

Dr. Bellana alleges 'Most NHSL minor staffers addicted to substances'

Health workers' union says issue already addressed with Hospital Director

Accuses Director of abusing his authority

BY DILANTHI JAYAMANNE

A sizeable proportion of minor employees at the National Hospital, Colombo is under the influence of either 'ice,' marijuana, or some other dangerous substance and there are a large number of absentees from amongst them at the hospital on a daily basis, Deputy Director of the Hospital and President of the Government Medical Officers' Forum (GMOF), Dr. Rukshan Bellana, alleged yesterday (7).

Continued on Page 2

CEB to issue paperless bills from January

The Ministry of Power and Energy has decided to introduce paperless bills and receipts to all customers from January 2023.

It was also decided to regulate the fixing of street lamps and operating street lamps, outsourced services to be done with existing staff, Power and Energy Minister Kanchana Wijesekera tweeted.



Continued on Page 2

Four weekly flights between JIA, Chennai from 12 Dec

BY SULOCHANA RAMIAH MOHAN

The first of four weekly direct flights between Chennai and Jaffna International Airport (JIA) in Kankasanturai is slated to take off on 12 December. The service will be operated by India's Alliance Air, the Civil Aviation Authority announced yesterday (7).

Continued on Page 2

Despite 70% electricity tariff hike CEB will still have deficit of Rs 150B - Seneviratne

BY THAMEENAH RAZEK

Additional General Manager of Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB), Engineer Rohan Seneviratne predicted that the CEB will still have a deficit of Rs 150 billion at the end of 2022, despite the electricity tariff increase of 70 per cent.

Continued on Page 2

Cruise ship passengers visit Yala Wildlife Dept gets cash windfall

The Department of Wildlife Conservation earned record revenue from foreign tourists who arrived in the two luxury cruise ships that recently docked in Sri Lanka.

551 foreign tourists from the ship that arrived on 30 November visited the Yala National Park in 110 vehicles, generating...



Continued on Page 2



UNICEF report reveals TWO IN FIVE HOUSEHOLDS SPEND 75% OF EARNINGS ON FOOD

Food insecurity to worsen in 2023

Two in five households (42 per cent) spend more than 75 per cent of their expenditures on purchasing food, leaving little to spend on health and education, UNICEF in its recent report on Sri Lanka said.

UNICEF said an acute economic crisis since early 2022 has caused severe food insecurity in Sri Lanka, and the situation is predicted to deteriorate between October 2022 and February 2023.

According to the report, an estimated 6.2 million people (28 per cent of the population) are moderately acute food insecure, while 66,000 people are severely acute food insecure. Two in five households (41.8 per cent) spend more than 75 per cent of their expenditures on purchasing food, leaving little to spend on health and education. Many families have exhausted their savings and are struggling due to crippling inflation.

Continued on Page 2

Dense fog shrouds Colombo



Dense fog shrouded the Colombo sky yesterday (7). Director, Environment Division, National Building Research Organisation (NBRO) Sarath Premasiri said the fog was caused by particles of dust being blown in from the Indian subcontinent.

The picture shows fog in Colombo, as seen from Colombo Lotus Tower. (Pic by Venura Chandramalitha)

60,000 MT coal shipment to arrive today

Four more shipments due later this month

BY THAMEENAH RAZEK

A 60,000 MT coal shipment will arrive in Sri Lanka today (8), with four more shipments expected later this month. In a media briefing yesterday (7), Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) Chairman N.S. Ilangakoon said the Ministry of Power and Energy, in collaboration with CEB, forecasts that approximately 33-38 coal shipments will be required in 2023.

These coal shipments total 60,000 metric tonnes. According to Ilangakoon, four of these shipments arrived in Sri Lanka last month, and 24 more will arrive between January and April 2023.

Continued on Page 2

COPA instructs WP RDA Confirm essential staff, remove surplus

The Committee on Public Accounts (COPA) has instructed the Western Province Provincial Road Development Authority to look into the possibility of confirming the employment of essential workers and consider removing the excess workers by giving compensation.

It was disclosed there are 556 employees working on daily wage basis and under contract basis as at 31 December 2021, exceeding the number of employees of the approved...



Continued on Page 2

Advertisement for METTLE OF RESILIENCE. Sri Lanka's most prestigious brand awards, SLIM Brand Awards 2022 takes place on the 8th December 2022 (Today) at the Monarch Imperial. See Pages 6 - 7

Debt restructuring with China IMF to issue statement tomorrow

BY PANEETHA AMERESEKERE

IMF's Senior Press Officer Ting Yan said yesterday (7) they will issue a statement tomorrow in response to an IMF team's visit to China to resolve Sri Lanka's debt restructuring crisis.

This was said in response when this newspaper queried about the above proposed visit as reported on the Chinese Foreign Ministry website on Tuesday (6).

Meanwhile, Government of India-controlled Prasar Bharati at a media briefing held in Beijing on...

Continued on Page 2

Persons arriving via airports, seaports Covid vaccine certificate requirement waived

BY DILANTHI JAYAMANNE

The Health Ministry has waived the requirement to produce a Covid-19 vaccination certificate by persons arriving in Sri Lanka via any airport or seaport.

Director General of Health Services, Dr. Asela Gunawardena in a letter on 'Preventive measures for persons arriving from overseas during the pandemic,' 'removed the...



Continued on Page 2

Audit on J'pura Hospital reveals 80% of surgical consumables expired - COPE

It was revealed at the Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE) that 80 per cent of surgical consumables bought by Sri Jayawardenepura Hospital for its neurosurgical unit in 2017, spending Rs 4.2 million have expired.

This was revealed when the hospital authorities were summoned before the committee to inquire about the Auditor General's report on the hospital in 2017.



Continued on Page 2

Germany arrests 25 accused of plotting coup

Twenty-five people have been arrested in raids across Germany on suspicion of plotting to overthrow the Government.

The group of far-right and ex-military figures are said to have prepared to...



Continued on Page 2

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

TWO IN FIVE...

UNICEF said it will prioritise access to basic social services to reduce the need for vulnerable families to resort to negative coping strategies. UNICEF will address humanitarian needs

through existing systems, where possible, and incorporate community-based approaches where relevant. UNICEF requires USD 28.3 million to meet critical needs linked

to nutrition, social protection and humanitarian cash transfers, education and child protection among the most vulnerable children and families affected by the economic crisis.

Confirm essential...

... staff of the Western Province Provincial Road Development Authority.

The committee made these remarks during its meeting to examine the Auditor General's reports and performance of the Western Provincial Road Development Authority for the years 2018, 2019, and 2020.

Dr. Charitha Herath, who chaired the meeting, said although there were a large number of projects in the past period, road development projects have been reduced due to several factors including the dollar crisis.

Therefore, if all these employees are hired on a permanent basis, they will have to pay their salaries from the Treasury money. Therefore, COPA members pointed out that it is necessary to look into the confirmation of employment for only the employees required and if there is excess labour, they should be compensated for and considered for removal.

Dr. Herath recommended that a report be given to COPA within 3 months setting out the priority list of the number of employees according to requirement as there are only a few projects at the moment.

It was disclosed that there are 396 employees on daily wage basis and 160 employees on contract basis.

The officials pointed out that these employees are essential employees. It is said that several attempts were made to recruit these employees on a permanent basis and it could not be done due to several factors including changes in policies due to the change of government. These employees were recruited on project basis and were paid from the profits of those projects.

It was also discussed that two concrete paving machines and a



curb machine worth 6 million which were purchased at a cost of Rs 158 million in 2012 were still lying idle. The two concrete paving machines were used for only 420 hours from 2012 to November 2022 and the curb machine remained idle from 2012 until now.

Thus, the officials pointed out that around 2011, road concreting was done on a large-scale and because of this, these machines were purchased in 2012. But after the purchase of these machines, the concrete paving of the roads gradually decreased and therefore the usefulness of these machines decreased. Therefore, they stated that given the present context, one of the two machines is sufficient for them.

Furthermore, the Secretary to the Ministry indicated that a programme is presently being carried out with the intervention of the ministry regarding the use of these machines. Therefore, it will be used in the future.

Accordingly, it was recommended to produce a report to COPA within 3 months pertaining to the next step.

Furthermore, there was a discussion about the recruitment of

two officers from October 2020 for a position called project coordination position, which is not in the approved staff of the authority, and about the vehicle rental and fuel expenses given to them. The officials pointed out that the officers are being recruited for special projects and their services will be terminated when the project is completed.

Accordingly, COPA recommended giving a report on this regard within a month.

Apart from the above, the misplacement of 6 vehicles belonging to the authority which is 20 years old, a contractor obtaining asphalt on credit basis in 2012 and 2013 and recovering the amount, along with several other matters were discussed at the Committee meeting.

State Ministers Lasantha Alagiyawanna, Prasanna Ranaweera, Diana Gamage, MPs Tissa Attanayake, J.C. Alawathuwalla, Dr. Sudarshani Fernandopulle, Hector Appuhamy, Ashok Abeyasinghe, Weerasumana Weerasinghe, Sarath Weerasesera, and Major Pradeep Undugoda were present at the Committee meeting.

60,000 MT coal...

He said if they are unable to follow this plan, they will arrange for two shipments of 80,000 metric tonnes of coal, and other shipments will be increased by 5,000 metric tonnes to avoid a

coal shortage. Meanwhile, CEB General Manager, Engineer Dr. D.C.R. Abeysekera said while 2022 was marked by crisis, the country will benefit from good rains. He did say, however, that in certain

instances to reduce power consumption, they had to resort to power cuts, which were only for about 50 per cent of the time, excluding tourist and industrial zones.

Four weekly...

Following the Easter Sunday Attacks and the Covid-19 outbreak, the Jaffna International Airport, which had been operational in 2015, was closed.

India had been pressuring the Government of Sri Lanka to restart flights at the earliest. The JIA was renovated with funding from India, although there were subsequent issues with the grant amount that were resolved.

80% of surgical...

COPE instructed the Health Secretary to provide a report on the matter within two weeks.

It was queried what action will be taken against officials who are responsible for purchasing the said surgical consumables and letting the stock expire. It was also recommended to take legal action to remove squatters around the hospital. Also, a sub-committee will be appointed by COPE to provide solutions to a number of administrative problems at the hospital as well.

Meanwhile, COPE queried as to why the hospital spent Rs 1.8 million for software and another Rs 19.7 million to scan documents and upload them. The committee instructed the hospital authorities to conduct an audit of this and provide a report within two weeks.

'Most NHSL...

He accused the Government and Police of failing to take action against the dangerous drug mafia operating within one of the country's primary tertiary care institutions.

Although NHSL authorities followed lenient measures during the Covid-19 pandemic with regard to attendance, now the situation has changed. The Hospital was worried that they will not be able to deal with the present situation.

Some employees amongst them had found second jobs for which they were being remunerated, he alleged, noting that some of these jobs included drug trafficking, it had resulted in alleged thefts taking place inside hospital wards and the car park. Health staff complained on numerous occasions of parts of their vehicles being stolen while inside the hospital patients lose their belongings.

Unfortunately, the authorities also have their hands tied as no action can be taken without incurring the wrath of the trade unions which were allegedly "paid to go on pickets and other forms of trade union action" in the face of disciplinary action being taken against the erring minor employees, the GMOF President accused.

He accused the Police of allegedly turning a blind eye to the situation at NHSL. The Hospital came under the purview of the Maradana and Borella Police stations. The hospital has been unable to bring either of the two law enforcing authorities down to discuss the issue and formulate a control plan due to the lethargic attitude shown by them. The GMOF President lambasted the Government for permitting five per cent of the health staff at the hospital to control and influence 95 per cent of the persons including patients who most often came from the peripheries and had to endure mental pain as well as physical pain as a result.

Meanwhile, responding to allegations, General Secretary of the Joint Health Workers' Union (JHWU), Ven. Tempitiye Sugathananda Thera said his outfit had discussed the accusations levelled against minor employees of the hospital with the Hospital Director and warned that they would be forced to resort to trade union action against Dr. Bellana who was the Deputy Director. "We have no issues if he in his capacity as a medical administrator took disciplinary action against any of the minor

employees engaged in theft, addiction to dangerous drugs or was engaged in the sale of it," he said.

But in this case the Deputy Director of the Hospital was only abusing his power by plucking mobile phones from minor employees and using abusive language, he accused.

"Further, dangerous substances arrive in the country either by air or by sea. But none of the minor employees at NHSL have any contact with any of the dealers or anyone in the Air Force or Navy for that matter to be able to even have vague access to any of these substances," he added.

The Ven. Thera said he had been at the NHSL the whole of yesterday (7) and that a motorbike and a three-wheeler had been stolen. The thieves were nabbed and handed over to the Deputy Director.

The Thera accused the GMOF President of merely carrying out a media show instead of doing his duty and taking disciplinary action. "It is obvious that he is the cat's paw for the Government to carry out a coup so that health service employees could be slashed to keep up with the demands of the IMF," he further said.

Wildlife Dept...

... an income of Rs 6.2 million for the day.

Further, 86 tourists who arrived in the second cruise ship on 5 December visited the Yala National Park in 18 vehicles, generating a revenue of Rs 981,981.

Minister of Wildlife Conservation Mahinda Amaraweera instructed the Department to open more ticket counters to avoid long queues.

Amaraweera also instructed the Department that if tourists arriving on luxury cruise ships are to visit the Yala National Park in the future, there has to be coordination with the Ministry of Tourism to ensure it could be organised effectively. (FT)



CEB to issue...

Further, work that cannot be completed by the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) needs to be done with the assistance of Local Councils, he said.

During a meeting held with CEB management, steps taken to reduce expenses and further

steps that could be taken to reduce the operating costs of the Ceylon Electricity Board were discussed. Wijesekera said instructions were also given to hold the ongoing construction work of the CEB's new headquarters. (TR)

IMF to issue...

...Monday (5) asked the question, "Media reports said an IMF team will travel to China this week to discuss faster progress on debt restructuring for countries, including Sri Lanka, which is trying to get an assistance package from the IMF. Can you share more details about the visit, like the schedule, the agenda of the visit, the meetings, et cetera? As China is the largest bilateral creditor to Sri Lanka, can you also share the data for total Sri Lankan debt owed to China?"

In response, according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry website, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson is quoted to have said, "China has long-standing sound cooperation with the IMF and

other international economic and financial institutions. With regard to your questions, if there is something to announce, we will let you all know in due course.

On Sri Lanka's debt issue, I'd like to stress that China attaches high importance to Sri Lanka's difficulties and challenges. We support the financial institutions in working out ways with Sri Lanka to properly solve the issue. We also hope relevant countries and international financial institutions will work with China and continue to play a constructive role in helping Sri Lanka overcome the current difficulties, ease its debt burden and realise sustainable development."

CEB will still...

Seneviratne said managing expenses in the upcoming year amidst rising prices of coal, furnace oil, diesel, and naphtha will be difficult. He claimed that the CEB and the Ministry of Power and Energy are taking every precaution to ensure that there will be no power outages in the coming year.

Speaking to the media yesterday (7), he said this required proper financial management.

In addition, he said timely coal shipments are required to restart the Norochcholai Power Plant.

"All of these must be met to provide electricity round the clock. Rain, fuel, and coal are all necessary for a reliable supply of

electricity across the entire nation. The biggest problem we are currently facing is that the CEB does not have enough money to make the electricity purchases. Our income will not cover the expenses in the upcoming year," he said.

