me about I having a second mom; which they did from an early age."

She continued, "They always used to talk about me having three parents because they knew only about my biological mother and not my father. I specifically remember one instance when we went to the store, and I was lost because I went away from my adoptive mother. Then the cashier came over to me and asked me whether I needed some help. I had then asked her to help me find my mother. But after she took me back to my adoptive mother, I had started asking for my real mother. And, I had stated that I felt like I had been kidnapped. I used to shout on the streets saying that my adoptive parents stole me and this was something I used to say all through the years I grew up in. And I felt I was not supposed to be in Norway and that I wanted to go back home."

Priyangika continued to narrate her tale, "We found mom in 2013, and then I had gone to Sri Lanka on Independence Day in 2014. But I had been searching for her since I was seven. So, I searched for over 12 years before I could meet her. The adoption law in Europe is that the adoptive parents are not allowed to assist the adoptees to reunite with their biological parents. And hence the adoptees have to find their families on their own. They can only give the adoptees the documents from the time they were adopted. But they may not reveal any kind of information about the whereabouts of the biological families or



Samanthie with her biological mother

any tip-off which could help the adoptees to reunite with their actual parents. I am trying to get this changed now. By the age of five, my adoptive parents used to tell me about my adoption in detail because I always had a lot of questions on my mind regarding the documents and my situation. We used to sit and talk about my family in Sri Lanka and the legal process required to be followed."

"Listening to my follow-up questions, my parents fathomed I was keener to know about my adoption as compared to my adoptive brother. Both of us are not biologically related; we were adopted from Sri Lanka. Then my adoptive parents showed me the documents such as birth certificates and films from the time they spent in Sri Lanka. But it was not enough information about my biological mother. So, at seven, I went to my adoptive father's office, and I asked him to help me write to the Government to get access to my documents. My father could only help me write a letter to the reunification programme authorities but my application was declined, and I was told that one has to be at least 16 to begin looking out for biological parents. And the Government told me that I could not look into their files until I was 18. This was a huge problem," mentioned Priyangika.

Taking a stroll down memory lane, she let us know, "I remember we had waited for a year to receive the authorities' response and were shocked to know about the minimum age threshold. We used to wait near the mailbox every single day. Realising that my plea was declined, I went into severe depression. I became suicidal by the age of eight. At school, I used to go to the library and ask for books about Sri Lanka. I began writing letters to the authors asking them to help me find my mom. We had a lot of family friends who were Tamil; but as my brother and I were Sinhalese, they were skeptical to talk to us as it was the time of war in Sri Lanka. But they still contacted people in Sri Lanka but nobody could really find anything

concrete. By the age of 13, everyone started telling me it seemed impossible for me to meet my mom."

Remembering how she started helping other individuals to reunite with their families, she told us, "While I was looking for my mother, one biological mother contacted me as she thought I had been helping others to meet their families. In real, I was just helping myself. She mentioned her child was stolen and taken to Europe. At that point, I thought that something was odd. Nevertheless, we were lucky enough to find her daughter. Rumours about I helping others to get reunited continues to spread, and that is how I started doing that for real."

It was while reuniting others and getting to know more Sri Lankans that Priyangika got to know about the hospital she was born in and the adoption centre in Colombo where she was kept. But the adoption centre was reluctant to give away any information regarding her mother. Even after striving hard, nothing could make her find her mother out and she had almost given up but carried on to help others to reunite. During her quest, she got to know about things like 'baby farms', acting mothers, and child kidnapping. But she continued to reckon that she was legally adopted as her adoptive parents had always told her of the court proceedings in her case. By the age of 18, she had assisted 100 reunions but still could not find her mom.

It was in 2012 that she had already given birth to a son, Nishant and she said that this was her first biological relationship. After it had been over 10 years of her trying to meet her mother, she had completely given up but yet she tried one last time. Priyangika turned to private sleuths in Sri Lanka and they could track her mother down.

Describing her reunion with mom, she divulged, "Even though I knew that something was odd about my adoption, I had thought that it would be extremely joyous to meet my mother. But to my surprise, she was reluctant even to look at me and felt shameful. Even though I kept on asking her innumerable questions, she was not ready to answer them. All she told me was that my father had passed away. She was traumatised. We spent a lot of time together over the next three weeks. She did not

"Adoption organisations in Europe have links to the birth countries of the children. These organisations charge millions of rupees to finalise the adoption. They have contacts with individuals in the countries of birth who tell them about orphanages. Baby farms, kidnapping children from families, hospitals, or streets, babies found at the orphanages' doorstep or given to them without the consent of the biological parents facilitate the illegal adoption lobby. Sometimes, parents are paid money and are falsely assured that the adoption is for a short time period so that they can stabilise their lives with the money but their children are never returned to them. Also, parents are deceived to believe that these orphanages are places where you can leave your kids and later pick them up again and meanwhile, those kids are given away."

tell me much about my past but all she said was that I was not supposed to be taken away. I moved to Sri Lanka the next year."

Revealing information about the 'adoption lobby', she let us know, "Adoption organisations in Europe have links to the birth countries of the children. Norway still has three such organisations. These organisations charge millions of rupees to finalise the adoption. They have contacts with individuals in the countries of birth who tell them about orphanages. Baby farms, kidnapping children from families, hospitals, or streets, babies found at the orphanages' doorstep or given to them without the consent of the biological parents facilitate the illegal adoption lobby. Sometimes, parents are paid money and are falsely assured that the adoption is for a short time period so that they can stabilise their

lives with the money but their children are never returned to them. Also, parents are deceived to believe that these orphanages are places where you can leave your kids and later pick them up again and meanwhile, those kids are given away."

She also revealed, "The Government officials and lawyers can also be part of this lobby and stealthily make the adoptive parents believe that the adoption is legal. It is tough to understand this lobby if you do not see it on your own. Therefore, I have also worked in orphanages in Sri Lanka. Women are even paid to become 'acting mothers' and give away someone else's child for adoption. These women are poor and are told that they can give a new life to the child by making them move to Europe to experience a better life, get access to better education to come back and help their own families. Babies are even swapped at hospitals to meet the needs of adoptive parents sometimes. Children are even claimed to be born dead."

Explaining her own case, she said, "During her pregnancy, my mother was forced to live alone because of extremely traumatising circumstances with my father, his family, and their community. One of her family friends then fooled her to live with her. She had also persuaded my mother to give me away for adoption, but she did not give in even though she was poor. Right after my birth, the doctor asked her to give me away, but she was not ready. She took me home and asked my father to accept us, but he did not do so. That was when the 'family friend' came in again and she lied to my mother about 'temporary adoptions'. She was told that she will be paid many lakhs of Rupees to hand me over to white parents and will stay in touch with me. And, when my adoptive parents showed her the images from Norway, she thought they were structures made by colonisers in Sri Lanka itself. And, my adoptive parents could not know that the lobby translator kept on referring to 'temporary adoption'. And, such illegal cases are handled by 'acting courts' and hence, both biological and adoptive parents are fooled. Illegal documents are made as well. The fact that I left Sri Lanka is mentioned nowhere. Even the European governments are not obliged to scrutinise the documents closely."

Priyangika also mentioned that she would now begin with legal action. She will be filing lawsuits against such orphanages in Sri Lanka either this or the next year; which depends on circumstances created by the pandemic. She will also file a lawsuit against the Norwegian Government later. She told us that while Sri Lanka has accepted the existence of this lobby, nobody from the Government has confessed to their role.

She has reunited people from different European countries, the USA, Australia to their families in Brazil, Colombia, and India in the past but mainly focuses on Sri Lanka now to dig deeper into one system. As per Priyangika, an industry based on children should not thrive. The Government should be responsible for its own children. And, the adoption racket has still not ended in Sri Lanka. New ways have been devised to continue to send children to foreign lands.

"The fraud has only changed its form; it has not ended," she said. (Goa Chronicle)



Another Sri Lankan who was adopted meets her biological mother.

Adoption of babies is a big international business.



Upholding 150 years of CGR tradition



(Picture by G. Niranjan)



DISHAN JOSEPH

Every Sri Lankan will remember the bliss of taking a train trip. Thousands of our citizens travel daily by train to the Fort Station to go to their workplaces.

Smartly attired in black and white, the railway guards are one of the last working men who represent a long and proud tradition as far back as 1864. They faithfully continue to work on every single train that runs across this country. Their main operating office is located at the Maradana Railway Station nestled on Platform No 5. In order to trace their magnificent vintage traditions, I met up with Guards Inspector Janaka Fernando, who counts three decades of service.

This amiable gentleman is the senior railway officer responsible for the 500 plus guards operating throughout the Railway Department. About 300 guards are stationed in Colombo and the rest operate from 12 unit offices to facilitate a consistent service. Amidst the noise of trains leaving the

were the train engine drivers. Towards the 1950s, the head guards were replaced by Ceylonese. Many of the pioneer Burghers are no more in service. Today we have a good mix from every community working as a team. I joined the Railways three decades ago. Since then we have undergone many improvements."

The railway guard is not to be confused with the railway security staff who wear khaki uniforms and operate as the Railway Protection Force (RPF). Fernando added: "The post of railway guard was a lucrative government job decades ago, as people were drawn to the immaculate white uniform, black velvet coat and firm white pith hat. The pith hat was discontinued years ago, but the uniform remains and inspires young men to join our ranks."

The men are selected from those who have passed Mathematics at the GCE A/L exam. In addition, they must have the NDT, while some also have degrees to their credit. The new recruits are absorbed as Class 3 Guards, and follow two years of training. During this time, they spend three months at the German Technical School, where they learn practical skills. A guard is taught about train engines, compartments, signals, block regulations (rail safety), train operating systems, responding to emergencies such as a fire on a moving train, collisions and derailment. They are also trained in first aid. A guard checks the entire train at the Main Yard before it is ready to enter the railway station, making sure all systems are safe. After they show a consistent good performance, they are promoted as Class 2/B guards. It is only after serving for three years that the under guards are taken for training on the Upcountry Main Lines.

The Guards Inspector said: "Working on the upcountry tracks is totally different. A guard must get an understanding of the steep inclines, the impact of the gradient on the speed of the train. Also, the weight of parcels and baggage loaded on a train impacts the upward push to far away stations on the Colombo-Badulla line. The guards are competent in using the hand brake to assist the engine driver when required. The hand brake is located in the rear guard's carriage. It is an important apparatus. After four years, the men can be promoted as Class 1 guards."

Trains come and leave Maradana, and their horns disturbed our peaceful conversation. By evening, office workers were assembling at the platforms. Guards returned from long runs and handed over their journals to an officer. Every train journey is documented in detail. The Guards Booking Office is a busy place.