He added that the cost of producing electricity is very high. Seneviratne claimed that the CEB previously received furnace oil for Rs 70, which was now purchased for Rs 320.

He said instead of receiving diesel for Rs 110, they now receive it for Rs 420, and instead of receiving one ton of coal for USD 80, they now receive it for USD 300.

Germany arrests...

...storm the Parliament building, the Reichstag, and seize power.

A minor aristocrat described as Prince Heinrich XIII, 71, is alleged to have been central to their plans.

According to federal prosecutors, he is one of two alleged ringleaders among those arrested across 11 German states.

The plotters are said to include members of the extremist Reichsbürger [Citizens of the Reich] movement, which has long been in the sights of German Police over violent attacks and racist conspiracy theories. They also refuse to recognise the modern German State.

Other suspects came from the QAnon movement who believe their country is in the hands of a "deep state."

An estimated 50 men and women are alleged to have been part of the group, said to have plotted to overthrow the republic and replace it with a new state

modelled on the Germany of 1871 - an empire called the Second Reich.

"We don't yet have a name for this group," said a spokeswoman for the Federal Prosecutor's Office.

Three thousand officers took part in 130 raids across much of the country, with two people arrested in Austria and Italy. Those detained were due to be questioned later in the day.

Justice Minister Marco Buschmann tweeted that a major anti-terror operation was taking place and a suspected "armed attack on constitutional bodies was planned."

The Federal Prosecutor's Office said the group had been plotting a violent coup since November 2021 and members of its central "Rat" (council) had since held regular meetings.

They had already established plans to rule Germany with departments covering health, justice and foreign affairs, the prosecutor said. Members understood they could only

realise their goals by "military means and violence against state representatives," which included carrying out killings.

Investigators are thought to have got wind of the group when they uncovered a kidnap plot last April involving a gang who called themselves United Patriots.

They too were part of the Reichsbürger scene and had allegedly planned to abduct Health Minister Karl Lauterbach while also creating "civil war conditions" to bring about an end to Germany's democracy.

Several violent attacks have been linked to Germany's far-right in recent years. In 2020, a 43-year-old man shot dead nine people of foreign origin in the western town of Hanau, and a Reichsbürger member was jailed for killing a policeman in 2016.

The Reichsbürger movement is estimated to have as many as 21,000 followers, of whom around 5 per cent are considered to belong to the extreme right.

(BBC)

LICENCE FROM THE REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES KANDY SCHOOLS PAST PUPILS ASSOCIATION

In pursuance of Section 34 of the Companies Act 7 of 2007 an Application has been made to the Registrar of Companies for a Licence directing an Association to be formed under the name and style of "KANDY SCHOOLS PAST PUPILS ASSOCIATION"

to be registered with limited liability without the addition of the word "Limited" to its name.

PRIMARY OBJECTS

The objects for which the Company is established are:-

- To foster and promote fellowship and friendship amongst the member schools of the Association.
- To assist the present and past students of the member schools as and when required.

Further details in Articles of Association San be examined where kept in No. 274/1, Kotte Road, Nugegoda. Notice is hereby given that any person objecting to this application may make such objection within 21 days from this publication, by a letter addressed to the Registrar - General of Companies, 400, D.R. Wijewardena Mawatha, Colombo 10.

Covid vaccine...

... requirement to produce the Covid-19 Vaccination Certificate on arrival at any of the airports or seaports from yesterday (7)."

In a letter addressed to all Deputy Director Generals, Director Quarantine, Chief Epidemiologist, Coordinator in Charge Covid-19 Operations of Health Ministry, Provincial, Regional Health Directors, Regional Epidemiologists, Medical Officer, Airport/Port Health Offices and Medical Officers of Health (MOHs), Dr. Gunawardena further said the requirement to produce a pre-boarding or on arrival negative Covid-19 test (PCR or

RAT) by any persons arriving in the island via any airport or seaport had also been removed.

However, if any foreign nationals or tourists tested positive for Covid-19 after arriving in the island, they were to isolate for seven days in either a private hospital, a hotel or place of residence. The cost of treatment or isolation was to be borne by those individuals (foreign nationals or tourists). He said the measures were applicable irrespective of other directives in any previous guidelines, letters or circulars which had been issued. Health sources said the World

Health Organisation (WHO) had earlier issued temporary recommendations to states parties (SP) with regard to international traffic following the 13th meeting of the International Health Regulations (IHR) Emergency Committee for Covid-19 held on 13 October. Accordingly, "24 (+1) states parties still required vaccination as a condition for entry" which was not consistent with IHR provisions or current temporary recommendations. 160 SPs were easing or totally lifting restrictions for international travel.

Police Log

BY ALOKA KASTURIARACHCHI

Maligawatta

A 44-year-old was assaulted to death by a group of individuals over a personal dispute in Maligawatta.

Police said the victim was assaulted with an iron rod on 6 December.

He had succumbed to injuries on admission to Colombo National Hospital.

The deceased was identified as a 44-year-old resident of Maligawatta.

According to the Police, the victim and the suspects had a long-standing quarrel and Police suspects the murder was committed due to that reason.

Police have identified the suspects and further investigations are underway to arrest them.

Gokarella

A 49-year-old woman was stabbed to death by her husband over a family dispute in Gokarella on 6 December, Police said.

Police said the suspect had committed suicide after the killing.

According to the Police the couple has been separated for the last 17 years and the wife had been abroad. She had come back to Sri Lanka recently and been residing with her mother in Gokarella.

The suspect had entered the house and stabbed the woman to death.

Gokarella Police are conducting further investigations.

Kegalle

Three individuals disguised as policemen, had entered a house, assaulted the occupants and looted their property.

Police said the suspects had entered the house in Kegalle disguised as policemen and assaulted the occupants on 6 December.

According to the Police, the occupants of the house had been living with three other associates.

The robbers had taken a gold bracelet, two rings, a necklace, two pendants, a mobile phone and Rs 355,000 in cash.

Kegalle Police are investigating to arrest the suspects.

Camping in Forest Reserve without permission

Six suspects granted bail

BY NEETA PATHMA KUMARI - NORWOOD

Chief Security Officer of the Nallathanni Wildlife Reserve Office, Prabash Karunathileka, said six suspects had been taken into custody by them on charges of being engaged in illegal camping at the Saptha Kanya Forest Reserve in Norton Bridge on 5 December afternoon.

He said, the suspects had gone camping without seeking approval from authorities. According to Karunathileka, his officers and Norton Bridge Police had conducted a search operation after relatives reported the campers missing.

The suspects were enlarged on bail and ordered to appear at the Hatton District Court on 27 December.

Due to rising fuel prices

Ten black stone quarries closed in Balangoda

BY S. WEERAWANSA - KALTHOTA

Over ten black stone quarries in Balangoda have been closed due to increases in fuel prices and electricity bills, owners said.

Further, due to increases in the prices of gunpowder, ammonia nitrate, service thread, dynamite, and imported cap materials, as well as a lack of water, it has been impossible to keep the work sites operational.

Thus, workers were laid off, and nearly 200 persons are unemployed at present.

Wasantha Kumara, owner of a quarry in Balangoda, said it is impossible to maintain quarries due to rising electricity bills, rising fuel prices, and a lack of gunpowder.

He added that businessmen who run these sites are in dire straits due to a variety of issues, including an increase in employee wages.

H. Pematratne, who worked in a black stone quarry, said he has lost his livelihood.

He requested authorities to look into this matter expeditiously.

Despite diesel price drop, bus associations say no fare reduction

BY NABIYA VAFFOOR

A conflict has arisen between private bus owners' associations on reducing the number of buses in operation on weekends and public holidays. However, they are in agreement when it comes to requesting a fare hike from the Government.

Speaking to *Ceylon Today*, yesterday (6), Lanka Private Bus Owners' Association, Chairman, Gamunu Wijeratne, noted that they have reduced the number of buses by 50 per cent on weekends and 40 per cent on public holidays.

He said that this decision was taken due to the decrease in daily income due to lack of passengers.

Wijeratne also stated that though the diesel price has been reduced, they do not plan on reducing bus fares.

"Only 1.1 per cent of relief has been provided from the Rs 10 price reduction of fuel. Therefore, they cannot expect us to

reduce the bus fares following such small concessions," he added.

He stated that between 35 and 40 per cent of the daily income from buses is spent on fuel and money has to be allocated for maintenance.

"The prices of spare parts and service activities have increased three to four fold. Besides, due to the increase in the price of lubricating oil and the increase in the salaries of employees, a situation has been created where it will not be possible to maintain the bus service," he added.

Meanwhile, Anjana Prithyanjith, Secretary of the All Ceylon Private Bus Owners' Association, said his union does not support this decision and that the passengers will be greatly inconvenienced due to such decisions.

He further said that the bus owners are going through huge losses on a daily basis therefore, their association has decided to go for an increase in fares and will discuss it with the government.

SL MAKES USD 45,000 FROM PALMYRAH PRODUCT EXPORTS

BY NAALIR JAMALDEEN

Palmyrah Development Board (PDB) Chairman Krishantha Pathiraja said Sri Lanka has earned USD 45,000 from the export of palmyrah products.

He added that the export of Sri Lankan palmyrah products to France has increased significantly.

He said efforts are being made to promote Sri Lankan palmyrah products worldwide, while expressing confidence that the palmyrah industry can be used to address the foreign exchange crisis.

Participating in agricultural product exhibitions abroad will help to promote our palmyrah products in foreign countries, the PDB Chairman said.

"There is huge potential to earn more income from the export of palmyrah products to European markets," Pathiraja said.

The PDB has developed the palmyrah industry of this country, providing required technical knowhow and proper guidance to those engaging in the industry, Pathiraja added.

Merchandise export earnings decline

Trade deficit widens to USD 4.4B

Earnings from merchandise exports declined in October 2022, on a Year-on-Year (YoY) basis, for the first time since March 2022, mainly due to lower earnings from garment exports, Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) said yesterday. Garment exports have been Sri Lanka's second largest foreign exchange (FX) earner after remittances since 2009.

This resulted in the trade deficit at the end of the first 10 months of the year recording a value of USD 4.4 billion. Consequently, earnings from merchandise exports declined by 11.9 per cent YoY in October 2022, over October 2021, to USD 1,051 million, CBSL said.

Though overall merchandise imports declined by 21.2 per cent to USD 1,336 million in October 2022, compared to USD 1,694 million in October 2021, however, the country experienced a trade deficit of USD 285 million in October 2022, CBSL said.

Subsequently, the country's trade deficit in the first 10 months of the year widened to USD 4,389.2 million (USD 4.4 billion), though merchandise exports in the first 10 months of the year grew by 8.9 per cent YoY to USD 11,031.7 million and imports in the commensurate period fell by 7.3 per cent to USD 15,420.9 million, it said.

(PA)

CTU protest in Jaffna tomorrow

PHOTO AND TEXT BY T. PRATHEEPAN

Making various demands in front of the Northern Province Governor's Secretariat, the Sri Lanka Teachers' Union (CTU) has decided to launch a protest tomorrow (9), Deputy President of the Northern Province Union, Deepan Thileesan said.

The protest will be staged after the schools close at 2.00 p.m. Thileesan, at a media conference held in Jaffna, said they would protest over the irregularities in the Northern Province Education Ministry and the lack of administrative leadership.

In December 2021, they had submitted a 100-page complaint, in accordance with the request from the Northern Province Governor, regarding the irregularities in the education sector in the Northern Province. An inquiry committee was appointed for it. The Secretary of the Ministry of Education of the Northern Province has been



asked to submit a report on the said investigation, but it has not been submitted as yet, Thileesan said.

"Even though it has been almost a year since the complaint was filed, the investigation has not been completed and we have doubts about compilation. The third term has already started but the condition of the Northern Province Ministry of Education and the Northern Province Education Department has reached such a level that the second term examination cannot be held. Over these irregularities, we will advance the protest by presenting various other demands," he added.

Abeywardana urges Parliamentarians

Set aside political agendas for better future

BY NAALIR JAMALDEEN

UNP Chairman, MP Wajira Abeywardana urged Parliamentarians that if Sri Lanka is to strengthen its economy, everyone must set aside their narrow political agendas and reach a national consensus.

He also urged the leaders and members of all political parties to join the National Council and join hands to rebuild the country's collapsed economy and restore normalcy.

MP Abeywardana was speaking to the media at Sirikotha about the country's economic crisis and associated mitigation measures.

Budget 2023 has been presented at a critical juncture, he said. "President Ranil Wickremesinghe is looking to create national unity for the future of this country. It should be remembered that if certain political parties and groups are unable to achieve national unity at this time, a national disaster is imminent," he added.

ASSOCIATED MOTOR FINANCE COMPANY PLC

GRAND VEHICLE AUCTION



93 Nos. Diesel & Petrol Motor Vehicles on Thursday 15th December 2022

To Be Held At our Vehicle Yard

No. 17/1 Pinhena Junction, Horana Road, Kottawa.

Commencing at 10.00 am

Comprising

CAR

WP CAW-22XX	HONDA	VEVEL	2017
CP KD-97XX	SUZUKI	LIANA	2003
SG CAX-06XX	SUZUKI	SPACIA	2016
WP CAV 25XX	HONDA	VEZEL	2016
WP CBD-45XX	SUZUKI	SPACIA	2017
SP CAY-34XX	SUZUKI	WAGON R	2015
WP CAB-83XX	HYUNDAI	TUCSON	2014
UP CAU-21XX	HONDA	GRACE	2015

LORRY

WP DAD-15XX	TATA	ACE	2016
UP PR-24XX	MAHINDRA	BOLERO PICK-UP	2011
SG LA-60XX	SUZUKI	CARRY	2000
UP GB-42XX	MITSUBISHI	CANTER	1996
WP LG-42XX	CHANGAN	SC1031D	2008
68-81XX	TOYOTA	DIANA	1993

VAN

WP GR-05XX	NISSAN	CARAVAN	1997
WP GL-70XX	NISSAN	CARAVAN	1997
59-35XX	TOYOTA	HIACE	1993
252-84XX	TOYOTA	HIACE	1995

TRACTOR

NW RF-47XX	MASSEY	FERGUSON	2017
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THREE WHEELERS

CP YK-00XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2011
WP QP-00XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2008
WP QS 00XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2009
WP QS 02XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2009
CP QS-02XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2009
CP QP 02XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2008
WP AAS-04XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2014
WP QS-05XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2008
NW QQ 07XX	BAJAJ	BAJAJ	2008
WP AAP 08XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2014
CP QR-09XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2008
SP QF-13XX	BAJAJ	2STROKE	2006
CP QS-14XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2009
WP QM 15XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2007
WP YX 17XX	BAJAJ	RE 205	2012
CP QV-19XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2009
WP QM 22XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2007
WP QN-25XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2007
WP QQ 25XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2008
WP HV 26XX	BAJAJ	2STROKE	2003
WP QL 27XX	BAJAJ	RE 200	2007
SG YL 27XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2011
WP QM 28XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2007

THREE WHEELERS

WP QN-30XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2007
WP ABJ 30XX	BAJAJ	AUTO	2015
SP QP-30XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2008
WP AAL-30XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2013
WP QF-32XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2006
WP QL-35XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2007
WP ABC-38XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2015
SG QP 40XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2008
CP YW-41XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2011
UP YL 42XX	BAJAJ	RE 205	
CP QR-44XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2008
WP AAL-45XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2013
CP YX-45XX	BAJAJ	2STROKE	2012
WP GV-47XX	BAJAJ	2STROKE	2002
WP YA 50XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2010
CP QO-50XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2008
NW AAX-51XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2015
WP QW 53XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2010
WP QN-55XX	BAJAJ	2STROKE	2007
WP YL-55XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2011
WP YL-56XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2008
WP QP 58XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2008
WP YZ-64XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2012
WP AAW-64XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2015
CP QW-65XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2010
CP YF-66XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2010
WP QQ-67XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2008
WP YN-67XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2011
WP AAP 67XX	BAJAJ	RE	
CP QQ-67XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2008
SG QS 72XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2009
CP QP-72XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2008
CP YZ-72XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2012
WP YV-73XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2012
WP QT 74XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2009
CP QM-83XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2008
WP YA-83XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2010
CP QR-85XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2008
NW YL-87XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2011
CP QQ-89XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2008
SP QV-89XX	BAJAJ	2STROKE	2019
WP QK 92XX	BAJAJ	2STROKE	2007
WP AAQ 92XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2014
WP YV-93XX	BAJAJ	RE45	2008
CP YF-93XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2010
CP QT-93XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2009
WP YL-96XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2011
WP QS-97XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2009
WP QT 98XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2009
WP ABF-99XX	BAJAJ	RE 205	2015
WP QN-99XX	BAJAJ	4STROKE	2008

Viewing - 13th & 14th December 2022 at the Venue of Auction (Between 8.30 am - 5.00 pm)

(Vehicle cannot be inspected on the day of Auction)

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- Entrance : By a non refundable Ticket of Rs. 1000.00 per person on day Auction.
- Payment : Non - refundable initial deposit of 25% in Cash at the fall of the Hammer & Balance 75% & Removal latest by 3.00 pm on Thursday 22nd December 2022 to be paid to Associated Motor Finance Company PLC, No.146, Havelock Road, Thimbirigasyaya, Colombo 05.
- The management has the right to withdraw any vehicle (s) from the Auction without prior Notice.
- The decision of the Auctioneer will be Final.

*CONDITIONS APPLY



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VEHICLE NO.	MAKE	MODEL
CP QO-24XX	RE-4S	BAJAJ
WP QP-92XX	AR4S	BAJAJ
SG QL-30XX	RE04	BAJAJ
WP ABI-82XX	RE 4	BAJAJ
NC BDW-79XX	PLEASURE	HERO
NC BIS-10XX	ZR	YAMAHA
NC BHH-76XX	MASTRO	HERO
NC BFO-85XX	PULSER	BAJAJ
NC BAO-14XX	DISCOVERY	BAJAJ
NC BDY-27XX	DIO	HONDA
NW BHL-17XX	RAY ZR	YAMAHA
NW BIR-22XX	DIO	HONDA
NC BID-47XX	APACHI	TVS
NC BIO-19XX	RAY ZR	YAMAHA
NC BHC-09XX	FZ	YAMAHA
NC BGV-76XX	DIO	HONDA
NW BEY-94XX	DIO	HONDA
NC BDX-18XX	DIO	HONDA
NP BGI-76XX	FAZER	YAMAHA
NP BIR - 85XX	PLATINA	bajaj
NP BFJ 08XX	DIO	HONDA
NC BDR-70XX	DISCOVERY	BAJAJ
NW BGP-11XX	DIO	HONDA
SP BEE-72XX	SCOOTY PET	TVS

Inspections can be done at company vehicle yard, on 08th December 2022 (From 8.30 a.m to 4.30 p.m) at Yapanaya junction, Anuradhapura. (In front of United Motors) (Vehicles can be inspected via online on this day at relevant branches)

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Auction Date : 09th DECEMBER 2022
Time 10.30 am

*Conditions Apply Attendance will be accordance with the health guidelines

Can participate the auction via online from Kottawa, Narammala and Matara branches

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Making Ranil President was the correct decision - Basil Rajapaksa



Living to pay bills

A new year means fresh hopes and new beginnings. However, for Sri Lankans, upcoming year brings more uncertainty and more suffering. New addition to the heap of suffering in the New Year would be another massive electricity tariff hike in January.

Ceylon Today on 1 December reported that Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) officials had told the National Council Sub Committee on Economic Stabilisation that to recover the losses of the CEB, another tariff hike by about 70 per cent is needed.

The tariff hike would be done under two steps in January and June 2023, pending Cabinet approval. Measures are to be taken for the purpose of obtaining approval of the Public Utilities Commission of Sri Lanka (PUCSL), said CEB Additional General Manager Rohan Seneviratne.

It was also revealed at the committee that the CEB is planning to spend a loan which is expected to be received to pay back money that CEB owed to power suppliers.

Accordingly, the CEB expects to make part payment to the electricity suppliers by obtaining a Rs 50 billion loan.

It was also disclosed that the Electricity Board presently owes nearly Rs 650 billion as loans to various parties including banks and electricity suppliers. The CEB representative said, out of the amount, nearly Rs 35 billion is to be paid to the organisations that supplied renewable energy and Rs 75 billion is to be paid to thermal power suppliers.

However, Minister of Power and Energy Kanchana Wijesekera denied the proposed tariff hike is to recover the CEB's losses.

For a country in which electricity tariffs were hiked by over 200 per cent a few months ago, this is horrible news. The people are already suffering from higher tariffs. Although the Government extended an olive branch to the religious places when the priests declared 'war' saying they cannot afford massive electricity bills in religious places, the common people did not have that opportunity.

In the meantime, making the news more confusing, the PUCSL Chairman said increasing electricity tariff by 70 per cent is illegal and there is no need to increase the bill at this moment.

However, Minister Wijesekera rejected claims made by the PUCSL Chairman and warned the country will have to face power cuts of six to eight hours per day next year if the proposed electricity tariff hike is not approved and does not receive the necessary money to purchase fuel and coal.

Making a special statement in Parliament this week Wijesekera explained no proposal has been submitted to Cabinet to recover previous losses and the only proposal that was made was to revise electricity tariffs to match the power generation costs.

The Minister said the report presented to Cabinet only outlines the losses incurred by the CEB over the past years and the financial assistance offered by the Treasury to help the CEB.

Wijesekera emphasised that he has proposed electricity tariff hikes under two stages next year to ensure uninterrupted power supply.

"We requested the CEB to provide a continuous power supply in 2023 and the CEB pointed out that there might be a drought next year. They said there might be reduction in rain and that would lead to the reduction in hydropower generation.

Therefore, CEB calculated that Rs 59.60 will be required for the generation of one power unit and over 17,000 GW in total is required for next year, the Minister said.

He also stressed PUCSL has not approved the tariff revision requested by the CEB and the tariff was revised last August after a period of nine years. He further said it is the responsibility of the PUCSL to revise tariffs yearly; however, they had not followed protocol.

If the proposed tariff hike goes ahead, it would be a deadly blow to the people. The electricity bill has already become unbearable that some are considering not paying the bill and letting the electricity disconnected. If this increases by another 70 per cent, it is hard to imagine how the ordinary people would face the situation because they have no any other choice, either they should pay without complaining or face the hours-long blackouts.

Needless to say, this proposed tariff hike will severely affect the businesses, in a backdrop where foreign businesses are already re-locating their factories to other countries owing to the huge costs and limited fuel. Also, many SMEs are facing the threat of shutting down their businesses as well. Economy will be further shrunken and at the end of the day, the common people will have to bear that burden as well.

MISREPORTING THE CRISIS IN SRI LANKA

BY UDITHA DEVAPRIYA

The financial crisis that swept through South Asia in early 2022 did not, to borrow an oft-quoted Sinhala witticism, fall from the sky. They had their antecedents and they followed a predictable course. In both countries, the unravelling of the crisis led to the expulsion of the President, in scenes that were reported by the mainstream media in terms which did not, I believe, do full justice to the complexity of the situation. But the media, despite its objective veneer, has a tendency to reduce, if not ignore, these complexities.

To many if not most journalists, a debt crisis remains a symptom of the failures of political elites. As such, their reporting remains limited to a particular frame, a limited canvas. We saw this clearly in Sri Lanka. Scenes of people taking to the streets, calling for the President's resignation, and entering his official residence, were framed almost exclusively as a classic anti-State uprising. One would be tempted to compare these developments to the Arab Spring - a line which the Government itself bought, as witness a government press release which characterised the demonstrations along exactly those lines.

Yet, the crisis in Sri Lanka and Pakistan cannot be compared to the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. It cannot be compared to the protests in Lebanon. The crisis in Sri Lanka and Pakistan was fuelled by an overheating economy reeling from the effects of Covid-19, the Russia-Ukraine War, colossal political mismanagement, and decades of neoliberal globalisation and authoritarianism. It was more systemic than political, more economic than systemic. It bore the hallmarks of the debt crises that swept through Latin America in the 1980s, crises which permanently disfigured their economies.

The media's obsession with the political dimensions of all this is understandable. People distrust the political establishment, deeply. They no longer feel that the system serves them. They want to topple, overturn, and replace it. The Government's callous disregard for their suffering deserves no second opinion: they have grossly failed the country and its citizenry. Their response to the carnage of 9 May was to turn against the people, to bemoan their lack of patience, to gaslight them. For years and decades, they have been enforcing the same failed policies, like a prayer. A systemic crisis of the sort we are seeing through has its origins in too many political decisions, overseen by too many governments.

As such, commentators and journalists may feel validated in doing scoops on political elites. Yet, while it is understandable, even justifiable, their fixation with the political aspects of a crisis of this magnitude has led them to leave out, or belittle, its structural causes. It is like a poorly designed house lacking not just architectural grace, but also a solid foundation: what attracts attention is the lack of artistry, not the absence of a foundation. Perhaps because of this, the media in general, together with civil society, has been attributing too much in the crisis to the failures of the Rajapaksas and their allies, their authoritarian and militarist drive, and their strategy to use the current political setup to make a comeback.

And in doing so, they have, I think, misread the causes of the crisis. What the crisis did was to speed up something that was decades in the making. Since 1977, the country has been experimenting with one neoliberal model after another, dismantling the State sector and subsidies and liberalising the economy in a bid to spark growth. Such efforts have come to



Ironically, but perhaps not surprisingly, the mainstream media - barring a few journalists and commentators - churns out the same policy prescriptions that got us into this mess. As Hashim bin Rashid points out in an insightful piece in Jamhooor, "middle-class professionals and policy hawks... continue to peddle the only solution they know: go back to the IMF"

nothing: inequalities have widened and nationalist backlashes have, as I pointed out in my column last week, wildly accelerated. In the absence of radical economic reforms, of the sort that could have strengthened domestic industries and spurred industrialisation, these efforts have only reinforced the island's dependence on private capital. 2022 took all these to their final, inexorable conclusion, ending with a proverbial bang.

Ironically, but perhaps not surprisingly, the mainstream media - barring a few journalists and commentators - churns out the same policy prescriptions that got us into this mess. As Hashim bin Rashid points out in an insightful

piece in Jamhooor, "middle-class professionals and policy hawks... continue to peddle the only solution they know: go back to the IMF." This solution is also peddled by journalists, even those who, not long ago, sided with lower middle class protesters who wanted to see through radical economic reforms in tandem with political change. With the waning away of the Aragalaya - a movement now dominated by left groups, which the media ignores or criticises - after July, economic discussions have yet again reverted to middle class policy elites and hawks.

This was predictable. The protests themselves remained united at the core, but deeply divided along the periphery. Once they realised their primary objective of ousting Gotabaya Rajapaksa, these divisions came up to the surface, to the extent that the protests have now split between student-political left (the JVP-FSP and the IUSF), and centre-right liberal (the Black Caps) flanks. Ranil Wickremesinghe's rise to the presidency emboldened many in the Aragalaya whose anger was directed at the Rajapaksas, not the far more right-wing UNP. The bottom line to all this is that, after Rajapaksa fled, policy discourses that had once been dominated by Colombo elites and think tanks again came under them.

In giving these elites more airtime and space than protest groups calling for real economic change, the media remains guilty of perpetuating discourses that have got us nowhere for the last four decades. In this I am not disparaging multilateral financial institutions, the ambits and mandates of which may have changed - for the better, I hope - in this period. I am, however, deeply sceptical of policy elites, based in think tanks and civil society groups - who on the one hand can call the present Budget "more good than bad" while criticising the Rajapaksas on the other, and who, while (rightly) bemoaning the failures of the Rajapaksas, demonise student groups for "vehemently [opposing] any kind of education reform" and criticise "restrictive labour laws." We badly need a new debate over the crisis we are living through. Our elites have failed us. Not just political elites, but also policy elites.

The writer is an international relations analyst, researcher, and columnist who can be reached at udakdev1@gmail.com Photograph by Dhananjaya Samarakoon



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BY JUAN MANUEL SANTOS

WHAT THE COP15 BIODIVERSITY CONFERENCE MUST DO

In Montreal this month, governments will come together at the Convention on Biological Diversity's COP15 Summit to negotiate a global deal for nature. To succeed, the summit must deliver an agreement on the overall mission, with clearly defined goals and concrete plans to achieve them.

The recent United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) in Sharm El-Sheikh offered encouraging but insufficient signs of an emerging political consensus on the need for global solidarity in the face of global warming. Now, world leaders need to attend to another existential risk to people and the planet: the alarming and growing loss of biodiversity.

In Montreal this month, governments will come together at the Convention on Biological Diversity's COP15 summit to agree on a global deal to put the world's biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030. We cannot afford for this conference to be treated as a sideshow or afterthought to COP27. The biodiversity crisis is no less important than the climate crisis, and it is escalating quickly. It must be a top political priority for all countries.

Given the current rates of biodiversity loss, some scientists estimate that we are on track to lose three-quarters of the world's species within only a few centuries. This mass extinction and the ongoing threat to ecosystems and habitats are inextricably linked to climate change. That is why world leaders must come to COP15 with high ambitions and set a mandate for successful negotiations.

To succeed, COP15 must not only deliver an agreement on the overall mission but also set clearly defined goals and establish concrete plans to protect 30% of all land and ocean areas by 2030. Leaders must come to Montreal with both the national plans and the financing needed to advance these objectives.

When I was first elected President of Colombia in 2010, I found myself running a country that was almost entirely flooded for 18 months. The climate

pattern known as La Niña, aggravated by global warming, meant near-biblical rainfall. Lacking the tools or know-how to handle the situation, we saw that we needed to make peace with nature. Experts advised focusing on the protection of biodiversity, so that is what we did. Colombia, one of the world's most biodiverse countries, now has a combined protected area that is larger than Japan or the United Kingdom.

We understand both the value of nature and what we stand to lose when it is eroded. We also have come to appreciate what we can learn from those with the closest relationship to the land. Many indigenous communities had been warning of an ecological crisis for decades, only to have their voices and rights dismissed.

Nature loss hurts people everywhere. It is already harming human health, reducing air quality, undermining our ability to grow food or obtain water, exacerbating extreme weather events, and weakening our ability to mitigate or adapt to climate change. These problems make biodiversity loss a security issue. Continued damage to our ecosystems is one of the biggest long-term risks to our societies.