"Guards are often seen by passengers waving either a red or a green flag. This is a key signal to the engine driver, as some trains have up to a dozen compartments and these visual signals come from the rear compartment. Both men must work as a team. We once used red and green signal lamps at night, which was stopped in 1990. Since then we use flashlights with red and green lights."

This is where the 300 guards change shifts and is a very busy administrative hub. Some take a break before taking over the next shift.

H.U. Rajapaksa is the Chief in Charge (CIC) of Guards Booking, which is a British book system. He has a massive ledger on his antique desk. The ledger is actually a duty roster. It is his task to assign guards on various trains. As per the rail regulations, each train has a head guard and an under guard. As the train is ready, the guard will sound the first whistle, indicating to the passengers that the train is about to move. The second sharp whistle indicates to the passengers and the stationmaster that the train is moving. On the rail journey, guards have to monitor the signals. Some signals are controlled (semaphore system); others are automatic. Watching the signals is a prime duty. Before a train nears a level crossing (700 metres in advance) the signals will indicate if the rail crossing is secured by the gatekeeper, if not the train will come to a complete halt.

Railway guards also get involved in "shunting" – the process of attaching or detaching compartments at some stations. Apart from these duties, the guard is

responsible for the parcels and mailbags in his custody. These have to be dropped off and collected at various stations. Railway guards perform another key task by collecting cash from smaller stations (ticket sales revenue). On some lines, the guards monitor the exchange of the tablet between the stationmaster and engine driver. Fernando added: "Guards are often seen by passengers waving either a red or a green flag. This is a key signal to the engine driver, as some trains have up to a dozen compartments and these visual signals come from the rear compartment. Both men must work as a team. We once used red and green signal lamps at night, which was stopped in 1990. Since then we use flashlights with red and green lights."

Despite the responsibility entrusted with the railway guards, they have the chance to enjoy some of the finest natural scenery on every line. The best views are on the upcountry lines, amidst mist-laden hills and salubrious green tea plantations.

Occasionally, the railway guard has to deal with a suicide victim, who decides to take his or her life on the rail track. This is not a pleasant sight to witness. The train is halted and the victim's body is handed over to the nearest railway station or police. Occasionally, wild elephants crossing rail tracks at night cause minor accidents and delays. Some senior guards commented: "It is obvious that visibility is less at night, in comparison to daylight. A diesel locomotive has a bright light that reaches 100 metres. But it depends on the curves and bends of the tracks. Often wild elephants suddenly appear at bends and the result could be fatal for the meandering animal. You cannot halt a big heavy train as quickly as a car. During these tragedies, trains also derail. The engine drivers always uphold safety and they take their jobs very seriously. The elephants just happen to be at the wrong place."

I understood that some traditional 'elephant corridors' have been encroached by humans who have extended their cultivations. At times, they put up electric fences thereby disturbing the normal crossing routes of elephants. Elephant calves are innocent and confused, so they suddenly cross onto the rail track, and the jumbo mothers have no choice but to follow them. It is a difficult situation for the oncoming train.

We had tea and I brought up the topic about railway staff seeing ghosts at night from old railway stations, and this was denied by the guards as we burst into laughter. For more than 150 years, the railway guards have sustained a vital duty on all Sri Lankan trains. Their black and white uniform is a reassuring sign to engine drivers, stationmasters and passengers.



platform Fernando explained: "We are one of the first branches of the Ceylon Government Railway (CGR). Since its inception, the railway guards have been an integral part of the train services. At the outset, the posts of guards were held by the British, as

"As the train is ready, the guard will sound the first whistle, indicating to the passengers that the train is about to move. The second sharp whistle indicates to the passengers and the stationmaster that the train is moving. On the rail journey, guards have to monitor the signals. Some signals are controlled (semaphore system); others are automatic. Watching the signals is a prime duty."

Third vaccine dose 'likely' needed within 12 months - Pfizer CEO

US: The head of Pfizer said in an interview aired Thursday that people will "likely" need a third dose of his company's COVID-19 shot within six to 12 months of vaccination, while elsewhere defending the relatively higher cost of the jab.

CEO Albert Bourla also said annual vaccinations against the coronavirus may well be required.

"We need to see what would be the sequence, and for how often we need to do that, that remains to be seen," Bourla told CNBC in an interview recorded on April 1.

"A likely scenario is that there will be likely a need for a third dose, somewhere between six and 12 months and then from there, there will be an annual revaccination, but all of that needs to be confirmed," he said, adding that variants will play a "key role."

"It is extremely important to suppress the pool of people that can be susceptible to the virus," he said.

Researchers currently don't know how long vaccines provide protection against the coronavirus.

Pfizer published a study earlier this month that said its jab is more than 91 percent effective at protecting against the coronavirus, and more than 95 percent effective against severe cases of COVID-19 up to six months after the second dose.

The Pfizer vaccine, developed by the US-based company in partnership with German



firm BioNTech, currently plays a leading role in American and European vaccination campaigns.

The pharmaceutical giant announced in February that it was testing a third dose of its vaccine to better combat the emerging variants. And Bourla said Thursday the company was working on a new formula that would allow the vaccine to be stored for four

to six months at a normal temperature, rather than the minus 70 degrees Celsius (minus 94 Fahrenheit) or below currently required.

Israel to scrap outdoor mask mandate

Israelis will no longer have to wear masks outdoors starting from Sunday as the num-

ber of virus infections plummets, Health Minister Yuli Edelstein said.

"The rate of infection in Israel is very low thanks to the successful vaccine campaign in Israel, and therefore it is possible to ease (restrictions)," Edelstein said in a statement Thursday.

He said however that masks will still be required indoors.

With close to five million people – more than half the population of 9.3 million – vaccinated, Israel continues its world-beating campaign that sent coronavirus infection rates down.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu obtained millions of Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines in part by agreeing to share with Pfizer medical data on the product's impact.

The vaccines have transformed life in Israel. In mid-January the country had a peak of some 10,000 new infections a day but the rate is now about 200 cases a day.

France's COVID-19 deaths pass 100,000

The number of people killed by COVID-19 in France climbed past 100,000 on Thursday, with the virus claiming a further 300 lives in the past 24 hours, the country's health authority said.

The current death toll stands at 100,232.

France is the third country in Europe to reach the grim milestone of 100,000 corona-

virus deaths, after the United Kingdom and Italy.

Nearly 30,000 people were killed in France in the first wave of the pandemic between mid-March and mid-May last year but the bulk of the deaths have been recorded since October, when the country was hit by a second surge in infections that remained stuck at a high level through the end of 2020.

India's daily virus cases double in 10 days

India's daily coronavirus caseload has doubled in 10 days, with a record 200,000 new infections logged Thursday as authorities grapple with shortages of vaccines, treatments and hospital beds.

India is experiencing a vicious second wave, recording almost two million fresh infections this month alone.

This week, it overtook Brazil to become the country with the second-highest number of cases worldwide, after the United States.

In the past day it also recorded over 1,000 deaths, health ministry data showed, taking its total to 175,000, although on a per-capita basis India is far behind many other countries.

Many states are tightening the screws, in particular Maharashtra and its capital Mumbai, which this week introduced tougher restrictions for its 125 million people. - AFP

Significant drop in COVID deaths among Europe's elderly - WHO



A medical worker giving a woman a COVID-19 vaccine in the Netherlands.

GREECE: The share of COVID-19 related deaths in Europe among those over the age of 80 has reached the lowest level since the start of the pandemic, the World Health Organization said Thursday.

The trend could possibly be attributed to the rollout of vaccines among high-risk groups, according to Hans Kluge, the WHO regional director for Europe.

"Over the past two months the trend among people more than 80 years of age has diverged from the trend seen in every other age group," Kluge told a news conference in Athens.

Kluge noted that the group now accounted for close to 30 percent of COVID-19 related deaths.

In mid-January, the figure hit a

peak of 62 percent, WHO Europe said.

The WHO's European chapter, which recently described the situation as "more worrying than we have seen in several months", also said they now saw "early signs that transmission may be slowing across several countries."

But Kluge still urged caution, noting that on average 160 new cases were reported every minute.

"Signs of decline are not equal to low rates of transmission," Kluge emphasised, and stressed the importance of the rollout of the vaccine.

The WHO's European region comprises 53 countries and territories and includes Russia and several Central Asian nations. - AFP

Covax seeks \$2 bn in donations to cover COVID-19 vaccines



The COVAX initiative for equitable global access to COVID-19 vaccines plans to distribute over 330 million doses to developing nations in the first half of 2021.

SWITZERLAND: The Covax scheme launched a push for an extra \$2 billion in donations on Thursday, saying it needed the money in advance to reserve COVID-19 vaccine doses.

The Covax facility ensures the 92 poorest participating economies can access coronavirus jabs, with the cost covered by donors.

The United States co-hosted Thursday's donor event at which the first \$400 million was raised. Sweden led the way, putting in \$258 million, with the Netherlands donating \$47 million.

"People everywhere should have access to rigorously tested, safe, and effective COVID-19 vaccines," said US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

"As long as COVID is spreading and replicating anywhere, it poses a threat to people everywhere."

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga

will host a Covax funding summit focused on the 92 countries in June, it was announced. Nearly 840 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in at least 205 territories around the world, according to an AFP count.

Covax has delivered more than 38 million doses so far to 113 participating territories. The first shipment landed in Ghana on February 24, with Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo publicly taking the first shot. Covax is co-led by the WHO, the Gavi vaccine alliance, and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations.

The scheme is aiming to distribute enough doses to vaccinate up to 27 percent of the population in the 92 poorest participating economies by the end of the year.

"We have now secured up to 2.5 billion doses ... and sight on another billion doses," said Gavi chief Seth Berkley. - AFP

Pandemic embrace wins World Press Photo prize

THE NETHERLANDS: Danish photographer Mads Nissen won the World Press Photo of the Year Award on Thursday with his picture of a Brazilian nursing home resident hugging a healthcare worker after months in Covid isolation.

The photo captures an embrace between a nurse and 85-year-old Rosa Luiza Lunardi after she spent five months isolated in her Sao Paulo nursing home.

The women are separated by a protective plastic sheet to reduce the risk of contagion.

Taken in August 2020, the shot first appeared in the Danish daily Politiken, where Nissen is a staff photographer.

"This iconic image of COVID-19 memorialises the most extraordinary moment of our lives, everywhere," World Press Photo Award jury member Kevin WY Lee said in a statement.

He said the picture showed vulnerability, loss and separation but if "you look at the image long enough, you'll see wings: a symbol of flight and hope".

"The First Embrace" won the competition's main category as well as a prize in the General News - Singles category.

"To me, it's a story of love and hope in the most difficult times," Nissen said.