As an economic matter, the collapse of certain essential ecosystems is all it would take to push countries like mine into bankruptcy. Consider, for example,



that around 75% of food crops rely on animal pollinators such as bees, birds, and butterflies. The loss of all animal pollinators seems unthinkable, yet it is a real threat. And if food becomes scarcer, the poorest will suffer first.

Moreover, the destruction of habitats is a serious public health threat, not least because it is bringing humans and animals into closer and more frequent contact. The World Health Organization warns that this is both causing existing infectious diseases to spread more quickly and accelerating the emergence of novel zoonotic pathogens.

Finally, not only is climate change one

of the main drivers of biodiversity loss; the destruction of ecosystems is undermining the planet's ability to neutralise the effects of greenhouse-gas emissions. South America's Andean forests, for example, act as critical carbon sinks, absorbing atmospheric carbon dioxide that would otherwise be hastening the pace of global warming.

Forests, wetlands, underwater kelp forests, mangroves, and other natural systems also protect from extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, heatwaves, and storms, by acting as natural buffers or reservoirs. Biodiversity loss not only makes climate change

worse but also eliminates our best line of defence against it.

COP15 offers a major opportunity for governments to achieve a breakthrough – equivalent to the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement – that unites the world behind one mission: to halt, and ideally reverse, biodiversity loss by the end of this decade.

To be sure, the current effort suffers from a lack of high-level political engagement, leading many to question why we have two separate convention processes for issues that go hand in hand. They are right to wonder. Looking ahead, I would like to see us bring both conventions together, in recognition of the fact that climate change and biodiversity loss must be addressed in tandem.

In the meantime, though, we cannot afford further delay in setting ambitious targets to protect and restore biodiversity this decade. The recent 'Loss and Damage' Agreement at COP27 demonstrated that, with sufficient resolve, countries can work together on seemingly intractable issues. With time running out, world leaders must nurture this spirit of cooperation in Montreal.

Juan Manuel Santos, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, is a former President of Colombia (2010-18) and a member of The Elders. (Project Syndicate)

Construction to begin on world's biggest telescope

One of the grand scientific projects of the 21st Century begins its construction phase on Monday.

The Square Kilometre Array (SKA) will be the largest radio telescope in the world when completed in 2028.

Split across South Africa and Australia, with a headquarters in the UK, the facility will address the biggest questions in astrophysics.

It will perform the most precise tests of Einstein's theories and even search for extra-terrestrials.

Delegations from the eight countries leading the project are attending ceremonies in the remote Murchison shire in Western Australia and the Karoo of South Africa's Northern Cape.

When the festivities are over, the bulldozers will move in.

"This is the moment it becomes real," said Prof. Phil Diamond, Director General of the Square Kilometre Array Organisation. "It's been a 30-year journey. The first 10 years were about developing concepts and ideas. The second 10 was spent doing technology development. And then the last decade was about detailed design, securing the sites, getting governments to agree to set up a treaty organisation (SKAO) and provide the funds to start," he told BBC News.

The initial architecture of the telescope will incorporate just under 200 parabolic antennas, or 'dishes', as well as 131,000 dipole antennas, which look a little like Christmas trees.

The aim is to construct an effective collecting area measuring hundreds of thousands of square metres.

This will give the SKA unparalleled sensitivity and resolution as it probes targets in the sky. The system will operate across a frequency range from roughly 50 megahertz to, ultimately, 25 gigahertz. In wavelength terms, this is in the centimetres to metres range.

This should enable the telescope to detect very faint radio signals coming from cosmic sources billions of light-years from Earth, including those signals emitted in the first few hundred million years after the Big Bang. One of the SKA's great quests will be to trace the



full history of hydrogen, the most abundant element in the Universe. The telescope should be able to detect hydrogen's presence even before great clouds of it, collapse to form the first stars. "The SKA is going to contribute to so many areas of astronomy," said Dr. Shari Breen, the observatory's Head of Science Operations.

"One would be these 'fast radio bursts' that have been detected. These things output the equivalent of an entire year's worth of energy from our Sun in just a fraction of a second. And we have no idea what they are. How is that possible? Hopefully, the SKA will have an answer."

The telescope is being built in areas already used for radio astronomy on a smaller scale.

Expanding these sites, however, has required various land agreements, with farmers in the Karoo; and with the WajarriYamaji, the Aboriginal title holders in the Murchison.

The Wajarri community has organised Monday's celebration to inaugurate the SKA.

Various procurement

contracts will be announced around the ceremonies.

These will take the total financial outlay to date to just under €500m (£430m) – out of an expected final construction budget of €2bn. The first major milestone should come in 2024 when four dishes in Australia and six antenna stations in South Africa are made to work seamlessly together as a basic telescope. This proof-of-principle moment will then trigger the array's full roll-out. By 2028, the SKA will have an effective collecting area of just under 500,000 square metres. But the set-up is such that it can continue growing, perhaps up to the much desired one million square metres, or one square kilometre.

One way this could happen is if more and more countries join the organisation and provide the necessary funds.

The current members are South Africa, Australia, the UK, China, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal and Switzerland. These countries have ratified the treaty.

(BBC News)

Leveraging data for the public good

BY CHRISTOPHER PISSARIDES, FADI FARRA AND AMIRA BENSEBAA

While it is widely acknowledged that intangible assets drive our economies and societies, we still lack adequate tools to measure and value them. Governments and businesses must work together to revise the prevailing metrics by which we value such assets.

The digital age has taught businesses to see people as individuals rather than just as members of certain demographic cohorts. On social media, we receive personalised ads based on our responses to previous ads, our current location, and our shopping habits. Our massive digital footprint enables companies to know precisely how effective their advertising campaigns are at the individual level and to derive immense value from this knowledge.

Alas, it seems that this technological wave has yet to reach policymakers. Despite the advantages of big data, governments still tend to use a one-size-fits-all approach when planning investments or designing policies. To help improve public services through better use of data, we have developed a new framework we call Quantum Governance.

Every successful business is built on three foundations: a shared goal, which serves as its *raison d'être*; the tools and methods to achieve it; and consumers, who are motivated by their own interests, ambitions, and beliefs. While it has become a staple of public debate that governments should operate like businesses, that is impossible, because these two types of social organisations were created for different purposes. What they do have in common, however, is the human factor. And that should be the focus of public-private partnerships in the digital age.

To perform well, both governments and businesses need to measure, assess, and understand information about people. While preventing abuse requires sound data governance, the status quo offers little hope: large and powerful corporations hoard valuable datasets, lose public trust, and lobby legislators to avoid oversight, while governments resort to top down regulations that alienate voters. Moreover, because large companies have far greater resources to spend on compliance



and lawyers than their smaller rivals do, these regulations often benefit the very businesses they were meant to constrain.

Yet data are simply too important to be entrusted to either governments or large corporations that treat them as their private property. Instead, governments should collaborate with companies on joint-governance frameworks that recognise both the opportunities and the risks of big data.

Businesses – which are best positioned to understand big data's true value – must move beyond short-sighted efforts to prevent regulation. Instead, they need to initiate a dialogue with policymakers on how to design viable solutions that can leverage the currency of our era to benefit the public good. Doing so would help them regain public trust.

Governments, for their part, must avoid top down regulatory strategies. To win the support they need from businesses, they need to create incentives for data sharing and privacy protection and help develop new analytical tools through advanced modelling. Governments should also rethink and renew deeply-rooted frameworks inherited from the industrial era, such as those for taxation and social welfare.

In the digital age, governments should recognise the centrality of data to policymaking and develop tools to reward businesses that contribute to the public good by sharing it. True, governments require taxes to raise revenues, but they must recognise that a better understanding of individuals enables more efficient policies. By recognising companies' ability to save public money and create social value, governments could encourage companies to share data as a matter of social responsibility.

But collaboration is just as critical as data-sharing. Neither governments nor businesses properly account for the human factor in their decision-making processes. Adapting to the age of big data would mean shifting away from outdated metrics like GDP toward metrics that focus on people.

To this end, our Quantum Governance approach introduces an accounting framework we call the Balance of Public Policy, which treats the intangible and tangible aspects of policymaking as equal. When designing policies, policymakers often grapple with intangibles such as individual policy adoption, public legitimacy, popular narratives, and community beliefs. Similarly, the accounting standards that businesses use provide little guidance on how to value certain assets – for example, they often consider workers a disposable cost. But workers' talents are a major factor in any company's success or failure. Accounting frameworks should be revised to quantify and record such assets in business performance statements.

While it is widely acknowledged that intangible assets drive our economies and societies, we still lack adequate tools to measure and value them. Governments and businesses must work together to revise the prevailing metrics by which we value such assets. Both would benefit from developing the tools needed to better leverage big data, and doing so would serve the public good.

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Fadi Farra is a managing partner at Whiteshield.

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(Project Syndicate)

METTLE OF RESILIENCE.



21ST SLIM BRAND EXCELLENCE 2022

Sri Lanka's most prestigious brand awards, SLIM Brand Awards 2022 takes place on the 8th December 2022 at the Monarch Imperial. The coveted event recognizes the giant efforts of brand marketers taken to keep their brands alive and performing during one of the toughest years so far. Launched 21 years ago for the very first time, the Brand Excellence awards is the very first award ceremony dedicated to recognising and rewarding the best brands and their brand custodians in Sri Lanka. Today the awards program, which began with a mere 26 entries, boasts a record-breaking number of applicants year on year.



Nuwan Gamage
President,
Sri Lanka Institute
of Marketing

Slim Brand Excellence is there to appreciate those strategic master minds who kept their brand flags flying high. This year too we will be appreciating those resilient brands and the efforts made by their brand custodians during unprecedented times. There were a record number of entries this year and we would like to congratulate each and every one of them as the resilient brand stories presented were truly inspiring.

We, as a national body for marketing firmly believe that marketers have a larger role to play in uplifting the national economy. That's why we have initiated a national initiative is to establish marketing as a main force to develop our nation branding blueprint to position Sri Lanka globally for travel, Invest and Live. I think as marketing professionals in the country, we all have the responsibility of uplifting the Sri Lankan brand, which is a direct solution to moving out of this tragic situation.



Imal Fonseka
Head of Jury

Unprecedented times bring out both the best and worst in people and organizations. Marketing expenditures in areas from communications to research are often slashed across the board—but such indiscriminate cost cutting is a mistake.

Although it's wise to contain costs, failing to support brands or examine core customers' changing needs can jeopardize performance over the long term. Companies that put customer needs under the microscope, take a scalpel rather than a cleaver to the marketing budget, and nimbly adjust strategies, tactics, and product offerings in response to shifting demand are more likely than others to flourish both during and after an economic crisis.

Those are the brands and companies we will recognize and award today.



Gayan Perera
VP Events,
Sri Lanka Institute
of Marketing

In these challenging times, the true testament for a powerful brand is nothing but mere resilience and the agility which it adopts to keep it relevant to its customers.

Despite the economic crisis, it is encouraging to witness the receipt of closer to 150 entries this year. It is a clear indication that our marketing fraternity embraces the evaluation model of Brand Excellence and makes use of this golden opportunity to reflect on their brand's present status quo and strategize towards excellence in the future.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the untiring efforts of the project committee and the events division of SLIM for setting the stage for an extravagant event tonight. Also, Kudos to our valued sponsors and event partners for standing strong besides the institute to organize events of this stature. Heartiest congratulations to all the winning brands and their "brand smiths" tonight. You have truly proven the mettle of your brand/s.



Sanath Senanayake
CEO/Executive Director,
Sri Lanka Institute
of Marketing

Brand Excellence is not merely an awards show but transcends beyond to create an atmosphere through its process for brands to evolve. We take pride in setting standards and helping brands to reach their aspirations perhaps even helpful in establishing such brands offshore. We have seen that meticulously curated criteria set forth for the awards has been a strong foundation for brands to build their resilience and stature.

We extend our congratulations to all those who applied, which is an indication of their confidence in the brand and its potential. Those who would be receiving accolades, you have done exceedingly well and an extra effort would make it a world renowned identity. My appreciation goes to stakeholders of Brand Excellence.



21ST SLIM BRAND EXCELLENCE JULY 2022



- Row 1 (Left to Right) Imal Fonseka - Co-founder, Food Revolution/ Taurus Naturals | Nushad Perera - Managing Director, Ten Holdings - Sri Lanka & Malaysia | Nandana A Wickramage - The Practical Coach, Board Director, Consultant, Business Development & Strategic Advisor to Multiple Companies, Personal & Career Development Coach & Lyricist | Dr. Ravi Bamunusinghe - Founder SLSME, Business Advisor Coach & Visiting Faculty Member of PIM, University of Sri Jayewardenepura | Himalee Madurasinghe - Director/Head, Kantar Sri Lanka
- Row 2 (Left to Right) Crystal Nathan - Chief Insights Officer/Executive Director, PepperCube Consultants (Pvt) Ltd | Nadi Dharmasiri - Group Chief Marketing Communications Officer, David Pleris Holdings (Pvt) Ltd | Upul Adikari - Head of Marketing, Hatton National Bank | Rohan Somawansa - Head of Marketing & Corporate Communication, DSI Samson Group | Sathish Rathnayake - Category Head - Frozen Confectionery, Senior Vice President - John Keells Group
- Row 3 (Left to Right) Sanath Wijetunga - Chief Executive Officer, Orel Corporation (Pvt) Ltd | Shaminda Perera - Head of Marketing, Reckitt - Sri Lanka | Ruwan Welikala - Vice President - Dairy, Nestlé Lanka PLC | Kushani Peiris - Senior Marketing Manager, Maliban Biscuit Manufacturers Ltd | Madhusanka Ranatunga - Chief Sales & Marketing Officer, Lion Brewery (Ceylon) PLC
- Row 4 (Left to Right) Santhush Weeraman - Managing Director, SGM Integrated, SGM Films, Singer/Composer | Derrick Antony - General Manager - Marketing, Hemas Manufacturing PVT Ltd | Tharaka Ranwala - Senior Deputy General Manager, Sampath Bank Plc | Samitha Hemachandra - General Manager - Marketing, Ceylenco Life Insurance Ltd | Manjula Dahanyake - Group Chief Executive Officer, Lanka Milk Foods PLC
- Row 5 (Left to Right) Viranga Wickramaratna - Chief Executive Officer, Keells Food Products PLC | Rashmi Rajahmoney - Head of Marketing, Godrej Sri Lanka | Heshan Perera - Chief Marketing Officer, Daraz | Chamari Fernando - Managing Director, George Steuart Consumer (PVT) LTD.