It is Nissen's second World Press win – he scooped first prize in the 2015 competition for his intimate portrayal of a gay couple in Russia.

Ernesto Benavides, a freelancer working for Agence France-Presse in Lima won second prize in the Spot News - Stories for a series of images taken when supporters of ousted Peruvian president Martin Vizcarra clashed with police in November.

More than 74,000 images had been submitted by some 4,300 photographers around the world, and 45 of them had been nominated by the judges, according to the organisers of the Amsterdam-based competition.

The awards ceremony took place online this year due to coronavirus restrictions.

The photo of the year award was won in 2020 by AFP photographer Yasuyoshi Chiba, for an image of a young man reciting a poem among protesters in Sudan. - AFP



The photograph titled 'The First Embrace' Danish photographer Mads Nissen (R) shows Rosa Luiza Lunardi (85) embraced by nurse Adriana Silva da Costa Souza, at Viva Bem care home, Sao Paulo, Brazil, on August 5, 2020.

Former US VP Pence receives pacemaker

US: Former US Vice President Mike Pence, believed to be considering a White House run, has been fitted with a pacemaker to treat a heart abnormality, the Republican's office said Thursday, adding a full recovery is expected.

"Over the past two weeks, former Vice President Pence experienced symptoms associated with a slow heart rate and, upon consultation with his doctors, underwent a procedure yesterday at Inova Fairfax Medical Campus in Falls Church, Virginia, to implant a pacemaker," the 61-year-old religious conservative's office said in a statement.

"The routine surgery was successful, and he is expected to fully recover and return to normal activity in the coming days." Pence in the same statement expressed gratitude "for the swift professionalism and care" he received from doctors and other medical staff. Pence disclosed his medical history in 2016 when he was nominated to be Donald Trump's running mate. It said he had been diagnosed with asymptomatic left bundle branch



Former US Vice President Mike Pence

block, a problem that prevents the heart's electrical wiring system from producing the normal signals that trigger a heartbeat. Pence has largely remained out of the political spotlight since he and Trump lost the November election to now-President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. Earlier this month it was announced that Pence reached a deal to pen an autobiography scheduled for release in 2023, the year before the next Presidential election.

A pre-election memoir would fulfill a step traditionally taken by American politicians mulling higher office. - AFP

Chicago Police shoot dead Latino teenager

US: Authorities in Chicago released police body camera footage Thursday showing an officer shooting dead a 13-year-old Latino boy as the mayor of America's third-largest city appealed for calm over the "excruciating" video.

The shocking footage shows teenager Adam Toledo running from officers in the small hours of March 29 and then being hit with a single shot to the chest as he stops and raises his hands.

Prosecutors say he was armed, although no weapon is visible in his hands in the video when he is struck.

In a news conference Thursday ahead of the latest video's release, Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot called for a peaceful response from residents, describing the footage as "excruciating to watch."

Lightfoot would not com-

ment on whether Toledo – who was laid to rest on Friday last week – was holding a gun when he was killed, despite saying repeatedly earlier in the week that he was.

"I don't think it matters whether Adam is a choir boy, whether he is involved in some other untoward activity – the fact of the matter is that he was walking in the street and he was shot unarmed," Adeena Weiss-Ortiz, the Toledo family attorney, told reporters.

Toledo, who reportedly has American Samoan heritage, was laid to rest last week.

The Civilian Office of Police Accountability is reviewing footage from body cameras worn by the responding officers and other video, along with audio recordings from surveillance sensors. - AFP



Protests over Adam Toledo's killing have taken place in Chicago this week.

'Now is the time for US, Russia to deescalate tensions' - President Biden



US President Joe Biden speaking on US-Russia relations at the White House in Washington on Thursday. - AFP

US: US President Joe Biden said Thursday after announcing sanctions against Russia that for both countries "now is the time to deescalate."
Biden described the sanctions, which are aimed at the Russian economy and dozens of individuals, as a "measured and proportionate" response to Moscow's hostile actions against the United States.
He said that during a phone call earlier

this week he was "clear with President Putin that we could have gone further" but added that Washington is "not looking to kick off a cycle of escalation and conflict with Russia."
Biden said that with direct communication between him and Vladimir Putin they could establish "a more effective relationship" and that the Kremlin leader "agreed" with this. Biden's proposed summit with

Putin, which he said could take place "this summer in Europe," would be a chance to "launch a strategic stability dialogue."
Putin has not yet responded to the invitation but Biden said "our teams are discussing that possibility right now."
Biden said there were "critical global challenges that require Russia and the United States to work together, including reigning in nuclear threats from Iran and

North Korea, ending this (coronavirus) pandemic globally, and meeting the existential crisis of climate change."
Biden said he'd challenged Putin on Russia's invasion of part of Ukraine and current massing of troops on another part of the border. "I affirmed US support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and I strongly urged him to refrain from any military action." - AFP

WHO urges use of COVID-19 lessons to battle deadly superbugs

SWITZERLAND: Lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic should be used to fight the spread of drug-resistant bacteria, which kill tens of thousands of people each year, the World Health Organization said Thursday.

The UN health agency warned that the world was running out of options for fighting antimicrobial resistance (AMR), with few new effective antibiotics in the pipeline.
But it said the coronavirus crisis, which had dramatically deepened global understanding of the health and economic implications of an uncontrolled pandemic, could spur progress.

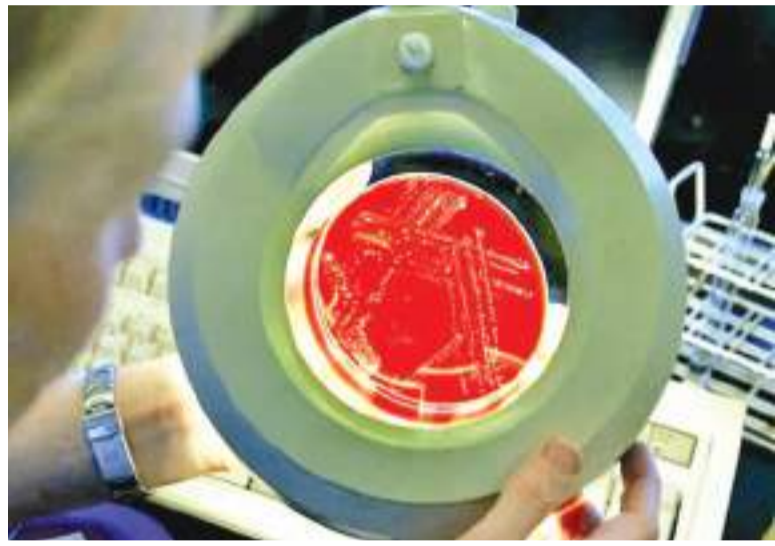
COVID-19 has taught us "how fast communicable diseases can spread", Henry Skinner, head of the AMR Action Fund, told reporters at a press conference.

"We need to have the right drugs available so we are always able to treat these infections and prevent their becoming a pandemic."

The worldwide push to rein in the pandemic has proven that rapid progress can be made when there is enough political will, the WHO said.

"Opportunities emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic must be seized to bring to the forefront the needs for sustainable investments in (research and development) of new and effective antibiotics," Haileyesus Getahun, who heads the WHO's AMR division, warned in a statement.

Discovered in the 1920s, anti-



Antibiotic resistance happens when bugs become immune to existing drugs, like antibiotics, and make minor injuries and common infections potentially deadly.

otics have saved tens of millions of lives by defeating bacterial diseases such as pneumonia, tuberculosis and meningitis.

But over the decades, bacteria have learned to fight back, building resistance to the same drugs that once reliably vanquished them - turning into so-called "superbugs".

Drug-resistant bacteria are estimated to kill more than 33,000 people in Europe each year, and 35,000 in the United States.

Peter Beyer, head of WHO's AMR global coordination and partnership unit, said that while no data is available for other regions, such infections are believed to be

an even bigger problem in middle- and lower-income countries.

"In all countries where infection prevention and control is less developed, in hospitals you have a higher mortality, and you have also a higher resistance," he told reporters.

In the report published Thursday, it concluded that none of the 43 new antibiotics currently being developed sufficiently address the problem of drug resistance in the world's most dangerous bacteria.

It highlighted 27 such drugs in the pipeline, including monoclonal antibodies like the treatments being used for COVID-19. - AFP

Lebanese doctor's drive to curb COVID-19 with sniffer dogs

LEBANON: Lebanese doctor Riad Sarkis says he can help curb COVID-19 globally. As he speaks inside Beirut airport, one of his secret weapons is wagging its tail next to him.

Specifically trained sniffer dogs can detect COVID in a person in a few seconds, including in very early stages when a PCR test would yield a negative result.

"Man's best friend" doesn't even begin to describe how Dr. Sarkis views dogs, which he argues can save more human lives than ever before by stopping the spread of the pandemic.

"The day we build a machine with an electronic nose that amplifies smells 10,000 times, then we can replace the dogs. For now, we need them," Sarkis says. The effusive professor, who splits his time and work between France and Lebanon, has temporarily sidelined his passions for music and poetry to stay on a war footing against the pandemic that has brought the world to a standstill. A digestive system surgery professor and oncologist, Sarkis had spent 12 years researching how dogs could help detect cancer and increase chances of early treatment.

"When COVID appeared, I thought why not try. And it worked," he recounts. Research was conducted with France's Maisons-Alfort veterinary school, a leading institution founded in the 18th century, and various labs and universities. The results were staggering: the hyper-sensitive snouts of trained sniffer dogs were almost infallible.

"PCR tests have a margin of error that can reach 30 percent. With dogs,



Sniffer dog Rox takes part in a training to detect COVID-19 through sweat samples at a facility in Lebanon's capital Beirut. - AFP

it's less than five percent," he says. Each dog can process hundreds of samples every day, the only wages they need are biscuits or rubber toys and they deliver results on the spot.

The technique is not intended to replace PCR testing but has been rolled out in a number of international airports such as Dubai, Helsinki and Sydney.

At a training facility provided by Bank Audi in Beirut, Rox and Sky, an Alsatian and a Malinois, are being trained by dog handler Carlo Selman.

"These dogs are a gift from God to combat COVID," he says, as Sky wiggles in excitement ahead of a new exercise.

Replicating the set-up at an airport terminal, a partition shields the dogs from the testing area, where passen-

gers are ushered into booths. The underarm sweat sample is collected by the passengers, who are generally only too happy not to have a swab drilled into their nostrils.

The cotton pad is dropped in a glass container, which is in turn placed at the small end of cones that flare open on the other side of the partition.