21ST SLIM BRAND EXCELLENCE COMMITTEE 2022



- Row 1 (Left to Right) Chamill Wickramasinghe, DGM- Membership, Corporate Affairs & HR | Gangani Liyanage, Assistant Manager - Events, Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing | Meshara Perera, Product Manager - Personal Loans, DFCC Bank PLC | Gashi Kodihuwakku, Manager - Brand Development, Softlogic Life | Emanthie Peter, Manager - Marketing, Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts
- Row 2 (Left to Right) Dalrya Kotalawala, Brand Executive, Shift Integrated | Harshini Fernando, Senior Manager - Communications, Softlogic Life | Selonic Perumal, Chief Executive Officer, Shift Integrated | Oken Silva, Senior Manager - Digital Marketing, Loops Integrated | Pavithra Balakrishnan, Assistant Brand Manager, Hemas Consumer Brands
- Row 3 (Left to Right) Dilani Fonseka, Manager - Marketing Communications, Hutchison Telecommunications Lanka (PVT) Ltd | Wassam Ismail, Chief Executive Officer, Loops Integrated | Shannon Gamage, Senior Associate - Events, Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing | Nimasha Divyanjalee, Associate - Events, Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing | Shanalle Maduwaage, Assistant Brand Manager - Dove & TRESemme, Unilever Sri Lanka
- Row 4 (Left to Right) Positha Perera, Senior Brand Manager, Maliban Biscuit Manufacturers | Treshan De Zoysa, Assistant Brand Manager, Unilever Sri Lanka | Dimithra Silva, Manager - Events, Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing | Deshan Akalanka, Senior Associate - Events, Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing



EXCHANGE RATES

05.12.2022

Currency	Buying Rate	Selling Rate
Australian Dollar	244.8490	256.2898
Canadian Dollar	267.1568	279.4191
Chinese Yuan (Renminbi)	50.8203	53.9450
Euro	379.1991	394.7273
Japanese Yen	2.6654	2.7772
Singapore Dollar	265.9897	277.2767
Sterling Pound	442.9536	459.8408
Swiss Franc	381.7549	400.9131
US Dollar	361.3026	371.7191

Country	Currency	Indicative Rate
Bahrain	Bahrain Dinar	963.2695
Kuwait	Kuwait Dinar	1,184.9158
Oman	Oman Rial	943.2671
Qatar	Qatar Riyal	99.0284
Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabian Riyal	96.6152
UAE	UAE Dirham	98.8747

Source: CBSL

NFIs hit record high Rs 20.3 B

BY PANEETHA AMERESEKERE

Sustained foreign buying into Expo Lanka Holdings PLC by its largest shareholder, the Japanese-controlled SG Holdings Ltd., uplifted nett foreign inflows (NFIs) into the bourse in secondary market trading in the calendar year to Tuesday to a new record of Rs 20.3 billion, beating its previous record established only on the previous market day Monday of Rs 19.4 billion, statistics showed. The market enjoyed an NFI of Rs 875.1 million on Tuesday.

Expo Lanka Holdings is also the bourse's largest capitalised Company. Consequently, bourse shareholders, at the end of eight consecutive market days of trading to Tuesday were richer by Rs 478 billion, with a market capitalisation in the review period increasing by 13 per cent to Rs four trillion. Market capitalisation last passed the Rupee-four trillion mark two months ago on 5 October with a figure of Rs 4.1 trillion recorded on that day. The bourse also made consecutive gains, in eight consecutive market days to Tuesday.

Subsequently, the ASPI, Tuesday over Monday increased by 0.43 per cent to 8,881.34 points and the S&P SL 20 Index by 0.93 per cent to 2,835.66 points on a 149.8 million share volume and a Rs 3.1 billion turnover. Consequently, the bourse made daily turnovers of over Rs two billion for seven consecutive market days to Tuesday.

Prior to Tuesday, the last time market indices, the ASPI and the S&P SL 20 indices made higher figures than these were 61 and 62 calendar days ago on 7 October and 5 October, with figures of 9,049.52 and 2,887.67 points respectively.

Tuesday was also the sixth consecutive market day that the bourse enjoyed consecutive NFIs. Prior to Tuesday, the last time the bourse enjoyed NFIs for at least six consecutive market days was 13 calendar days ago, where, covering the calendar day period from 15 November to 23 November, for a total of seven consecutive market days, the bourse enjoyed consecutive NFIs.

Inflationary money up Rs 1.3 B

BY PANEETHA AMERESEKERE

The Government of Sri Lanka's (GoSL's) demand-pull inflationary face value money printing (FVMP) debt increased by Rs 1,277 million (Rs 1.3 billion) and overall by Rs 3,323 million (0.10 per cent) to Rs 3,262,816.05 million (Rs 3.2628 trillion) on Tuesday due to a persistent lack of revenue. Tuesday was the second consecutive market day that GoSL's FVMP debt increased.

GoSL's at least theoretical MP borrowing costs (BCs) decreased for the second consecutive market day to Tuesday, this time by 1.57 per cent (Rs 2,105.81 million) to Rs 131,697.77 million due to continuous buying pressure of Treasury (T) Bills and T Bonds in secondary market trading because of high yields offered by the same due to GoSL's huge 'borrowing appetite'.

Market shortfall fell by 0.33 per cent (Rs 1,277 million) to Rs 387,586 million Tuesday, nonetheless, causing sustained rate pressure. Reserves haemorrhaged for the second consecutive market day to Tuesday, this time by USD 5.63 million (Rs 2,046 million) and in the two consecutive market days to Tuesday by US\$ 34.55 million (Rs 12,551 million) due to the settlement of energy import bills. Conversions are based on the value of the administered and benchmark official 'spot' fixed at Rs 363.19 to the US Dollar in the reference period.

EY sees other Big Four firms mirroring its proposed split

Splitting EY into separate accounting and consultancy businesses will help pay rising technology bills and "inevitably" be copied by rival "Big Four" firms, a top EY official told a Reuters Breakingviews podcast.

Andy Baldwin, global managing partner, said EY was holding roadshows to explain a "compelling case" for the company's third attempt to split into two - if partners across the world give their backing in votes during in the first quarter of next year.

If ratified, the split of a near \$50 billion company would mark the biggest shake-up in the sector since the 2002 collapse of Arthur Andersen, the auditor that was mired in the Enron scandal and whose downfall reduced the "Big Five" to the "Big Four" of PwC, Deloitte, KPMG and EY, formerly Ernst & Young.

(Reuters)

FINANCE TODAY

CBSL Governor Advises Public

AVOID HIGH-INTEREST RATE BORROWINGS

CBSL ready to solve banking and financial sector liquidity issues

BY ISHARA GAMAGE

The Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL), Dr. P. Nandalal Weerasinghe, urged businessmen and the public to refrain from taking loans at high-interest rates on a short to medium-term basis, as Sri Lanka is currently successfully controlling inflation.

Therefore, the Governor requested whenever possible, to negotiate with Banks and Financial Institutions to obtain loans at lower rates than the current 30-35% higher interest rates in the market.

If this advice is duly followed, Banks and Financial Institutions will take measures to grant loans at low-interest rates, the Governor pointed out.

Addressing the Sri Lanka Economic Summit organised by the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce, which ended last Tuesday in Colombo, Weerasinghe predicted that by the end of next year it is possible to bring inflation down to a mid-single-digit level.

Currently, there is a big difference between the policy interest rate and the market interest rate.

According to him, the high-interest rates in the market at present are due to the unnecessary market fear about the restructuring of the domestic debt and the liquidity issues.

The high 'cost of funds' in the banking industry is one of the prime reasons why the interest rates are



Nandalal Weerasinghe

correspondingly high.

Owing to this, the Governor has asked the financial institutions to refrain from collecting Time Deposits at high-interest rates at a competitive level as a solution to their liquidity problems.

"The Central Bank is ready to solve the liquidity problems of banks and financial institutions. "As a result, the Central Bank stands ready to

provide any necessary support in the event of a liquidity crisis," he said.

Governor Weerasinghe also expressed his confidence that he will soon be in a position to provide a firm answer to rumours surrounding the restructuring of the domestic debt.

"Till then, the Central Bank has refrained from expressing its opinion in this regard".

Migration is trending – JKH Chairman

Krishan Balendra, Chairman, John Keells Group said, although the private sector can accept high tax rates, it is essential to maintain a stable tax policy that is valid for a long time.

Balendra maintained that he would never shift the tax burden to the consumers.

Krishan Balendra, also said migration is trending.

As the country faces its worst flexible exchange rate crisis, people are fast losing faith and Sri Lankan companies are losing their talented workers at a pace.

"We've observed an outflow of workers from tourist hotels to nations we've never seen before," he remarked.

"People have visited Scotland and Ireland. The Middle East and the Maldives Australia's labour market is hot."

Rs 85,000 M T-Bill Auction

WAYS stay elevated due to uncertainty

BY PANEETHA AMERESEKERE

Weighted average yields (WAYS) at Tuesday's weekly Rs 85,000 million Treasury (T) Bill auction remained unchanged week-on-week (WoW) due to a mix of near-record high inflation and sustained uncertainty. Consequently, the WAYS of the 91, 182 and 364-day maturities remained unchanged at 32.91, 32.27 and 29.46 per cent, WoW respectively.

The fact that the WAYS of the 182 and 364 maturities being smaller than the 91-day maturity and that the 182-day maturity is greater than the 364-day maturity, is an indication that the market expects yield pressure to last

only in the short term.

A reflection of the Government of Sri Lanka's (GoSL's) huge 'borrowing appetite' is that the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) on behalf of the former, once more sold over 100 per cent, this time 163.67 per cent (Rs 65,467 million) of the 91-day maturity compared to its original offer of Rs 40,000 million at Tuesday's auction.

In the obverse, in an almost perennial weekly action feature, CBSL sold only 27.82 per cent (Rs 6,954 million) and 15.45 per cent (Rs 3,090 million) of the 182 and 364-day maturities compared to their original offers of Rs 25,000 and Rs 20,000 million; respectively, on Tuesday. Subsequently, CBSL sold only 88.84 per cent of the

total, original offer of Rs 85,000 million made at Tuesday's auction.

CBSL on behalf of the GoSL will have to repay a sum of at least Rs 23,278 million worth of maturing Treasury T-Bills to the market by tomorrow (Friday 9 December). Their splits are 91-day maturities of Rs 5,767 million; 182-day maturities of Rs 12,891 million and 364-day maturities of Rs 4,620 million; respectively. Additionally, CBSL, on behalf of GoSL, has to repay T-Bill maturities worth Rs 38,138 million; comprising all three maturities, i.e., 91, 182 and 364-day maturities, sold to the market, in relation to its original 7 September 2022 T-Bill auction.

TREASURY BILL AUCTION HELD ON 06 DECEMBER 2022

Maturity (Days)	Amount Offered	Bids Received	Amount Accepted ^(a)	Weighted Average Yield Rate (WAYR) (%)	
				Current Auction	Last Auction
91	40,000	98,095	65,467	32.91	32.91
LKA09123C104					
182	25,000	25,749	6,954	32.27	32.27
LKA18223F096					
364	20,000	21,169	3,090	29.33	29.46
LKA36423L080					
Total	85,000	145,013	75,511		

All amounts are in Rs. Millions.

While resuming FTA with Singapore SL to commence China, India and Thailand Trade Deals shortly

BY ISHARA GAMAGE

Dollar Crisis hit Sri Lanka has decided to sign new Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with China, India, and Thailand, as well as resume its previously suspended Trade Agreement with Singapore, Chandanie Wijayawardhana, Snr. A.S. of President said on Tuesday (6).

She further stated at the Economic Conference organised by the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce in Colombo that talks for the immediate implementation of FTAs with China, India, and Thailand have already commenced.

She added that the President, Ranil Wickramasinghe, has instructed to move swiftly for Sri Lanka to enter into Trade Agreements with other countries.

Elaborating further, she said, she has been advised to simplify the process of doing business in Sri Lanka.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe will concentrate on an export-oriented, competitive market economy for Sri Lanka, which can serve South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia.

Addressing the Conference, the President pointed out that the FTAs will be restored and improved into a comprehensive economic and technical alliance and that his administration will concentrate on delayed Indo-Sri Lanka Projects.

Although the two parties have exchanged basic agreements about the trade deal with China, Sri Lanka reportedly has not yet replied favourably to China's offers for the reduction of import taxes on goods.

According to analysts, Sri Lanka is caught in a geopolitical Cold War between China and India, which the US is supporting. This Cold War has caused Sri Lanka to be cautious with both Asian nations.

World Bank approves Sri Lanka's IDA eligibility

The World Bank this week approved Sri Lanka's request to access concessional financing from the International Development Association (IDA). This type of financing, which is offered at low interest rates, will enable the country to implement its government-led reform programme to stabilise the economy and protect the livelihood of millions of people facing poverty and hunger.

The request is the result of Sri Lanka's sustained deterioration in economic and social conditions, which have reduced income levels, reversed poverty gains, and affected its access to financial markets. This approval means Sri Lanka now becomes an IDA country.

"We are committed to helping the Sri Lankan people at this time of dire need, so their country turns around and restores its economic well-being," said Akihiko Nishio, World Bank Vice President for Development Finance. "The World Bank is ready to support Sri Lanka as it implements reforms that will reduce poverty and rebuild the economy, creating the foundation for sustainable growth."

Through IDA support, the World Bank will provide concessional financing, technical assistance, and policy advice as Sri Lanka implements reforms to drive recovery and enhance the country's economic prospects, especially measures directed towards the poor.

Access to IDA's concessional financing

would also alleviate existing debt service pressures given the more favourable terms IDA financing carries. As an IDA country, Sri Lanka will also be subject to IDA operational policies.

"At this time of critical need in Sri Lanka, we appreciate the World Bank's rapid response and its vision as the first development partner to respond in record time through repurposing existing operations to help preserve Sri Lankan institutions for basic service delivery," said Ali Sabry, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka. "The reverse graduation to IDA will enable us to access resources to help sustain institutions to become more resilient and responsive to the needs of the people of Sri Lanka."

Since 2017, when it first graduated from IDA, Sri Lanka has been creditworthy for lending from the World Bank's International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). To date, in response to the country crisis, the Bank has repurposed USD 325 million from IBRD and a further USD 71 million from other regular Bank operations towards crisis response for basic service needs. This has also helped leverage support from other multilateral development institutions, bilateral donors, and UN agencies around a common crisis response mechanism.

Sri Lanka's reverse-graduation brings the total number of IDA countries to 75.

Cloud ERP

PUSHING BUSINESSES TOWARDS FASTER RECOVERY DURING CRISIS

BY UTHPALA KUMARA

The pandemic revealed gaps and fault lines in business planning, supply chain vulnerabilities declining market share, and, it also made businesses increasingly aware of how important ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) has been to the viability of their businesses. These business challenges raised by the pandemic and the ensuing economic crisis are quickly tipping the scales towards the faster adoption of business tech.

By definition, a Cloud-based ERP system runs on a vendor's Cloud platform as opposed to an on-premises network, allowing organisations to access the system over the internet. It enables teams and organisations to conveniently access the software over the internet, so all that's needed is a connection and a browser to ensure the success of operations.

At a time when the global community is trying to rear its head from multiple black swan events like the Covid-19 pandemic or high economic volatility, businesses will always have the advantage of coping better with significant workplace changes and bouncing back faster with Cloud-based solutions integrated into their workflow.

Switching to a Cloud ERP comes with a host of powerful benefits that are often undelivered by a traditional ERP. This

includes a simplified deployment process that ensures the deployment and assimilation of an ERP within time and budget, reduced upfront investments that reduce the financial burden and ultimately allow more predictable cash flows, improved and more efficient collaboration among users of the system, and most importantly, guaranteed disaster recovery and data security – functionalities not offered by on-premise systems due to technical limitations and cost.

Business success is often based on two essential qualities. The first is business intelligence that supports quick and effective decision-making, which is necessary to outpace the competition and thrive in one's industry. The other is agility, which creates growth and sustainability in a business.

This is what an ERP brings to a business operation. Today, ERPs are central to an organisation's ambition to survive and prosper. It often replaces myriad individual systems, including accounting systems, production planning and inventory control systems. It gives management a core point of control over their business.

This setup becomes particularly critical in times of crisis. While most companies look at investment in an ERP as a depreciating asset, a cloud ERP in this sense continues to provide a return in the long run. It helps companies fortify their interoperability and resilience a great deal.



Uthpala Kumara

Furthermore, it's an evergreen investment that continually refreshes and brings new benefits to its users.

However, as companies already using ERPs or are looking to integrate an ERP into their business to manage the transition to next-generation ERP with digital solutions and cloud features, they must mitigate risks by first addressing their most urgent business challenges and then prepare for a full transformation and a smooth transition of core functionalities. Successful migration to cloud ERP

requires leaders committed to this complex transition because they firmly understand the specific benefits and the overall value to the business, particularly during a crisis.

When businesses are under pressure during a crisis, they often do things they would not do under normal circumstances. Perhaps they eliminated a redundant step to get by with fewer employees or tried outsourcing a portion of the manufacturing process. ERP offers the tools to model and examines whether these steps should become part of their new normal, so they can take valuable lessons from what was otherwise an unpleasant experience. It is also an opportune time to see how technology can improve process efficiency. ERPs can automate processes that may currently be inefficient or consume skilled labour, which could be redeployed elsewhere in the business.

Maintaining a high level of service in the worst of the downturn is critical as this will also position businesses for a more robust recovery. Even when the demand for a company's products wanes, there will likely be some residual demand. They may be able to pick up new customers that their less-prepared competitor, who perhaps radically changed their proposition or ran down their inventory levels, could not serve. Or, if a company's products saw increased demand or shortages,

customers will have looked for alternative sources and may have found them. Will we go back to their earlier suppliers, or will they send additional business to the vendor who was there for them in a crisis? Downtimes can be an opportunity if one is prepared.

Keeping customers happy during stressful times is one of the main challenges of business organisations. But, it is difficult as businesses struggle to manage their sales and inventory expeditiously. It becomes even more complicated when customer and inventory information is housed on multiple platforms. ERP, therefore also helps maintain up-to-date information and facilitates client representatives to access the right, updated information and efficiently handle the customer information, thus improving client satisfaction.

In any case, while crises will continue to disrupt operations across several industries, there is an important lesson that everyone can learn: to look at the opportunities for sustainability and business continuity even as businesses cross tough times. In such a context, Cloud ERP Software systems help organisations stamp out the chaos and turn disruption from an existential threat into a competitive weapon.

(The writer is the Head of Sales & Partnerships – South Asia at IFS)

Seylan Cards Make Way For Heartfelt Joy This Festive Season

As Sri Lankans look forward to celebrating the joyful festive season that is fast approaching, Seylan Cards as the 'Essential Card for Heartfelt Essentials', seeks to make way for heartfelt joy this season, with over 300 merchant partnerships pledging to offer discounts of up to 50% for Seylan Credit and Debit Cardholders.

This holiday season, Seylan Cards have covered the gamut of their Cardholders' favourite merchants across categories that include clothing, shoes, accessories, opticians, online shopping platforms, supermarkets and many more.

Some of the big names in the retail space include popular merchants such as Softlogic Brands, Cool Planet, Fashion Bug, CIB, Hameedia, Sriyani Dresspoint, Samanmal, Nolimit, D Samson & Sons, Velona, Spa Ceylon and Thilakma. Many of these merchants have set up offers on their online



Ruchith Liyanage

platforms as well, so that customers can enjoy a hassle-free shopping experience.

Reflecting on the benefits of Seylan Cards as the Essential Card, supermarkets such as Cargills, Glomark, Arpico and SPAR are offering discounts of up to 30% this season.

Further to this, Seylan Cards introducing a 'Happy Hour' concept with selected merchants including Kelly Felder, Saree Mandir, Dilly & Carlo and Diliganz, where even more attractive discounts will be offered

during a specific time frame. Furthermore, Easy Payment Plan (EPP) options can also be availed for Electronics, Education, Insurance and Health categories during this season.

"Christmas is a celebration that brings people together, and this season Seylan Cards will make way for heartfelt joy among our Cardholders and their families through all the exciting offers we have planned," said Ruchith Liyanage – Head of Cards, Seylan Bank. "We have consciously selected a range of merchant partners to ensure that our customers can shop to their heart's content this season. This is definitely not an opportunity to be missed."

Seylan Bank's mission of spreading heartfelt joy among each and every Cardholder is a priority this season, and the financial institution is hopeful that this will be achieved during the most wonderful time of the year.

To Develop Nation's Sales Workforce SLT Training Centre And SLIM Sign Landmark Agreement

SLT-MOBITEL, the National Information and Communication Technology Solutions Provider's Training Centre (SLTTC), the training arm of the SLT Group signed a landmark agreement with the Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing (SLIM) the National Body for Marketing in Sri Lanka, recently with the aim to develop the nation's sales workforce.

Based on the agreement, SLIM will deliver the proposed National Diploma of Sales Management (NDSM) programme at SLTTC. The nine-month-long curriculum includes different modules such as Digital and Social Selling; Strategic Sales Management and -Sales Forecasting; Planning and Budgeting; Managing People and Performance, etc., thus developing much-needed skill sets of the sales workforce.

The agreement was signed between Janaka Abeysinghe, CEO/SLT and Nuwan Gamage, President/SLIM institute. Janaka Silva, GM/Talent Development, Asiri Indika, DGM/ Talent Development Centre from SLT-MOBITEL, Sanath Senanayake, CEO/Executive Director, Mihirinie Fonseka, DGM Business Development, Asanga Seneviratne, Manager Corporate Sales from SLIM



Janaka Abeysinghe, CEO, SLT and Nuwan Gamage, President, SLIM, exchanging the signed agreement

were also present at the occasion.

The SLTTC was initially established to develop the Company's human resources through training activities. However, currently, in recognition of its programme excellence, the centre offers multiple Qualifications and Certificates catering to a wide group including professionals, employees of private and public sector institutes and the public.

Today, the centre imparts valuable knowledge and vast practical experience gathered over many years and takes pride in building Sri Lanka's knowledge economy. Through affiliation with reputed qualifying

bodies, SLTTC offers courses such as the City & Guilds (UK) and Pearson (UK), 'Technician' certificates and HND Diplomas, especially in the fields of Electrical, Electronic and Telecommunications.

SLTTC has been further recognised by the University of Hertfordshire through a franchise agreement with the centre, to deliver a three-year Bachelor of Engineering (BEng) Degree programme. The University of Hertfordshire is among the top 1,000 universities in the world and, SLTTC holds the sole franchise for its BEng (Hons) Engineering Degree programmes in South Asia.

Sophos 2023 Threat Report highlights Ransomware Remains One of the Greatest Cybercrime Threats to Organisations Criminals 'Follow The Money' By Commercialising Cybercrime: Sophos

Sophos, a global leader in innovating and delivering next-generation cybersecurity as a service, today published its 2023 Threat Report. The report details how the cyber threat landscape has reached a new level of commercialisation and convenience for would-be attackers, with nearly all barriers to entry for committing cybercrime removed through the expansion of cybercrime-as-a-service. The report also addresses how ransomware remains one of the greatest cybercrime threats to organisations with operators innovating their extortion tactics, as well as how demand for stolen credentials continues to grow.

Criminal underground marketplaces like Genesis have long made it possible to buy malware and malware deployment services ("malware-as-a-service"), as well as to sell stolen credentials and other data in bulk. Over the last decade, with the increasing popularity of ransomware, an entire 'ransomware-as-a-service' economy sprung up. Now, in 2022, this 'as-a-service' model has expanded, and nearly every aspect of the cybercrime toolkit – from initial infection to ways to avoid detection – is available for purchase.

"This isn't just the usual fare, such as malware, scamming and phishing kits for

sale," said Sean Gallagher, principal threat researcher, Sophos. "Higher rung cybercriminals are now selling tools and capabilities that once were solely in the hands of some of the most sophisticated attackers as services to other actors. For example, this past year, we saw advertisements for OPSEC-as-a-service where the sellers offered to help attackers hide Cobalt Strike infections, and we saw scanning-as-a-service, which gives buyers access to legitimate commercial tools like Metasploit so that they can find and then exploit vulnerabilities. The commoditisation of nearly every component of cybercrime is impacting the threat landscape and opening up opportunities for any type of attacker with any type of skill level."

With the expansion of the 'as-a-service' economy, underground cybercriminal marketplaces are also becoming increasingly commodified and are operating like mainstream businesses. Cybercrime sellers are not just advertising their services but are also listing job offers to recruit attackers with distinct skills. Some marketplaces now have dedicated help-wanted pages and recruiting staff, while job seekers are posting summaries of their skills and qualifications.



Sean Gallagher

"Early ransomware operators were rather limited in how much they could do because their operations were centralised; group members were carrying out every aspect of an attack. But as ransomware became hugely profitable, they looked for ways to scale their productions. So, they began outsourcing parts of their operations, creating an entire infrastructure to support ransomware. Now, other cybercriminals have taken a cue from the success of this infrastructure and are following suit," said Gallagher.

Indeed, as the cybercrime infrastructure

has expanded, ransomware has remained highly popular—and highly profitable. Over the past year, ransomware operators have worked on expanding their potential attack service by targeting platforms other than Windows while also adopting new languages like Rust and Go to avoid detection. Some groups, most notably Lockbit 3.0, have been diversifying their operations and creating more 'innovative' ways to extort victims.

The evolving economics of the underground has not only incentivised the growth of ransomware and the 'as-a-service' industry but also increased the demand for credential theft. With the expansion of web services, various types of credentials, especially cookies, can be used in numerous ways to gain a deeper foothold in networks, even bypassing MFA. Credential theft also remains one of the easiest ways for novice criminals to gain access to underground marketplaces and begin their 'career'.

Sophos also analysed the following trends:

- The war in Ukraine had global repercussions for the cyber threat landscape. Immediately following the invasion, there was an explosion of financially motivated scams, while

nationalism led to a shake-up of criminal alliances between Ukrainians and Russians, particularly among ransomware affiliates

- Criminals continue to exploit legitimate executables and utilise 'living off the land binaries' (LOLBins) to launch various types of attacks, including ransomware. In some cases, attackers deploy legitimate but vulnerable system drivers in "bring your own driver" attacks to attempt to shut down endpoint detection and response products to evade detection.
- Mobile devices are now at the centre of new types of cybercrimes. Not only are attackers still using fake applications to deliver malware injectors, spyware and banking-associated malware, but newer forms of cyber fraud have been growing in popularity, such as 'pig butchering' schemes. And this crime is no longer just affecting Android users, but iOS users as well.
- The devaluation of Monero, one of the most popular cryptocurrencies for crypto miners, led to a decrease in one of the oldest and most popular types of crypto crime – crypto mining. But mining malware continues to spread through automated 'bots' on both Windows and Linux systems.



SZA reveals 'S.O.S' album release date

SZA brought a couple surprises to her appearance Saturday Night Live recently. In addition to revealing the release date of her sophomore album, *S.O.S.*, the TDE singer-songwriter also debuted a new song from the upcoming set.

For her first song during the Keke Palmer-hosted episode, SZA performed her recent single *Shirt*, which debuted at No. 11 on the Billboard Hot 100 in early November. Toward the end of the moody song, where she performed against a starry background while flanked by two dancers, SZA cleverly snuck in some imagery announcing the December 9 release date of her long-awaited second album, *S.O.S.*

Days earlier, SZA unveiled the project's surreal cover art, which features the artist donning a sports jersey while sitting on the edge of a diving board planted over a large body of water. *S.O.S.* follows her 2017 debut, *Ctrl*, which debuted at No. 3 on the Billboard 200.

For her second SNL performance, SZA gave another sneak peek of her upcoming album by debuting the new song *Blind*. This time around, the singer opted for a full backing band with strings, while delicately singing the beautiful track amid splashing waves and a hazy lighthouse. This marked SZA's second SNL appearance following her debut in 2017 in support of *Ctrl*.

SZA recently covered Billboard's R&B/Hip-Hop Power Players issue. In the cover story, she questioned her longevity in music and where she sees her career going forward. "I feel like music, in this capacity, I don't see longevity," SZA admitted. "I like to create, I like to write, I like to sing, and I like to share. But I don't know if chasing after superstardom or whatever I'm supposed to be doing right now is sustainable for me or for anybody. I'mma take a good swing at it, and I'mma give 'em my absolute best."

(billboard)

A Harry Potter-style world with an Arab twist

The enticing premise of a contemporary fantasy novel is that the everyday is, in fact, full of magic.

Arab-American writer George Jreije tackles this idea with several layers in his middle-grade contemporary fantasy debut, *Shad Hadid and the Alchemists of Alexandria*.

As he grapples with the familiar tropes of the genre, Jreije also presents a new type of protagonist who can wield a unique brand of magic.

He's a first-generation Arab immigrant who has a love for Middle Eastern desserts and discovers he's an alchemist — it's a new territory in the contemporary fantasy landscape.

"The inspiration for the idea of a 12-year-old boy who discovers he's an alchemist came from wanting to write something that was boldly unique and original," Jreije tells *The National*.

"I wanted to write something that was part of my lived experience. Not just being an Arab, but being an Arab-American and being someone who loves Arab food."

Jreije's novel follows Shad Hadid, a Lebanese boy who lives with his grandmother, Teta, in Portland, Oregon. Shad doesn't fit in at school and dreams of one day opening a Middle Eastern bakery selling desserts.

One of the core strengths of the novel is Shad himself. Clever, sarcastic, brave, curious and fiercely protective over his family and friends, readers will find themselves rooting for him despite the obstacles he finds himself up against, and they'll no doubt find his streak for troublemaking rather charming.

"Shad himself is very much a window into the boy that I was when I was 12," Jreije says with a laugh. "I think his biggest personality trait is that he likes causing some sort of trouble or does so unintentionally. And I was a troublemaker, but I always had good intentions."

While very confident, Shad is also rather lonely and has the overwhelming responsibility of caring for his sick grandmother, something which allows him to use his talents as an exceptional cook and baker. Then, one day, while trying to outsmart bullies, take care of his grandmother and stay on top of his school work, several extraordinary things happen. Shad is attacked by a menacing shadow in front of his favourite bakery, discovers that he comes from a long line of alchemists and receives an invitation to Alexandria Academy, a school of magic.

Any reader of the *Harry Potter* series may find the premise familiar — orphaned child discovers they possess some form of magic and is whisked away to a school where they learn about themselves while also fighting the forces of evil.

But Jreije's story is very different. Not only is Shad a Lebanese immigrant to America, who uses Arabic words and phrases, and not only is alchemy's Islamic roots explored in the story but, most interestingly, the magical school where Shad hopes to learn more about the ancient science, has never even heard of alchemy.

"I wanted to flip this trope on its head," Jreije says.

"Shad goes to this school and yet the alchemy is not there. There is no sign of it. It's not him going to this wondrous school and learning all these secrets and he's being taught this ancient art from all of these individuals. He goes there and there's no alchemy." Claiming to be a school for technology, deans and students are more interested in progress for progress's sake. This forces Shad to look beyond the facade of the school to discover a plot by the necromancers, a dark, sinister subgroup of alchemists and their plans to create an elixir for eternal life and something much more dangerous. "I wanted to push readers off a cliff and say, you're not in your typical story anymore," Jreije says. "Now you're in my story, and you're in for a ride, so buckle up."