Sarkis explains that the accuracy and speed of the dogs' testing skills should be a key to stemming the spread of the Covid pandemic. "By the time a passenger carrying COVID gets PCR results, he has entered the country and very often the damage is done," he says. Dogs can detect COVID at a very early stage, which allows for the isolation of asymptomatic people who would otherwise be unwittingly spreading the virus. - AFP

Iran nuclear talks 'positive' despite fresh tensions



The 'Grand Hotel Wien' in Vienna, Austria where closed-door nuclear talks with Iran are taking place.

AUSTRIA: Diplomats said Thursday that the latest talks in Vienna to save the 2015 Iran nuclear deal were positive despite fresh tensions over Tehran's announcement that it was preparing to ramp up uranium enrichment in response to an attack on a facility it blamed on arch-foe Israel.

The latest round of diplomatic negotiations aimed at ensuring the US's return to the accord lasted for roughly two hours on Thursday afternoon, with Russia's ambassador to the UN in Vienna, Mikhail Ulyanov, tweeting afterwards that the "general impression is positive".

The talks comprised delegations from the remaining parties to the deal following the US exit - Germany, France, Britain, China, Russia and Iran.

There had been fears that developments in recent days could cast a pall over the talks, with a European diplomat telling AFP ahead of the meeting that Iran's announcement that it would enrich uranium up to 60 percent "puts pressure on everyone".

The move would take Iran closer

to the 90 percent purity level needed for use in a nuclear weapon.

Despite the latest developments on the ground, the chair of the talks, EU diplomat Enrique Mora, also struck an upbeat note at the end of Thursday's meeting.

He tweeted that participants had been "ready to advance... despite very challenging events and announcements over the past days".

Another diplomatic source said there had been "no big problems" at the talks, which is now expected to be followed by fresh meetings of experts to discuss possible measures to be taken by Washington and Tehran on sanctions lifting and nuclear issues.

The head of the Iranian delegation, Abbas Araghchi, was more cautious at the end of Thursday's meeting.

According to a statement from Iran's foreign ministry, Araghchi stressed that Tehran wanted to avoid the talks "dragging on" and that they had to "take place in a well-defined framework and within an acceptable time period". - AFP

Democrats unveil bid to expand US Supreme Court

US: A group of congressional Democrats launched a daunting bid Thursday to expand the US Supreme Court from nine to 13 justices, angering Republicans who accused their rivals of attempting a power grab to enact President Joe Biden's agenda.

The move appears to be an effort by the party's progressive wing to pressure Biden on the explosive issue, less than one week after the president announced he was forming a commission to study reforming the high court, including the question of adding justices.

The Supreme Court sits as the final arbiter on fundamental American legal matters, which can include minority and LGBTQ rights, racism, the death penalty and electoral controversies - and its justices are appointed for life.

Several liberal Democrats have said expansion is necessary after Donald Trump gave the bench a 6-3 conservative majority with three picks, including one just eight days before the 2020 election and after millions of Americans had voted.

"We are here today because the United States Supreme Court is broken, it is out of balance, and it needs to be fixed," Senator Ed Markey told reporters on the building's front steps, adding that Americans worry the court is "no longer a neutral arbiter"



US Senator Ed Markey is among a handful of Democrats who introduced a measure in Congress to expand the number of seats on the Supreme Court from nine to 13.

of the nation's constitutional questions.

The bill, which would allow Biden to fill all four new seats, appears doomed to fail - at least for now.

Asked whether she supports it, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told reporters "no," adding she did not have plans to bring it to a floor vote.

Although hesitant, Biden has agreed to consider reform, and last week ordered the creation of a bipartisan commission of scholars, former administration officials and retired federal judges to study the issue. The White

House has downplayed any potential frustration over the lawmakers' rush to introduce their legislation, although spokeswoman Jen Psaki said Biden would wait to hear from the commission before forming a view.

Liberals point to recent decisions gutting the Voting Rights Act; opening the floodgates for corporate dark money to impact election campaigns; refusing to strike down voter suppression laws and upholding what critics see as gerrymandering to entrench Republican power. The issue has been a political football since the controver-

sial confirmation of conservative Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court following the September 2020 death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a liberal icon.

Trump nominated Barrett just weeks before the November election that he lost to Biden.

Congress reformed the court several times in the 19th century, including in 1863 when Republicans expanded it to 10 seats. It was reduced to seven a few years later, but in 1869 it was expanded back to nine, where it has remained. - AFP



Despite the military using lethal force to quell demonstrations, people in Myanmar have continued to take to the streets to protest the coup.

Myanmar's military shoots at protesting medical workers

MYANMAR: Myanmar's military opened fire on protesting healthcare workers on Thursday, killing at least one bystander as the demonstrators fled for safety to a nearby mosque.

The country has been in turmoil since the military seized power from civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1, triggering a massive uprising that the junta has sought to quell using lethal force.

But protesters have continued taking to the streets, this week using the Myanmar New Year holiday of Thingyan as their latest rallying point as the normal festivities have been cancelled.

In Myanmar's second-largest city Mandalay, a demonstration by medical workers

Thursday turned violent when soldiers opened fire, sending them running to the mosque.

"They were shooting everywhere... they were targeting the Sule mosque compound because people in there were hiding protesters," said an eyewitness.

The junta has tried to force people back to work, and on Thursday, state-run media reported that at least 20 doctors participating in the movement will be charged for attempting to "deteriorate peace and stability".

So far, more than 700 civilians have been killed in anti-coup unrest, according to a local monitoring group, and more than 3,000 have been detained. - AFP

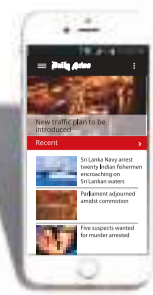
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Application for a Licence under Section 34 of the Companies Act No.7 of 2007 from the Registrar of Companies

In pursuance of Section 34 of the Companies Act No. 7 of 2007 an application had been made to the Registrar of Companies for a licence that an Association be formed under the name and style of "VOLUNTEER FORUM" to be registered with limited liability without the addition of the word "limited" at the end of the name.

The objects for which the Association is established are:

- To promote the love of education among the upcoming generation.
- To aid the youth of today to reach their academic goals.
- To promote participation in sports, arts and culture on youth.
- To equip and empower young people with different knowledge which will help them in all spheres of life.
- Encouraging diverse stakeholders in the countries to join with us to promote youth employment through their programs and already existing activities/initiatives.
- To provide opportunities for the youth to build their own enterprises and create wealth for themselves and the nation through, Organizing and conducting training, seminars and workshops.
- To create a productive and self-sustaining youth population, capable of protecting themselves and their communities against the risks of HIV/AIDS and Violence.
- To promote unity and patriotism among the youth.
- To assist in the process of social integration and personal realization of underprivileged children, young people, adults and families.
- To work for the social development of underprivileged individuals, groups and communities in Sri Lanka.
- To encourage healthcare development and health promotion.
- To encourage and popularize voluntary work.
- Participation in social welfare activities.
- To conduct research on youth concerned issues socially and economically.

The other provisions of the Association are set out in Extenso in the Articles of Association, a copy of which may be inspected at the office of the proposed Company at 531/1 C/1 Athurugiriya Rd., Malabe.

Notice is hereby given that any person, company or corporation objecting to this application, may lodge such objections within three weeks from the advertisement by a letter to the Registrar- General of Companies, "Samagam Medura" No.400, D.R. Wijewardene Mawatha, Colombo 10.,

Promoter

Replies to Classifieds & Casual Advertisements published C/o the

Daily News

should only be sent by ordinary post. Replies sent under registered cover will not be accepted.

DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT - EASTERN PROVINCE

Notice on Summon of Meeting of Under the Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Act No. 22 of 2012

By virtue of power vested on me under Section 66 (G) of Local Authorities Elections as amended by Act No. 22 of 2012, I, Nagarasa Manivannan, the Commissioner of Local Government of Eastern Province do hereby summon the meeting to fill the vacancies arise as a result of resigning the post of Vice Chairman of the Koralapattu West Pradeshiya Sabha, Batticaloa District, Eastern Province at 10.00 a.m. on 2020.08.11 at Koralapattu West Pradeshiya Sabha Council Hall for the purpose of elect the New Vice Chairman. Furthermore, the scheduled meeting has been published in the Gazette notification (extraordinary) No of 2223/4 of Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka on 2021.04.15.

N. Manivannan,
Commissioner of Local Government,
Department of Local Government,
Eastern Province.



Sri Lanka Police
Special Task Force

INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

(Procurements of Goods and Vehicles)

01. Commandant / Special Task Force, STF Headquarters, No: 223, Baudhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 07, now invite for sealed bids from eligible bidders for the following procurements to the Special Task Force (STF) Sri Lanka Police for UN Mission Deployment of STF Troops in African Continent (Bidders are requested to refer the UN COE Manual for details)

Con. No	Procurement No	Description of Items	Qty.	Document Charges R.	Value of Bid Security R.
1.	STF/LOG/C/216/2020	Light Cargo Single Axle Trailer	02	6,000.00	360,000.00
2.	STF/LOG/C/217/2020	Fork Lift (rough terrain) Over 5 Tons	01	5,000.00	292,500.00
3.	STF/LOG/C/218/2020	Fuel Trailer (up to 2,000 Litres) (Flow meter mandatory)	02	5,000.00	225,000.00
4.	STF/LOG/C/219/2020	Truck Fuel Tanker (over 6600 and up to 10,000 litres) (flow meter mandatory)	01	6,000.00	360,000.00
5.	STF/LOG/C/220/2020	Water Trailer (up to 2,000 litres)	02	5,000.00	225,000.00
6.	STF/LOG/C/221/2020	1. 4 Nos. Breaching Tool Set 2. 4 Nos. Rappelling Gear Set i) Abselling Rope (100m) ii) Carabiner iii) Figure iv) Ladder v) Seat Harness vi) Pulley vii) Adjustable Anchor Strap viii) EXO Eashook ix) Rig	As per List	5,000.00	285,516.00
7.	STF/LOG/C/222/2020	Ballistic Shield (Level - III A)	03	3,000.00	111,375.00
8.	STF/LOG/C/224/2020	Bus (13-24 Pax or greater than 24 passengers.)	01	4,000.00	180,000.00

- Bidding will be conducted through National Competitive Bidding (NCB) Procedure.
- Interested eligible bidders may obtain further information from Director/ Logistics, STF & inspect the bidding documents from the address given below from 0900 hrs, to 1500 hrs, on any working days except on Public & Bank Holidays from **17.04.2021 until 12.05.2021**
- Qualified Bidders shall possess legal rights for the above procurements. The Bidder should be registered Business Firm. **The Bidder should be registered under Public Contract Act No. (03) Of 1987. (For Total Bid value of over 1 million), failure to produce the registration certificates with the bids' will result for disqualifications.** The Bidder shall not have a conflict of interest and bidder's name shall not be included in the list of debarred firms at the National Procurement Commission. A margin of preference for eligible locally produced goods offered shall be applied. Additional details are provided in the Bidding Documents.
- A complete set of bidding documents in English Language may be purchased by interested Bidders from the STF Procurement Unit on submission of a written application to the address mentioned below, upon payment of a non-refundable tender fee indicated above table in cash per each tender from 0900 hrs, to 1500 hrs, on any working days from **17.04.2021 up to 12.05.2021** Only a single set of bidding documents for each procurement shall be issued for an institution.
- Bids must be inserted into the tender box placed at the under noted address at or before date of opening (13.05.2021) of the respective tenders. Alternatively, bids may be sent by registered post to reach before the closing time of bids. The respective Tender Number should be indicated at the Top of the Left Corner of the Envelop. **Any late bids will be rejected. Bids will be opened soon after closing of bids in the presence of the bidders or their representatives who choose to attend personally at Conference Hall at STF Headquarters, No: 223, Baudhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 07 at 1400 Hrs. on 13.05.2021.** The representatives who will attend on behalf of the bidder should be definitely producing an authorized letter from the organization. Otherwise they will not be allowed for sitting
- Bids shall be valid for **91 days** from the date of opening of bids.
- Priority will be given to suppliers with Ex-Stock
- All bids shall be accompanied by a Bid Security at the amount indicated above and it shall be:
 - Issued by any Commercial Institution operating in Sri Lanka and approved by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka.
 - In the form include in Section IV of the Bidding Documents.
 - In favor of Commandant / STF.**
 - Valid up to **13.05.2021 up to 08.09.2021**
- Pre Bid Meeting will be held on **28.04.2021** at the Conference Hall at STF Headquarters, No: 223, Baudhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 07.
- If it is applicable, the Bidder should pay the Indicated amount of testing charges for testing process to Accountant / STF and the book receipt issued should be attached to the bid.
- The decision taken by the STF Procurement Committee will be the final decision and the Purchaser reserves the right to make any amendments on Financial Regulations and Treasury Circulars issued periodically.
- For further clarifications, please contact -

Telephone Numbers

Director / Logistics, Direct : 011-2505933
Special Task Force Headquarters, General : 011-2500471 / 0112589741 Ext: 251
No.223, Baudhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 07. Fax : 011-2556506

Commandant,
Special Task Force

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INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

AMENDMENT TO THE NOTICE

DESIGN & BUILD PROJECTS AT BASE HOSPITAL, WATHUPITIWALA

We wish to announce that some conditions and facts in the procurement notice, published in the "Daily News" paper on 25.03.2021 are amended as below.

1. Contents of the table in Paragraph 3 of the notice,

Name of the Project	Design, Development & Improvement of existing Sewerage Treatment System at Base Hospital, Wathupitiwala
CIDA Registration	"EM1/EM2 for electrical & mechanical services and Grade C4/C5 for Building Construction and Sewerage & Water Supply" is replaced by "Grade EM1/EM2 for Electrical and Mechanical services and Grade C5 or above for Building Construction" OR "Grade C4 or above for Sewerage and Water supply"
Duration	"150 days" is replaced by "Shall be proposed by the Bidder"

- In the 3rd and 4th lines of Paragraph 5, "from 26.03.2021 to 23.04.2021 from 09.00 hrs to 15.00 hrs" is replaced by "from 26.03.2021 to 14.05.2021 from 09.00 hrs to 15.00 hrs"
- In the 3rd line of Paragraph 7, "on or before 11.30 am on 30.04.2021" is replaced by "on or before 11.30 am on 21.05.2021"

All other details in the previous procurement notice shall remain same. Any inconvenience caused is regretted.

Procurement Unit,
Engineering Organization (W.P),
5th Floor,
#204, Denzil Kobbekaduwa Mawatha,
Battaramulla
12.04.2021

T.P:- 0112 -092504
Fax: 0112 - 092505



TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tenders are invited from reputable companies who are capable of Providing **Yard cleaning Service for Colombo International Container Terminals Limited ("CICT")**.

Tender No.	Description of Work
RFQ/04/04/21	Yard cleaning service for Colombo International Container Terminals Ltd 2021/22

Prospective Vendors are requested to obtain Tender Documents (In Electronic Format Only) by email (Email: ranidu.laksiri@cict.lk) of Procurement Department of CICT (Mobile/Tel: 0766666803, 01125666803).

Please submit your sealed tenders to be received to below address not later than 3.00 p.m. (Local Time), on 07th May 2021, & mention "Yard Cleaning Service for Colombo International Container Terminals Ltd" on the top left-hand corner of the envelope.

Procurement Department,
Colombo International Container Terminals Limited,
Port of Colombo,
120/20, Marine Drive Road,
Colombo 01.
Sri Lanka.

The Housewives' companion
Classifieds on
Daily News

CHINA'S GDP GROWS RECORD 18.3% IN FIRST QUARTER

CHINA: China's economy expanded at its fastest pace on record in the first quarter, data showed Friday, in a sharp turnaround from the historic contraction caused by the coronavirus outbreak.

The world's second largest economy was the only major one to grow at all in 2020, supported by strong retail spending and industrial activity as well as better-than-expected exports as the virus hit markets around the world.

It marks the fastest pace since quarterly records began three decades ago, though the GDP figure of 18.3 percent is slightly below forecasts in an AFP survey of economists.

While the disease first emerged in central China in late 2019, the country was also the quickest to bounce back after authorities imposed strict control measures and consumers stayed home.

"The national economy made a good start," National Bureau of Statistics spokeswoman Liu Aihua told reporters Friday.

In March, the country's industrial output rose 14.1 percent on-year, bringing first quarter growth to 24.5 percent, the official data showed.

Retail sales surged 34.2 percent, picking up from the first two months and bringing first-quarter growth to 33.9 percent as life largely returned to normal.

Liu, however, warned that the international landscape still contained "high uncertainties".

The urban unemployment rate ticked down slightly to 5.3 percent, a figure analysts are watching closely as China's consumption rebound lags behind that of its industrial sectors.



This photo taken on April 15, 2021 shows an employee working on an assembly line at an auto plant of Dongfeng Honda in Wuhan in China's central Hubei province, as data shows the country's economy expanded at its fastest pace on record during the first quarter.

- AFP

William and Harry won't be shoulder-to-shoulder at Prince Philip funeral



UK: British Royals William and Harry will not walk side by side in the procession at today's funeral of Queen Elizabeth II's husband Prince Philip, Buckingham Palace revealed Thursday.

As young boys in 1997, the pair provided the most poignant image of their mother princess Diana's funeral as they walked, heads bowed, behind her coffin. Prince Philip, also known as the Duke of Edinburgh, accompanied them, alongside their father Prince Charles and uncle Charles Spencer.

Their grandfather's funeral, at Windsor Castle at 3 pm (1400 GMT) today (Saturday), is the pair's first reunion since Harry's shock move to the United States last year.

It will be closely watched for signs of strains in the sibling relationship, with confirmation they will not walk shoulder-to-shoulder and instead be separated by cousin Peter Phillips likely to fuel speculation that a rift persists.

The brothers have reportedly fallen out over Harry's departure from the royal frontline and move to California with his wife, Meghan.

When the coffin, to be carried on a bespoke Land Rover designed to Philip's specifications, arrives at St George's Chapel, William will move ahead of his younger brother as the royal mourners enter in pairs.

The procession elements were among the eagerly-awaited details released by the Palace ahead of the service, which has been curtailed due to coronavirus restrictions.

Philip died last Friday at the age of 99 and Britain has this week been observing eight days of official mourning in the build-up to his burial.

Just 30 guests will be permitted at the 50-minute funeral, in line with government regulations.

Attendees including the queen, 94, will be required to wear face masks, sit

apart and observe Covid-19 social distancing rules.

She will be accompanied to the venue in the state Bentley by a lady-in-waiting, before sitting alone in the chapel.

Heir to the throne Charles, his wife Camilla, and the monarch's three other children and eight grandchildren, as well as all their spouses, will be present.

Other guests include the children of the queen's late sister Princess Margaret, and three of Philip's German relatives - Bernhard, the hereditary prince of Baden; Donatus, prince and landgrave of Hesse; and Prince Philipp of Hohenlohe-Langenburg.

Countess Mountbatten, Penelope "Penny" Knatchbull, who was Philip's carriage driving partner and one of his closest friends, is also invited.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson opted against attending to free up a space.

The palace confirmed royal mourners will wear civilian clothing - men in morning coats with medals, women in day dresses - which reports said was to avoid awkwardness over which princes are entitled to military uniform.

Send-offs for senior British royals are typically very public, pomp-filled affairs, but Philip's request for a no-fuss funeral paired with the pandemic has kept it minimal.

"The ceremonial aspects of the day and the funeral service itself are in line with The Duke's wishes and will reflect His Royal Highness's personal and military affiliations," the palace said.

Ahead of the service the coffin will be covered with Philip's personal standard flag and surmounted with his sword, naval cap and a wreath of flowers.

Members of the Queen's Company, 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, will serve as pallbearers, while his coffin will be lowered into the Royal Vault afterwards. - AFP

London wins 'super prime' property hot spot - Survey



The combined value of super-prime properties sold in the British capital climbed in 2020 to \$3.7 billion.

UK: London beat Hong Kong and New York to become the most popular city to buy ultra-luxurious residential property last year despite Brexit and Covid, a study showed Monday.

The combined value of super-prime properties sold in the British capital climbed in 2020 to \$3.7 billion (3.1 billion euros), according to data gathered by estate agency Knight Frank.

Hong Kong lost the top spot to London after sales slid to \$3.2 billion for luxury real estate, defined as property worth \$10 million or more. Los Angeles sales meanwhile

jumped to \$2.6 billion, earning it third place.

New York took fourth place with total sales of \$2.2 billion.

"London's super-prime residential market shrugged off Brexit and even looked through the pandemic - confirming the UK capital as the world's leading wealth destination," said Liam Bailey, global head of research at Knight Frank.

"After five years of price falls, the capital is set for a reset and the latest numbers from Knight Frank's super-prime data confirm that London is on top of the world."

- AFP

Brazil's SC quashes Lula's graft convictions

Paves way for possible Presidential run

BRAZIL: Brazil's full Supreme Court upheld a ruling Thursday annulling former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's corruption convictions, clearing the way for him to run for a new Presidential term next year.

In an 8-3 ruling, the court upheld Justice Edson Fachin's March 8 decision quashing Lula's convictions on procedural grounds, which has upended Brazilian politics as far-right President Jair Bolsonaro gears up to seek reelection.