Shad Hadid and the Alchemists of Alexandria is definitely a fast-paced story for middle-grade readers, full of adventure, action, themes of good and evil, friendship, culture, character transformations and diversity.

(thenational)

Entertainment TODAY



Aftersun

BEST MOVIES OF 2022

Here we are: somehow it's December already, 2022 has flown by at Mach 10 speed, and it's already time to tot up the very best movies of the year. It's been a doozy — with picture houses back open and in full swing, massive blockbusters sweeping across screens and into our eyeballs, and all kinds of cinematic surprises winning our hearts. It's been the year of the multiverse, both in the MCU and beyond. It's been a year of searing social commentary, delivered in the form of gripping crowd-pleasers. It's been a year of auteurs taking on gigantic budgets and doing fascinating things with them. And it's been a year of comebacks — not just from Pete 'Maverick' Mitchell, but the cinema itself. As *Vin Diesel* perhaps said it best, "The movies."

With all the year's major releases now out — aside from the long-awaited return trip to Pandora in *Avatar: The Way Of Water* — the members of *Team Empire* were polled for their top 10 films of 2022. Those individual ballots were totted up into the Top 20 below. As usual, we're running from UK release dates (yes, we know some of these were 2021 in the States; no, we haven't got *Pearl* or *Marcel The Shell With Shoes On* yet), and are looking at films released both on the big screen, and beamed straight into our living rooms (which, half the time, we also wished we were watching in a cinema). Across these 12 months, movies have taken us to all kinds of new worlds and experiences — from berserker Viking brawls, to fluffy panda-shaped puberty, to 1980s film school, and to the Comanche nation to face down one ugly human — well, you get the picture.

Read our list of the best movies of 2022 below.

Aftersun

Charlotte Wells's somber, sweet, and subtle debut feature was one of the year's best surprises, with its tender two-hander between young dad Calum (Paul Mescal) and his pre-teen daughter Sophie (Frankie Corio). Set on a holiday resort in Turkey, the pair make use of what precious time they have together before school begins. Sophie is beginning to see the world a little differently; one full of bare shoulders and kissing. Calum meanwhile has demons to battle, although they're never addressed head-on. Mescal and Corio are excellent, their collective presence as joyful to behold as it is painful, as the cracks in Calum's veneer deepen. You will struggle to find a better British filmmaking debut in 2022.

The Worst Person In The World

You never really stop coming of age — an idea wonderfully explored in Joachim Trier's funny, relatable, romantic, highly emotional *The Worst*



The Worst Person In The World



The Banshees Of Inisherin

Person In The World. Renate Reinsve stars as the indecisive, impulsive Julie, roaming through life (and Oslo), trying to juggle following her heart with making bad choices, desperately wanting to find something to commit to. It manages to chronicle late twenty-something malaise with refreshing authenticity throughout its 12 chapters, thanks to its impeccable Oscar-nominated screenplay and mesmerising, honest performances. The quiet, gut-punch moments are perfectly balanced with naturalistic wit, and the fantastical sequences (a city frozen in time as Julie runs towards her desires; a psychedelic trip interspersed with animation) elevate it even further.

The Banshees Of Inisherin

Marking the return of Martin McDonagh — who excels at serving up biting humour wrapped in misanthropy — *The Banshees Of Inisherin* is his best work yet, contained after the rather epic *Three Billboards*. In the early 1920s, on a (fictional) Irish island, Colin Farrell (incredible) is Pádraic, a well-meaning, good-hearted fellow... or at least he starts off that way, before his best friend Colm (Brendan Gleeson — also incredible), bored of idle chit-chat, decides he doesn't want to be his mate anymore. From there, McDonagh explores a disintegrating relationship, flame-throwing into the mix politics, art, donkeys, and dismemberment. With an excellent supporting cast providing various degrees of heartbreak — including Kerry Condon as Pádraic's sister Siobhán, and the ever-reliable Barry Keoghan as a horrendously troubled young man — McDonagh gives us a note-perfect piece of

upsetting melancholia that socks you in the gut.

Top Gun: Maverick

We — that is to say, *Empire* (and, well, an entire generation of cinemagoers) — were trepidatious. Over 30 years after *Top Gun* defined a decade and made Tom Cruise an icon, he and producer Jerry Bruckheimer were bringing *Maverick* back to the Danger Zone. No good could come from it! This is 2022, for Pete Mitchell's sake! But it's clear Tom Cruise and Jerry Bruckheimer also didn't want to trample on his legacy. Along with director Joseph Kosinski and a crack team of screenwriters — including Cruise's personal wingman Christopher McQuarrie — they created a sequel that improves on the original in every way. *Top Gun: Maverick* has a humongous beating heart, some of the most thrilling action sequences ever devised, and cracking chemistry all-round — from *Maverick's* tête-à-têtes with his gruff superiors, to Rooster (Miles Teller) and Hangman's (Glen Powell) fractious squabbling... and then there's that Val Kilmer scene. We laughed. We cried. We clenched. Action cinema doesn't get better than this.

Everything Everywhere All At Once

Even in the vastness of the multiverse, the chances of a film as boundlessly creative, heart-stoppingly emotional, and adrenaline-pounding exciting as *Everything Everywhere All At Once* coming into existence is slim-to-none. To say that the Daniels' follow-up to the barmy Swiss Army Man is a revelation is an understatement — its combination of crude comedy, surreal sci-fi, inventive action and epic emotional stakes make it one of the most magical, original movies in recent years.

Michelle Yeoh is at the top of her game as Evelyn, a laundromat owner with too many thoughts and not enough time — with too many dreams and too little commitment to making them happen. As it turns out, that makes her the perfect candidate to take on Jobu Tupaki, a dark force who has learned to harness the power of the multiverse, and wants to see it swallowed whole by an 'everything bagel' black hole.

There are secret raccoon-chefs, hot-dog hands, and hyper-hench pinky fingers. Jamie Lee Curtis does kung-fu in a tax office. Ke Huy Quan delivers heartbreaking monologues and beats people up with a bumbag. A near-silent scene of two rocks with googly eyes becomes pure cinematic ecstasy. But all of the absurdity in *EAAO* makes the grounded, ever-relatable theme of tension between parents and children all the more powerful, with further nuance in its intersections of immigrant identity, cultural heritage, and LGBTQ+ relationships. This film is love and pain, strength and weakness, light and darkness, all wrapped up in a perfect, undefinable package. It is everything, everywhere, all at once.

(empireonline)

PUZZLES

DAILY SUDOKU 2095

			8				5	
		2				3		
		6	9			7		
			5			2		
1					6		9	4
	7	9						
8	2				4	1		9
6	4			7				8

YESTERDAY'S SUDOKU 2094

3	1	8	5	4	7	2	6	9
9	7	4	3	2	6	8	5	1
2	5	6	9	1	8	4	7	3
6	8	3	2	9	4	7	1	5
1	2	7	8	5	3	6	9	4
5	4	9	6	7	1	3	8	2
8	3	2	1	6	9	5	4	7
7	9	5	4	8	2	1	3	6
4	6	1	7	3	5	9	2	8

Crossword

Puzzle 2195

1	2	3	4	5	6
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8					
9					
10					
11	12				13
14					
15		16		17	18
19					
20					
21					22
23					
24					

CLUES

Across

- 7 fancy dock for small yachts and cabin cruisers (6)
- 8 rapid active commotion (6)
- 9 Yearn (4)
- 10 Tavern where ale is sold (8)
- 11 Abridge (7)
- 13 Append (5)
- 15 Earlier in time (5)
- 17 News (7)
- 20 One of the bony segments of the spinal column (8)
- 21 Hindu prince or king in India (4)
- 23 Forty winks (6)
- 24 Hinder (6)

Down

- 1 Amylum (4)
- 2 Larger (6)
- 3 16th century small vessel with broad bows (7)
- 4 Frequently (5)
- 5 Amputate (6)
- 6 Decorating (8)
- 12 Completely airtight (8)
- 14 Counterpart (3-1-3)
- 16 Dumb (6)
- 18 Burst out (6)
- 19 Submarine (1-4)
- 22 Martial art (4)

SOLUTION FOR CROSSWORD 2194

1	C	P	3	P	4	S	5	F	6	U	F			
7	C	H	I	L	L	I	W	I	L	L	O	W		
8	I	A	G	I	A	L								
9	S	T	A	Y	10	M	O	N	O	X	I	D	E	
11	U	E	E	E	E									
12	T	O	P	P	I	N	G	13	S	N	O	R	T	
14	N							14	C					
15	S	L	U	R	P	16	S	H	A	17	P	E	L	Y
18	O	A	18	C	A	O								
19	C	O	C	K	E	R	E	L	21	L	I	K	E	
22	K	I	E											
23	G	E	I	S	H	A	24	C	A	T	T	L	E	
	R	H	M	E	Y	P								

UP & DOWN Words™

1. INNER

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

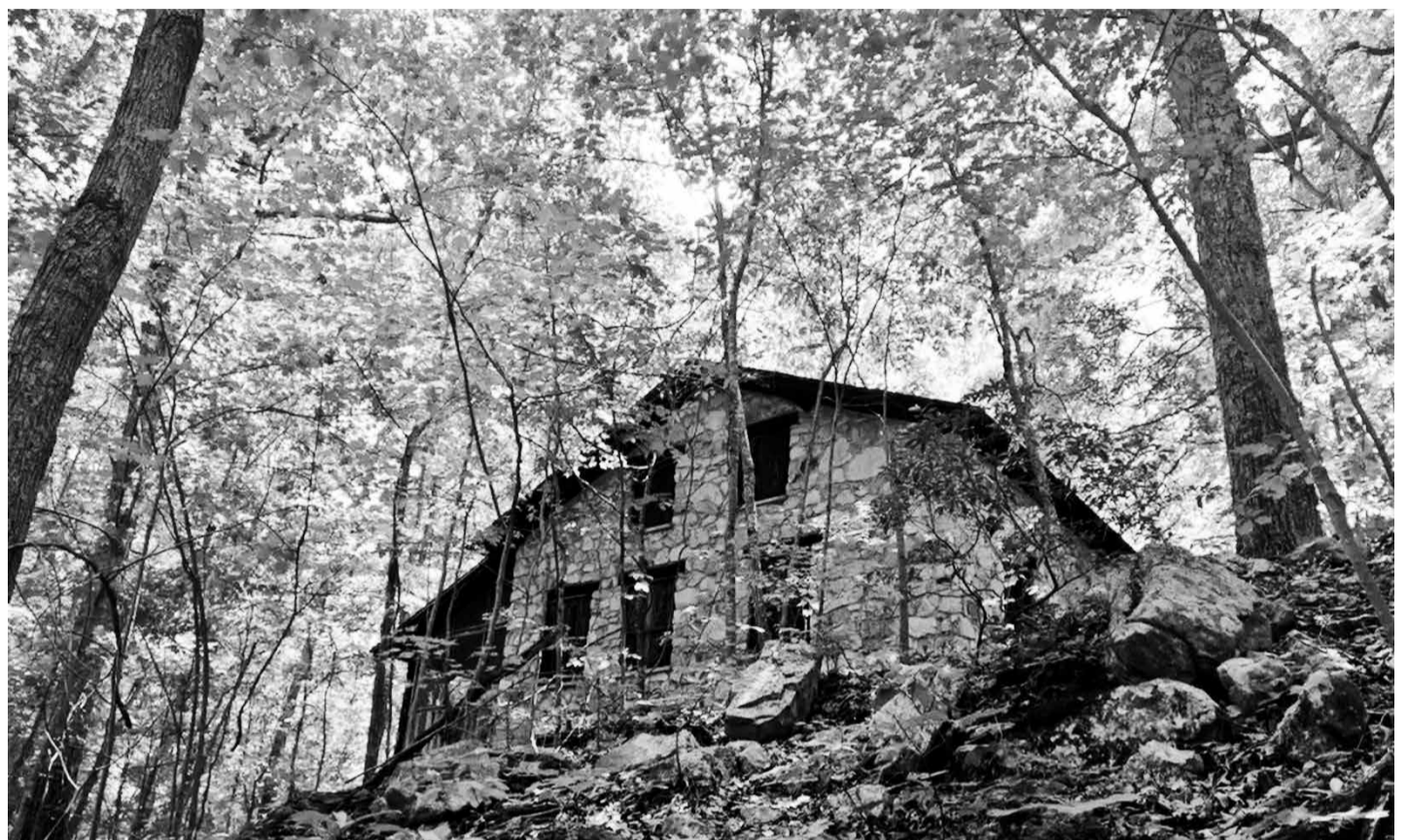
6. _____

7. _____

BOOK

- CLUES**
- 1. Thoughts
 - 2. Larynx
 - 3. Certain dance move
 - 4. Resign
 - 5. Reason to write a check
 - 6. Part of a credit report
 - 7. Required reading for many students
- Yesterday's Answer**
- 1. TOM
 - 2. CRUISE
 - 3. SHIP
 - 4. CAPTAIN
 - 5. MORGAN
 - 6. STANLEY
 - 7. CUP
- © 2011 Universal Uclick

BEST RECENT CRIME AND THRILLER



BY ALISON FLOOD

Henry Thorne is a clever, sensitive 10-year-old who has already been through more than most children his age after the death of his parents. He's living with his uncle and aunt, trying to find a new way of being when he is kidnapped by a gang of very nasty men for the millions in insurance money paid out on his father's death. They take him to an isolated house deep in the woods while they await the meeting of their demands. But Henry, who has always been more attuned to the world than most, knows that his kidnappers aren't the only danger lurking in the forest.

LA-based writer Philip Fracassi's *A Child Alone With Strangers* has all the elements of a police procedural, as the FBI desperately hunt for Henry while the boy does his best to stay alive. But it's also a perfectly pitched horror novel, visceral and terrifying, delving deep into an eldritch world that sits alongside our own. It reminds me of early Stephen King — *It*, *Firestarter*, *The Shining* — but Fracassi also brings a depth of understanding to his monsters, human and otherwise, that makes *A Child Alone With Strangers* deeply moving. I only picked this up because of a recommendation from the excellent horror podcast *Talking Scared*. I am now forcing it on everyone I know. Highly recommended.

Something uncanny also stalks the pages of Sharon Bolton's *The Buried*, a follow-up to *The Craftsman*, in which *Florence Lovelady*, Britain's most senior serving policewoman, is tasked by imprisoned serial killer *Larry Glassbrook* with solving the mystery of the remains

discovered at abandoned children's home Black Moss Manor. Florence has no desire to return to Sabden, the small industrial town in the shadow of Pendle Hill where she almost lost her life years earlier, but as she digs into the crime she discovers that things might not be quite as she remembers them.

Bolton infuses Sabden with claustrophobia, with the sense of something evil stalking the streets, as she moves her narrative between the days after Larry's arrest for murder, and the period around his death 30 years later. "Superstition was still rife in the place that had produced the Pendle witches," she writes. And "something in the town had slipped. A veneer of civilisation had been rubbed away. It was as though with the unmasking of the killer — Larry — something dreadful had been unleashed." Menacing and complex, this is lots of fun — but read *The Craftsman* first to enjoy it to the full.