The ruling does not find Lula innocent. But it essentially puts prosecutors back to square one by sending the cases to another court.

In the meantime, Lula, the popular but tarnished leftist who led Brazil through an economic boom from 2003 to 2010, has emerged as the top contender to unseat Bolsonaro in the October 2022 elections.

In an interview with Argentine television station C5N, the steel-worker-turned-President said his



Former Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva

lawyers proved the convictions against him were "a sham."

The 75-year-old has not officially declared himself a candidate but said "if necessary," he would run to defeat "a fascist like Bolsonaro," who he blamed for the "genocide" of the coronavirus outbreak in Brazil.

"I am in good health. But it does not necessarily have to be me. We can choose someone who can represent the progressive sectors of Brazil," he added.

Bolsonaro said the ruling means "Lula is now a candidate" for 2022 - and ominously warned of the consequences.

Polls put Lula neck-and-neck with 66-year-old Bolsonaro, and in some cases ahead.

Lula was jailed in 2018 on charges of taking bribes from companies seeking juicy contracts at state oil giant Petrobras.

The cases felled him just as he was gearing up to seek a new presidential term, in elections Bolsonaro ultimately won.

Lula has always maintained he is innocent and that the cases against him were a conspiracy to sideline him politically.

After Fachin's initial ruling annulling his convictions, he came out swinging at Bolsonaro, attacking the President's "imbecile" handling of the coronavirus pandemic, which has claimed 365,000 lives in Brazil - the world's second-highest death toll.

"Don't be scared of me. They say I'm a radical because I want to get to the root of this country's problems," Lula said in his comeback press conference, which analysts called a campaign speech in all but name. - AFP



Members of the Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment ride their horses into the grounds of Windsor Castle in Windsor, west of London following the April 9 death of Britain's Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. Prince Philip's funeral will take place at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle today. - AFP

Chauvin decides not to testify at George Floyd murder trial

US: Former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin said Thursday that he would not testify at his murder trial for the death of George Floyd, as a policewoman facing charges for the killing of another Black American made her first court appearance.

The prosecution and defense in Chauvin's trial rested on Thursday after the state called a final witness and Chauvin said he would exercise his constitutional right against self-incrimination.

"I will invoke my Fifth Amendment privilege today," Chauvin told Judge Peter Cahill.

"Is this your decision - not to testify?" the judge asked the former police officer, who was wearing a gray suit with a dark blue shirt and dark blue tie. "It is, your honour," Chauvin said.

The 45-year-old Chauvin was recorded kneeling on the neck of the 46-year-old Floyd for more than nine minutes during his May 25, 2020 arrest in Minneapolis for allegedly using a counterfeited \$20 bill.

A bystander video of the arrest went viral and sparked protests against



This screenshot obtained from video feed via Court TV on April 15, 2021, shows former Minneapolis Police officer Derek Chauvin (R), who is accused of killing George Floyd, addressing the court on April 15, 2021, next to Defense attorney Eric Nelson. - AFP

racial injustice and police brutality in the United States and around the world.

Cahill gave the nine-woman, five-man jury a day off on Friday before closing arguments Monday.

The judge reminded the jurors that they would be sequestered for their deliberations and told them they should "plan for long and hope for short" when packing their bags. Min-

neapolis was rocked by demonstrations following Floyd's death and there have been nightly protests in the city since Wright's shooting, some violent.

At the Chauvin trial, prosecutors called a final witness on Thursday to rebut testimony by a medical expert for the defense who said Floyd's death was due to underlying heart disease and the illegal drugs fentanyl and methamphetamine. - AFP

Saudi Arabia's city of roses blooms in Ramadan

SAUDI ARABIA: Every spring, roses bloom in the western Saudi city of Taif, turning pockets of the kingdom's vast desert landscape a vivid and fragrant pink.

In April, they are harvested for the essential oil used to cleanse the outer walls of the sacred Kaaba, the cubic structure in the holy city of Mecca towards which Muslims around the world pray.

This year, the harvest falls during the holy fasting month of Ramadan, which observant Muslims devote to prayer and reflection.

Workers at the Bin Salman farm tend rose bushes and pick tens of thousands of flowers each day to produce rose water and oil, also prized components in the cosmetic and culinary industries.

The perfumed oil has become popular among the millions of Muslims who visit the kingdom every year for pilgrimages.

Patterns of plants and flowers have long been part of Islamic art. Known as the city of roses, with approximately 300 million blooms every year, Taif has more than 800 flower farms, many of which have



Known as the city of roses, with approximately 300 million blooms every year, Taif has more than 800 flower farms.

opened their doors to visitors. While workers pick flowers in the fields, others labour in sheds, filling and weighing baskets by hand.

The flowers are then boiled and distilled.

"We start boiling the roses on high heat until they are almost evaporated, and this takes around 30 to 35 minutes," Khalaf al-Tuweiri, who owns the Bin Salman farm, told AFP. - AFP

Rajeev shone as a number eight for Lanka



Tony Amit and George Simpkin who played a big hand in transforming Sri Lanka rugby to reach greater levels. He also went on to captain the Western Province team in 2005 against the mighty Wanderers team.

He started working for MAS Holdings from 2004 no sooner he completed his Degree in Business Administration. During his tenure as a player, he also coached S. Thomas' College Mount Lavinia under-12 team from 2005 to 2008.

He was also a part of the scrumage rugby committee from 2004 to 2017. He is currently working for Silueta Private Limited a part of MAS Holdings as Deputy General Manager Business Development, for Sports protective garments using a patented technology.

His wife is Radika Obeyesekere and two children are Rahul and Rishi.

ALTHAF NAWAZ

In the game of rugby some players who had an illustrious career were influenced by their fathers in taking up the game. This is mainly due to the father being a former player or a rugby enthusiast. Rajeev Ganapathy was

one of the players who was motivated and encouraged by his father being an ex-player, later ended up playing for school, club and for the country as a profound player.

Rajeev was born in 1980 in Kandy city and his father was late Mohan Ganapathy who represented Trinity College Rugby in the year 1971/72 and was a part of the 'Bradby' winning team in 1972 obtaining Rugby Colours at school. He represented and captained Dickoya Maskeliya Cricket Club. He worked as a planter with Kelani Valley Plantations. His mother Usha worked as a Nutritionist for Ceylon Biscuits Limited. He has one sibling, Karthiga.

Rajeev was enrolled at Trinity College, Kandy in the primary school in 1985 and went on to complete his aca-

demical career in 1999. By birth he had a hefty build and had a liking to handle the oval shaped ball. With his father's influence, he embarked on his rugby career when he was mere nine years old. He was also highly impressed over another fellow schoolmate Haris Omar, who ultimately became his role model at school, which was another encouraging factor enabling him to take up the game of rugby.

He locked horns in multiple positions in the 'Pack' starting as a Hooker then binding in as a second row forward in the under-17 team finally occupying the flanker and number-8 berths at the first XV team at

college. He captained the under-13 rugby team and surged ahead to be a regular member of the college under-15, 17, second XV and first XV teams. He was a part of the 'Bradby' winning team in 1999 captained by Ravi Wickramasiri. He had the opportunity of captaining the first XV team against Isipathana in the year 1999, which they went down fighting 22-25 after their regular skip-

per was injured. He won the college rugby colours in 1998 receiving the same in the 1999 season. He was guided and coached by some of Sri Lanka's best during his tenure at school which included the likes of Asoka Weerasinghe, who was his junior coach who taught the basics of the game. The others were Anil Jayasinghe, Alex Lazarus and late Quentin Israel at first XV level while Ikram Odayar was their motivator. They also obtained the services of the late legendary coach George Simpkin for a three-week training programme at Trinity which further boosted his career in 1998.

Whilst undergoing a course in BA in Business Administration at ITS, he played in the Inter University rugby where the practices were held at Havelock Sports Club. Another former Trinitian, Ana Wijeratne monitoring

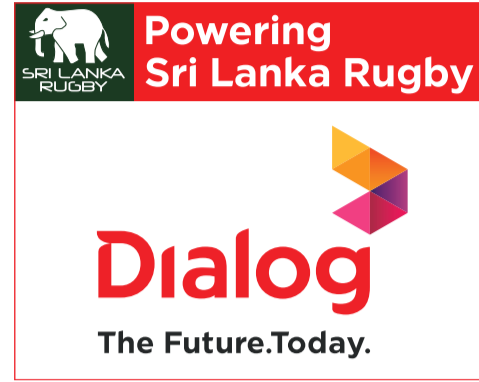
his playing skills convinced his father to let him take up club rugby at Havelock. With his influence, he donned the Havies jersey in 2000 under the captaincy of Nishantha Chanaka (Alex)

and was fortunate to be a part of a power-packed team of top rugby players there including Michael Jayasekera, Royce Samarantunga, Roshan Deen, Vimal Senanayake. He crossed over to represent CH and FC in the 2006/7 season. It was Shammi Silva who was the president of CH in 2007, who granted him then necessary permission to cross over to CH and FC during mid-season in 2007.

He was called for National duty in 2001 and competed until 2005. He made his debut with the Sri Lankan team in a tournament against Malaysia and Thailand captained by Asoka Jayasena which they won beating both sides. During his five-year stint he, played as a flanker and number-8 and had the opportunity of playing under several captains including Asoka Jayasena, Pradeep Basnayake, Sajith Mallikaratchchi and Viraj Prasanna. His coaches were retired senior DIG Nimal Lewke, C.P. Abeygunawardana,

former club President's and some past players there including Michael Jayasekera, Royce Samarantunga, Roshan Deen, Vimal Senanayake. He crossed over to represent CH and FC in the 2006/7 season. It was Shammi Silva who was the president of CH in 2007, who granted him then necessary permission to cross over to CH and FC during mid-season in 2007.

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Four Lankan weightlifters for Uzbekistan



(Pictures by Upananda Jayasundera-Kandy Sports Spl.Corr)

UPANANDA JAYASUNDERA
-Kandy Sports Special Corr.

Four Weightlifters representing Sri Lanka will participate at the Asian Weightlifting Championship to be held from 17th April to 25th April, 2021 at Tashkent, Uzbekistan including a woman Weightlifter They are as follows:

Men
Y.D.I.Kumara – 55 Kg.Weight category.

D.T.W.K. Palangasinghe – 61 Kg. Weight category.

D.M.I.C. Dissanayake – 73 Kg.Weight category.

Women
B.C. Priyanthi – 81 Kg. Weight category.

Officials:
R.B.Wickremasinghe – Head Coach
Rukshan Gunathillake – Assistant.coach
P.K.N.Dayan – Assistant.Coach
Udaka Nirmana – Masseur.

Sethmi Danoshi pride of HFC, Kurunegala

DILWIN MENDIS

Moratuwa Sports Special Corr.

Champion Athlete, School Netball Captain from 2012 to 2018, Sri Lanka under 21 Netball Captain for the World Cup 2018 and Sri Lanka under 19 netball Captain for the Australian Tour of 2019 Weerakoon Pathirana Sethmi Danoshi has brought honour and glory to her Alma Mater Holy Family Convent Kurunegala and her motherland. She was born on 13th June 2001 and admitted to this prestigious convent in 2007 when Rev. Sister Sriyani was at the helm of the school.

Following her father's footsteps a former Sri Lanka Air Force Warrant Officer W. Dharmakeerthi who was a fine football and a gymnastic player during his hey day. Sethmi commenced athletics when she was in Grade Two and swept the board easily at the Inter House Sports meet in 100, 200 and 100x4 metres Relay Event and in 2009, 2010 and 2011 too she won her events and became Champion for four successive years and she came up to the high school up to 2017 she excelled in athletics at the School Sports meet In 2016 she was the Champi-



Sethmi Danoshi

on Athlete and in 2018 she was the under 18 Champion Athlete and Games Captain in 2019 and 2020.

In the meantime when she was under 12 her mother Champika Nishani along with her father encouraged their daughter to take up to netball and she came under the Coaches Mrs. Amalka and Ananda Wannithilake and in the same year her school won the Divisional, Zonal, District and Provincial Tournaments and they were the All Island Champions too. From 2012 to 2019 except 2013 her school won all the Lower Level Tournaments and qualified for the Higher Level Tournaments under her captaincy. They were the All Island Run-



Sri Lanka under 19 Girls Netball Tour to Melbourne, Australia for Waverly Tournament in 2019. Seated L/R – Sethmi Danoshi (Captain), Mrs. Vijitha (Primary Care), Mrs. Iasanthi (Coach), Mrs. Anoma Abeyratne (President of the Girls Netball Federation), Mrs. Dayana (Manager), Mrs. Shiranthi (Referee), Lavanga (Vice Captain) Standing L/R – Janani Perera, Shereesha, Malmi, Nimasha, Bimanya, Tihana, Tharushi, Samadhi, Ishara, Vinuki (Dilwin Mendis, Moratuwa Sports Special Correspondent)

ners Up in the Milo Tournament in 2015 and in 2016 and they won the Milo Championship, National Schools Championship and again in 2017 Milo Runners Up and in 2018 National Schools and Milo Championship and in 2019 they were the Milo Runners Up and All Island Schools Champion and in the Junior National Tournament they were the Champions and she was adjudged the Best Defender and in the Senior Nationals they came third and she carried away the Best Defender's Title and in the Netball

Federation Tournament they were the champions. In 2015 and 17 they were the EVA Netball Champions.

In 2015 her school team made a tour of Malaysia for Pesta Cup and 20 countries participated and they were the runners up and she captained the team. This tour was a fine exposure for all the girls of the team.

In 2017 she made the World Cup Tour of South Africa and 20 teams participated and Sri Lanka was 19th and she captained the team In 2018 she captained the Development

Team and four teams participated and the Local Team came third.

Her final tour was in 2019 to Melbourne, Australia for under 19 Waverly Cup and she captained the team and out of 30 teams they came up to Best Seven and it was the first ever instance that Sri Lanka came to this position and as an under 17 player she was in the All Island Team. In this context Rev. Sister Priscilla and Rev. Sister Priyangani with the coaches and other school teachers helped her in many ways to come up the ladder.

Western Wind blows Alcazaba and Spirited Touch

In spite of heavy underfoot conditions, a thrilling and fitting finale was scripted to the RTC Governor's Cup 2021 powered by EFL when Western Wind, ridden by jockey Vivek not only stole the limelight but beat two of the best fillies – Alcazaba and Spirited Touch – to clinch an enthralling win at the Race course in Nuwara Eliya on Thursday. Western Wind took the lead from the set-off in the Class 1 1800metre race for the prestigious silverware, which is now 145 years old. The field of nine runners went past the legendary Grandstand, once at the start and then the culmination, which forced all spectators on their feet.

Jockey Vivek made the owners, and Gamini

Jayaratne, proud to claim a stunning victory from Alcazaba, who looked threatening in the final two furlongs. Reigning title holder Spirited Touch fell back to third position after jockey J. Chinoy navigated Alcazaba to the fore from the rear, looking threatening as usual and almost regaining her lost form as a two-time Governor's Cup winner.

Eventually Western Wind sealed the win by three lengths from Alcazaba, who was four lengths ahead of Spirited Touch. The win by Western Wind helped Jayaratne Stables regain the Governor's Cup after five years after the coveted title went to the hands of Edwards Stables

thrice and Fearless Stables and Stud Farm once.

Prior to the grand finale jockey Vivek gave his stable masters their first win with the RTC Queen's Cup powered by Classic Travel, steering Another Ace to an inspiring win in the race for Class 2 horses. This was the third successive year that Jayaratne Stables secured the RTC Queen's Cup. When the 2000metre race was in its almost end with two furlongs remaining, Star Scholar and Silver Streak were battling out to finish ahead of one another, but Vivek made a sudden breakthrough from the outside to clinch a thrilling and uncertain win to give Hasanga Jayaratne his only win in the RTC Governor's Cup Raceday 2021.

Glittering, ridden by jockey J. Chinoy and owned by Edwards Stables, made another stunning finish to win the RTC Mayor's Cup powered by Expolanka for Class 3 horses in a 1600metre race. Glittering pipped out Vigorous, ridden by S.D. Janaka, by a whisker as Olive, ridden by jockey Aneel, finished third by ten lengths.

Fearless Stables and Stud Farms completed a double in the Vegibest International Cup with Honourous and Torpedo making it a home-and-home battle in the Class 4 race of 1400metres. Jockey Aneel eventually steered Honourous to a win by half-a-length from Torpedo, ridden by local boy K. Sanjeewan. Jockey J. Chinoy rode

Zulu Fantasy to a third place finish.

The day started off with the Sports Ministry Challenge Cup, a Class 5 race of 1400metres, which was won by jockey K. Sanjeewan. The winning horse is owned by Kosala Senaratne. Waiting for Glory, ridden by K. Vaibhav and Goldie Girl, ridden by J. Chinoy finished at second and third respectively.

The Governor's Cup 2021 was organized and conducted by Royal Turf Club (RTC) with EFL partnering as main sponsors. Following the success of yesterday's event, RTC will wind up its Horse Racing Festival 2021, which is held annually during the April holiday season, with the RTC Magic Million Cup on

24th of April at the Racecourse in Nuwara Eliya.

Results
Sports Ministry Challenge Cup for Class 5 Horses 1400m 1. Miss Ivory (K. Sanjeewa/Kosala Senaratne)

2. Waiting for Glory (K. Vaibhav/Hasanga Jayaratne) 3. Goldie Girl (J. Chinoy/Edwards Stable)

Vegibest International Cup for Class 4 1400m 1. Honourous (Aneel/Fearless Stables and Stud Farm)

2. Torpedo (K. Sanjeewan/Fearless Stables and Stud Farm) 3. Zulu Fantasy (J. Chinoy/Edwards Stables)

RTC Mayor's Cup powered by Expolanka for Class 3 1600m

1. Glittering (J. Chinoy/Edwards Stables) 2. Vigor-



RTC Governor's Cup winner Western Wind(Vivek/Mr. and Mrs. Gamini Jayaratne) along with the officials and sponsor

ous (S.D. Janaka/Ajantha de Soya) 3. Olive (Aneel/Fearless Stables and Stud Farm)

RTC Queen's Cup powered by Classic Travel for Class 2 2000m 1. Another Ace (Vivek/Hasanga Jayaratne)

2. Silver Streak (L. Dayalan/Ramsis Peter Fernando) 3. Star Scholar

(R. Vaibhav/Mr. and Mrs. Gamini Jayaratne)

RTC Governor's Cup powered by EFL for Class 1 1800m

1. Western Wind (Vivek/Mr. and Mrs. Gamini Jayaratne) 2. Alcazaba (J. Chinoy/Edwards Stable)

3. Spirited Touch (Aneel/Fearless Stables and Stud Farm) (A.N.)

Pallekele ready to host test matches against Bangladesh



HAFIZ MARIKAR

in Kandy a test match will be played without spectators.

A high level rugby academy

A discussion took place at Pallekele, where the Central Province Cricket Association is handling the organizing part headed by CPCA president Sarath Ekanayake, Secretary Janaka Pathirana with officials of vital departments like Health, Police, cricket officials etc., regarding the test match arrangements between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, where the first test will be played from April 21 to 25, and the second test from April 29 to May 3 both at the Pallekele International Stadium. This will be the first time over here

Young rugby lovers in Kandy will be benefitted by a high level rugby academy to come out in Kandy and around Central Province with top-class coaching. Some of the top rugby promoters are working together to establish a Rugby Academy providing students with the skills they need in rugby, academics and community leadership. This academy will help to succeed in rugby and life, which will be open to students in grades 10-12.

Sri Chandrananda Buddhist school does well in cricket

Sri Chandrananda Buddhist school Kandy, who took up cricket in 2011 has done well in this year's inter school cricket tournament playing in under 19 division III level II Group E, now they have qualified for the next round. They have beaten schools like Mahanama College by nine wickets, Westwood College by nine wickets, Ranabima Royal College by six wickets, Teldeniya National School by six runs and won against Thalathuoya Central College on Parabola system. Thanks to the efforts of the principal Venerable Dr. Godagama Mangala Thero, MIC Nimesh Indeevara Sumanarathne and head coach Dileep Sumnaratne. The side is led by Kaveen Ranasinghe and his deputy is the stumper

of the side Anushka Katakumbura, Rest of the players are Geeth Tharusha, Janith Wijetunga, Kavishka Kande-kumbura, Anush Senavirhne, Saridu Sandima, Akila Nilwaka, Manula Nandasena, Kalana Rajapakse, Heshan PUNCHILAME, Eshan Dharmadasa, Chamath Ekanyake, Chinthaka Viraj, Nisalitha Lakvidu, Bathila Karunarathne.

Smithiraaratchy house champs

Last Saturday, a day full of thrills and excitement took place at the Trinity College inter-house ten-a-side rugby tournament, which was a friendly tournament under closed doors, which was won by Smithiraaratchy house, followed by Garret, Oorloff,

Lemaull, Central Boarding House (CBH). The player of the tournament award went to Tevin Krunanayake, and Thammuditha Dodanwatte, Most up and coming player award went to Sachitha Wamasekara.