Paula Rodriguez's debut novel *Urgent Matters* opens with a devastating train crash in the suburbs of Buenos Aires, the reality of the horror brutally laid out, the bodies "piled up, jumbled together, crushed against the walls of the carriage, spilling out the window, dislocated, broken, busted". Forty-three people are dead, but not Hugo Lamadrid, a man wanted by the police who uses the chaos to go on the run. Detective Dominguez

believes Hugo survived the crash and is on his tail. Hugo's partner, Marta, questioned by Dominguez and unaware — uncaring — of Hugo's whereabouts, flees with their daughter, Evelyn, while his mother-in-law uses the situation for nefarious purposes of her own.

Translated from the Spanish by Sarah Moses, this is fast-paced and funny, breathing life into a disparate and intriguing cast of characters: Marta's sister, who sells sex toys on the side; the teenage Evelyn, obsessively worrying about having stolen her teacher's mobile; the focused detective who loses his rag over a yoghurt. "It's a fruit base, you idiot. When was the last time you bought yoghurt? They all come like that now."

Emma Haughton hit the bestseller charts last year with her locked-room Antarctic thriller *The Dark*. Follow-up *The Sanctuary* is another locked-room mystery, this time set at a retreat deep in the Mexican desert. Zoey, estranged from her family, going nowhere, wakes up one morning to find herself at the Sanctuary with no idea how she got there, and only vague memories of what happened the night before in New York. She's told that a mysterious benefactor has funded her stay at the luxurious, remote refuge, but as she investigates what's really going on she becomes increasingly afraid. This is a great slice of creepy escapism, which, like *The Dark*, makes full use of its inaccessible, deadly setting.

(theguardian)

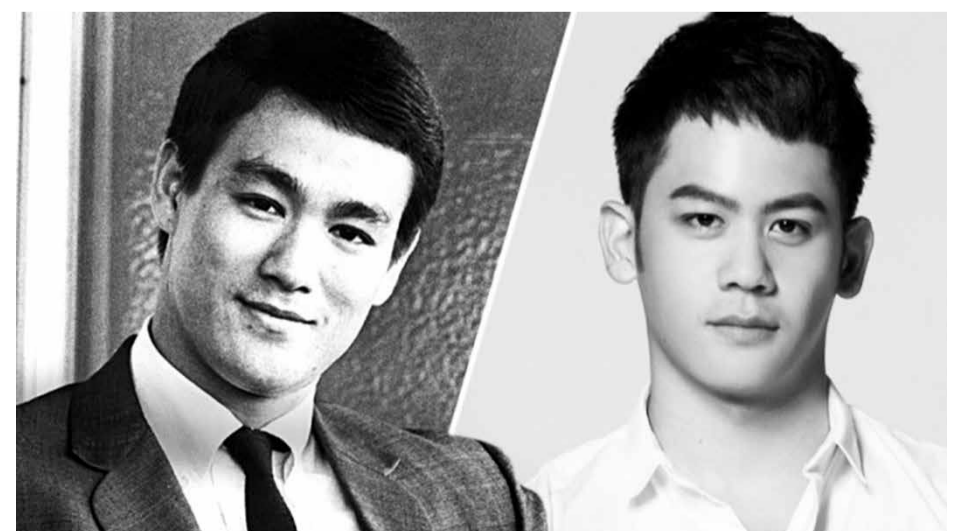
Ang Lee's son to play Bruce Lee in new movie

Having seen big success with the martial arts epic *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* more than two decades ago, director Ang Lee is now planning a film about one of the masters of screen combat: Bruce Lee. And he hasn't had to look too far for a star, casting his son Mason Lee in the lead.

According to Deadline, Ang and Mason have been planning this one for the last few years, with the latter committing to an extensive training programme through lockdown and beyond to get into fighting shape.

Bruce Lee, of course, needs little introduction as an icon of cinema and a Chinese-American groundbreaker who still faced racism and obstacles even as he became a global star. And, of course, he died shockingly young at 32, just before *Enter The Dragon* cemented his breakthrough.

"Accepted as neither fully American nor fully Chinese, Bruce Lee was a bridge between East and West who introduced Chinese Kung Fu to the world, a scientist of combat and an iconic performing artist who revolutionised both the



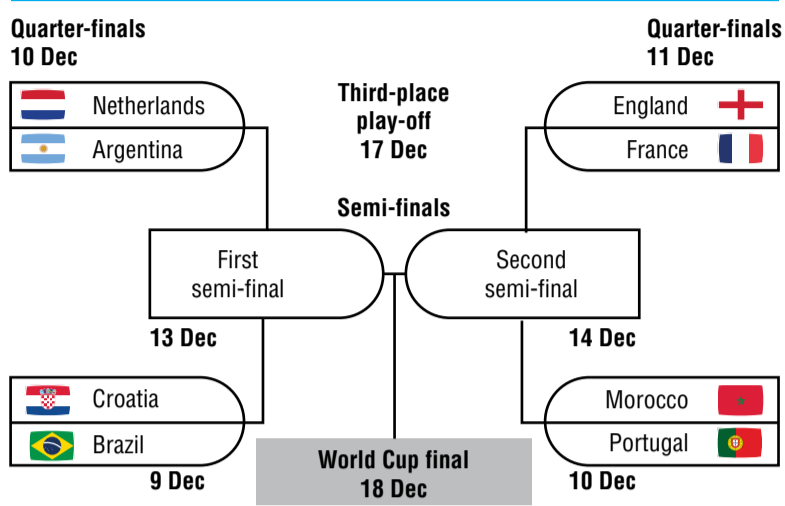
martial arts and action cinema," Ang Lee tells Deadline. "I feel compelled to tell the story of this brilliant, unique human being who yearned for belonging, possessed tremendous power in a 135-pound-frame, and who, through tireless hard work, made impossible

dreams into reality." Foxcatcher writer Dan Futterman is the latest person to tackle the script, which has been through a wealth of drafts as Lee and Sony developed it. Now it finally seems ready to kick into gear.

(empireonline)

SPORTS TODAY

FIFA World Cup 2022 Quarter-finals



Goncalo Ramos

FIFA World Cup 2022 Portugal rout Switzerland to advance to QF Ramos nets hat trick

Goncalo Ramos replaced Cristiano Ronaldo and scored a hat trick as Portugal stormed into the World Cup quarter-finals with an emphatic 6-1 victory over Switzerland on Tuesday.

Head coach Fernando Santos made a brave call to drop Ronaldo following a dispute in their last match, but Portugal proved to be free-scoring without him, setting up a quarter-final clash with Morocco on Saturday.

Ramos, making his first international start at age 21, opened the scoring at the Lusail stadium with a rocket strike inside goalkeeper Yann Sommer's near post before veteran defender Pepe, 39, became the oldest scorer in a World Cup knockout game with a thumping header.

Ramos struck again to start the second as he got on the end of defender Diogo Dalot's low cross and tapped home between Sommer's legs. Raphael Guerreiro made it four as he capped a well-worked team move with a powerful strike.

Switzerland struck one back on 58 minutes when Manuel Akanji found space at the back post from a corner and comfortably nodded in, but it did not spur a comeback, with Ramos striking his third with a deft chip over an onrushing Sommer, becoming the youngest male player to score a hat trick in a World Cup knockout match since Brazil legend Pele in 1958.

Ronaldo was brought off the bench on 72 minutes, and had a goal ruled out for offside, but Portugal still had time to net their sixth and final goal with a superb strike from substitute Rafael Leao in added time. "Cristiano Ronaldo talks to me and everyone in the team. He's our leader and always tries to help," Ramos said after the match. "I don't know if I will start the next game, that's up to the coach. I have to work as hard as I can

and then we'll see."

It was Portugal's first knockout victory since the 2006 World Cup in Germany, having suffered a group stage exit (Brazil 2014) and round of 16 elimination (South Africa 2010 and Russia 2018) since then.

After a tepid start, the game came to life when Ramos opened the scoring in the 17th minute by picking up Joao Felix's incisive pass before blasting the ball into the top corner from a tight angle to put the Portuguese ahead.

They doubled their lead through skipper Pepe when the 39-year-old timed his leap to perfection to rise above the two Swiss centre backs and head home from a Bruno Fernandes corner in the 33rd minute, with Sommer well beaten yet again.

At the other end, Switzerland striker Breel Embolo was frustrated by the Portugal defence despite the odd surging run into the final third, while their best chance of the half came when Xherdan Shaqiri's free kick was pushed out for a corner.

Sommer, returning from illness, did well to deny Ramos his second goal of the half with a fingertip save from a counter-attack as the Portuguese went in with a 2-0 lead at the break.

However, the beleaguered keeper could do nothing when Dalot sent in a cross six minutes after the restart with Ramos in the right place again at the near post to slip the ball between Sommer's legs and give Portugal a three-goal cushion.

"We did not show the mentality that we usually bring onto the pitch," Sommer said. "It is a very bitter evening. We gave the opponent far too much space. In a few situations I did not look too good either. This is not the way to survive against such opponents."

(Agencies)

LANKA PREMIER LEAGUE 2022

Today - 3:30 PM



Avishka Fernando



Sadeera Samarawickrama

Lanka Premier League 2022

SADEERA, AVISHKA AND BOWLERS SET UP JAFFNA KINGS 9 WICKET WIN

BY MUSTAQ SYDEEN

A collective all round performance helped Jaffna Kings register a thumping 9 wicket win over Dambulla Aura in the third match of the Lanka Premier League 2022 worked off at Hambanthota yesterday.

Batting first, Dambulla Aura were restricted to 121 runs, and in reply Sadeera Samarawickrama and Avishka Fernando's century stand saw Jaffna Kings achieve the target in just 15.4 overs.

Electing to bat, Dambulla Aura got off to a strong start with a 63 run partnership for the first wicket between Jordan Cox and Shevon Daniel.

Jordan Cox clubbed three sixes inside the powerplay and raced to a quick 43 runs off 22 deliveries including 3 fours and 4 sixes, while Shevon complemented his partner well with a four and a six for his 26 ball 19 runs to take Dambulla Aura to 49-0 at the end of 6 overs.

Vijayakanth Viyaskanth delivered for the Jaffna Kings with the first breakthrough when Jordan swiped one straight to Thisara Perera at short mid wicket. To make things worse for Dambulla, Jaffna was rewarded with their second wicket in the very next over when Shevon Daniel holed out to the deep where James Fuller completed the catch.

With both openers back in the pavilion, Dambulla middle order simply collapsed, as they were reduced from 63-0 to 99-7 losing 6 wickets for 36 runs to shell shock the Dambulla dug out.

Their batters were never comfortable in the middle as wickets kept on tumbling with the likes of Bhanuka Rajapaksa (18), Sikandar Raza (5), Dasun Shanaka (6), Ramesh Mendis (10) and Chathuranga de Silva (1) all departing cheaply with none of them able to at least pass the 20 run mark.

Paul van Meekeren offered some resistance from the lower order with back-to-back boundaries, but brilliant bowling saw such efforts cut short and they were restricted for a below par total of 121-9 in their allotted 20 overs.

Mahesh Theekshana and Vijayakanth Viyaskanth ripped through the Dambulla batting line up sharing three wickets apiece.

Chasing 122 runs, Sadeera Samarawickrama and Avishka Fernando gave the Jaffna Kings the perfect start with a 118 run partnership for the first wicket.

Sadeera top scored with a brilliant unbeaten 62 runs off 44 deliveries including 7 boundaries and a six, while Avishka Fernando (51) notched up his first half century of the season to seal the match. Avishka's was the only wicket to fall in

DAMBULLA AURA

J. Cox c Perera b Viyaskanth	43
S. Daniel c Fuller b Zaman Khan	19
B. Rajapaksa c Fuller b Viyaskanth	18
S. Raza c Wellalage b Fuller	05
D. Shanaka c Wellalage b Theekshana	06
R. Mendis c Z. Khan b Fuller	10
C. de Silva c de Silva b Theekshana	01
L. Madushanka c Z. Khan b Theekshana	01
N. Ahmed c S. Malik b Viyaskanth	02
Paul van Meekeren not out	11
L. Kumara not out	01
Extras	04
Total (20 Overs)	121
Fall of wickets: 1-63 (Jordan Cox), 2-65 (S. Daniel), 3-75 (S. Raza), 4-90 (D. Shanaka), 5-96 (B. Rajapaksa), 6-97 (C. de Silva), 7-99 (L. Madushanka), 8-102 (N. Ahmad), 9-11 (R. Mendis)	
Bowling: Maheesh Theekshana 4-0-20-3, Vijayakanth Viyaskanth 4-0-24-3, James Fuller 4-0-16-2, Zaman Khan 4-0-28-1	

JAFFNA KINGS

Sadeera Samarawickrama not out	62
Avishka Fernando st c Cox b Noor Ahmad	51
Ashan Randika not out	04
Extras	05
Total (15.4 Overs)	122
Fall of wickets: 1-118 (A. Fernando, 15.3 ov)	
Bowling: Noor Ahmed 3.4-0-28-1	

Jaffna's innings when he was stumped off Noor Ahmed's bowling with just four runs required for victory.

However, one down batter Ashan Randika did the needful with a delightful shot to the boundary off the first ball he faced to take their team over the line with 26 balls to spare.

47th Sri Lanka Schools Swimming Championship 2022

Two New records set on Day one



Action from Day one

M.M. Eknaligoda (Ananda College) and Anusara Abeygoonawardhana (Wycherley International School) set new records on day one of the 47th Sri Lanka Schools Swimming Championship 2022 which commenced at the Sugathadasa Swimming complex.

Eknaligoda set his record in the Boys Under-14 50m Backstroke with a time of 30.71, while Anusara set his record in the

Boys Under-20 400m IM with a time of 5.02.17.

The Championship commenced yesterday and among the distinguished guests at the opening ceremony were Susil Premajayantha (Minister of Education), Chandani Udakumbura (President SLSASA), Krishan Duminda (Secretary SLSASA), Jason Avencena (Managing Director, Nestle Lanka),



Bandula Egodage (Vice President - Corporate Regulatory Affairs, Nestle Lanka) and Ruwan Welikala (Vice President- Dairy, Nestle Lanka).

Offering a national platform for 5,000 children representing over 200 schools, the championship is organized by the Sri Lanka Schools Aquatic Sports Association (SLSASA) and sponsored by Nestle Milo.

Novak Djokovic to make Australia return in Adelaide one year after deportation

Novak Djokovic will play in January's Adelaide International, a year after being deported from Australia because of his Covid-19 vaccination status.

The Serb, who has won a record nine Australian Open titles, is also set to compete at the first Grand Slam of the year after his visa ban was overturned.

Britain's Andy Murray, Kyle Edmund and Jack Draper will also play in Adelaide, with the event beginning on 1 January.

The Australian Open starts 15 days later in Melbourne.

As well as world number five Djokovic, there will be three other top-10 men's players in Adelaide, with Felix Auger-Aliassime, Daniil Medvedev and Andrey Rublev also competing.

The women's field is strong too as top-

10 players Ons Jabeur, Aryna Sabalenka, Daria Kasatkina and Veronika Kudermetova take part.

Djokovic, 35, won the season-ending ATP Finals in December and will be bidding to win a 22nd Grand Slam title, which would take him level with Spain's Rafael Nadal, who claimed the title in Melbourne at the start of this year.

Serbia's Djokovic was deported before the 2022 event after his visa was cancelled. He was automatically banned for three years from entering Australia, but in November learned that he would receive a visa for 2023.

Meanwhile, Britain's Emma Raducanu will start her season at the Auckland Open in New Zealand, which starts on 2 January.

(Agencies)