Trinity will meet Sebs

Trinity College will play St. Sebastian's College in the quarter final of the tier "A" tournament, the match is set to be played on the 19th at Reid Avenue. This is going to be a close game and the side that bat, field and bowl well should come out as winners. Trinity College played five games in the first round and have won four and lost one with 18 points. A big hand should go to their coach

Kavinda Jaysuriya for guiding the team in the correct way with the backing of their principal Rev. Fr. Araliya Jayasundara.

St. Anthony's meet Mahanama

On April 20 St. Anthony's College will play Mahanama College in their quarter final game at Welagedera Stadium in Kurunagala. Both sides are equally balanced and should come out with a good game. Antonians out of their five games won three, lost one and no decision one, have qualified to the quarter-final round of Tier A tournament.

A big hand should go to their principal Rev. Fr. K.G. Henry B. Wijeratne for giving a big hand to keep the

game alive despite the corona problem.

Dharmapala to coach Sylvestrians

St. Sylvester's College has got a new rugby coach, B.M. Dharmapala, an experienced name in the coaching field, is sure to do his best. He started coaching with the Army and also coached schools like Prince of Wales, Malyadeva, St. Anne's, St. Anthony's forward coach Air Force forwards coach, Sri Sumangala, Sri Lanka team supporting coach (2009 - 2010), He has followed a IRB level-two coaching course in Australia 2002, a high performance and rugby sevens level-one and level two coaching course in Malaysia

Sport

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WORLD OF SPORTS

(APRIL 17)
LOCAL EVENTS
CRICKET (Inter-Schools U-19 Tournament): Royal vs Wesley at Reid Avenue
S. Thomas' vs St. Peter's at Mount Lavinia
FOREIGN EVENTS
CRICKET (Indian Premier League): Mumbai Indians vs Sunrisers Hyderabad at Chennai
(Nepal Tri Series): Nepal vs Netherlands at Kirtipur
FOOTBALL (FA Cup semi-final): Chelsea vs Manchester City
(April 17 and 18)
LOCAL EVENTS
CRICKET Bangladesh Intra-Squad match at Katunayake
(April 18)
FOREIGN EVENTS
CRICKET (Indian Premier League): Royal Challengers Bangalore vs Kolkata Knight Riders at Chennai
Delhi Capitals vs Punjab Kings at Mumbai
(Nepal Tri Series): Malaysia vs Netherlands at Kirtipur
FOOTBALL (FA Cup semi-final): Leicester City vs Southampton



Praveen Jayawickrama

Praveen Jayawickrama roped into Sri Lanka's Test Squad

DHAMMIKA RATNAWEERA

Uncapped left-arm orthodox spinner Praveen Jayawickrama of Moors SC has been called up for the Sri Lanka Test Squad for the two-Test series against Bangladesh, which begins at the Pallekele Stadium in Kandy next week.

The promising 22-year-old spinner has been included in the 18-member squad in place of left-arm spinner Lasith Embuldeniya who suffered an injury during the second Test against the West Indies in Antigua.

The former schoolboy of St.

Sebastian's College, Moratuwa, made his First-Class debut for Colts CC in the 2018/19 SLC Premier League Tournament.

Prior to his First-Class debut, he was named in Sri Lanka's Squad for the 2018 Under-19 Cricket World Cup. He made his List 'A' debut in December, 2019 for Moors SC.

Jayawickrama was among the wickets in the recently-concluded SLC Major Club Limited Over Cricket Tournament capturing 15 scalps in seven matches.

Meanwhile, the National Cricket Selectors have also recalled former

Skipper Angelo Mathews after the all-rounder pulled out during the One Day International series in the West Indies due to family commitments.

Paceman Dushmantha Chameera has withdrawn from the squad due to personal reasons, while Lahiru Kumara who missed the West Indies tour after he tested positive for COVID-19, is back in the squad.

Sri Lanka Test Squad: Dimuth Karunaratne (Captain - SSC), Dasun Shanaka (SSC), Pathum Nissanka (NCC), Oshada Fernan-

do (Chilaw Marians CC), Lahiru Thirimanne (Ragama CC), Dinesh Chandimal (Army CC), Angelo Mathews (Colts CC), Niroshan Dickwella (NCC), Roshen Silva (Ragama CC), Dhananjaya de Silva (Tamil Union), Wanindu Hasaranga (CCC), Ramesh Mendis (Moors SC), Vishwa Fernando (CCC), Suranga Lakmal (Tamil Union), Lahiru Kumara (NCC), Asitha Fernando (Chilaw Marians CC), Dilshan Madushanka (Colts CC) and Praveen Jayawickrama (Moors SC).

Manuja appointed SL Team Manager

Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) yesterday appointed Manuja Kariyapperuma as the Interim Manager of the Sri Lanka Team for the two-Test series against Bangladesh, which gets underway next week.

Chairman of the SLC Management Committee Professor Arju-

na de Silva confirmed that Kariyapperuma has been appointed Interim Manager of the Sri Lanka Team for the series which begins on April 21 at the Pallekele Stadium in Kandy.

Kariyapperuma, who is the present Consultant of Women's Cricket Operations and Develop-

ment, has been appointed Manager of the Sri Lanka Team only for the Bangladesh series.

"SLC has already advertised for the post of Sri Lanka Team Manager and a permanent manager will be appointed thereafter," Professor de Silva told the *Daily News* yesterday. (D.R)



Manuja Kariyapperuma

Manchanayaka lifts Royal with fighting 78 vs. Wesley



Dasis Manchanayaka (Royal)



Ryan Fernando (S. Thomas')

DHAMMIKA RATNAWEERA

Seventeen-year-old Dasis Manchanayaka hit a fighting 78 to help Royal College reach a modest 188 in their first innings on the opening day of their 128th Sir Frank Gunasekera Shield annual Inter-Schools Under-19 cricket fixture against Wesley College, which commenced at Reid Avenue yesterday.

Royal were struggling at 71 for four at one stage but Manchanayaka rescued the side with a superb knock, which included 12 boundaries.

Royal bowlers then hit back strongly as they reduced the Wesleyites to 40 for six at one stage.

However, Anudith Wickramasinghe (25 n.o.) and Denuwan Mendis (21) played intelligently to put on 49 runs for the seventh wicket.

Meanwhile, Ryan Fernando struck a fine knock of 103 with 15 boundaries as S. Thomas' College scored 227 for seven declared in their match against St. Peter's College which began at Mount Lavinia.

Chief scores
At Reid Avenue
Royal: 188 (Dasis Mancha-

nayaka 78, S. Zhakirthan 3/21, Thenuka Perera 3/32, Ravindu Sigera 2/35)

Wesley: 92/7 (Anudith Wickramasinghe 25 n.o., Denuwan Mendis 21, Gishan Balasooriya 2/26, Prashan Kalhara 2/21).

At Mount Lavinia
S. Thomas': 227/7 (Anuk Palihawadena 30, Shalin de Mel 35, Ryan Fernando 103, Manith Perera 24, Niman Umesh 2/35, Jesuran Benjamin 2/41, Wanuja Kumara 2/80)

St. Peter's: 51/2 (Shenal Boteju 30 n.o., Lahiru Chethaka 21 n.o., Yasiru Rodrigo 2/18).

At Kotahena (Match drawn)

St. Benedict's: 118 and 235 (Pasan Suwahas 66, Ashen de Soyza 52, Sharujan Shanmuganathan 40, Malinda Perera 26, Dilan Thabrew 22, Thushara Wanigasinghe 2/37, Kemira Nayanatharu 2/49, Sithija Chamaod 2/17)

Gurukula: 273/5 decl (Neluka Heshan 54, Sithija Chamaod 20, Kemira Nayanatharu 66, Janitha Shehan 54 n.o., Malshan Lakshitha 22 n.o., Malinda Perera 2/73) and 30/1.

Dandeniya wins Online Chess Tourney



D. D. L. N. Dandeniya

D. D. L. N. Dandeniya of Maliyadeva College scored a grand slam of eight points out of eight games at the CFSL Online Youth Under-10 Chess Championship held recently.

Dandeniya, who was sharing the lead with four points out of four with seven more players, received the Championship Trophy and the Gold Medal.

K. G. Wimalaratne of Kingswood College finished with seven points out of eight games to win the Silver Medal.

Sethum Dayaratne, also from Kingswood, won the Bronze Medal after a tie-breaker, while Damsen Dayaratne had to be satisfied with the fourth place. (D.R)

Morris stars as Royals beat Capitals in IPL

Chris Morris hit two sixes in the final over as Rajasthan Royals beat Delhi Capitals by three wickets in the Indian Premier League (IPL) match on Thursday.

Chasing 148 to win, Delhi needed 12 from the last six balls, bowled by England's Tom Curran.

Morris - who is the IPL's most expensive ever signing - finished with 36 from 18 balls and saw his side over the line with two balls to spare.

Earlier, Delhi posted 147 for eight with Rishabh Pant scoring 51 from 32 balls.

Having lost the toss and put into bat, Delhi fell to 37 for four after seven overs. Seamer Jaydev Unad-

kat bowled superbly, varying his length and pace to finish with figures of three for 15, while Mustafizur Rahman also chipped in with two for 29.

With a relatively low target to chase, Royals' top-order faltered as they fell to 42 for five. But Morris took on the reigns, launching the ball to all parts of the ground and holding his nerve to seal the win.

Chief scores
Delhi Capitals: 147/8 in 20 overs (Rishabh Pant 51, Jaydev Unadkat 3/15)

Rajasthan Royals: 150/7 in 19.4 overs (David Miller 62, Chris Morris 36 n.o., Avesh Khan 3/32).

(BBC)



Chris Morris plays a shot

Stokes out for up to 12 weeks with broken finger



Ben Stokes

LONDON, AFP - England all-rounder Ben Stokes will be sidelined for up to 12 weeks after fracturing a finger while on Indian Premier League (IPL) duty, cricket chiefs announced yesterday.

"England all-rounder Ben Stokes will be out for up to 12 weeks after a repeat X-ray and CT scan on Thursday revealed that he has a fracture of his left index finger," an England and Wales Cricket Board statement read.

"Stokes, who is current-

ly in India with Rajasthan Royals in the Indian Premier League, will fly home tomorrow. He will have surgery in Leeds on Monday."

"The injury occurred while fielding during Royals' opening match against Punjab Kings on Monday when he completed a catch in the deep to see off West Indies batsman Chris Gayle."

Stokes looks set to miss England's two Tests against New Zealand in June as well as limited-

overs matches against Sri Lanka. He could be back for the white-ball assignments against Pakistan in July and the five Tests against India that start the following month.

The Royals said earlier in the week that Stokes would be ruled out of the remainder of the IPL season.

Stokes, 29, was this week named Wisden's leading cricketer in the world for the second year in a row, becoming the first England cricketer to win the award twice.

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