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STAY UPDATED!**WEDNESDAY**

27 December 2023

Latest Edition

Price : Rs 70.00

Vol. 13/028

Immunoglobulin IV fiasco

CID questions Keheliya for over five hours

BY KEERTHI MENDIS

Former Health Minister Keheliya Rambukwella was questioned by the CID yesterday (26) for over five hours to record a statement on the controversial issue surrounding the import of sub-standard Immunoglobulin IV.

Continued on Page 2

SRI LANKA LACKS DECEASED IDENTIFICATION METHODS IN DISASTERS – PROF. PERERA

Living and dead must be treated with dignity

DMA does not focus on those killed in disasters

BY LALITH RUHUNAGE AND RAVINDRA CHANDRAL - HINIDUMA

Prof. U.C.P. Perera, Judicial Medical Officer (JMO) at the Forensic Medicine Department of the Medical College in Karapitiya, Galle highlighted the absence of a proper method to scientifically identify numerous

40,000 perished in tsunami, not even 10 per cent were definitely identified

Setting up of mobile morgues mooted in at least one hospital per district

perish in disasters, citing a lack of required facilities.

During the tsunami memorial event held yesterday (26) in Akmeemana, Prof. Perera said despite 19 years passing since the tsunami, there was no method to confirm identities of the deceased persons through scientific means in the event of a disaster.

Continued on Page 2



Measles outbreak in Kurunegala



BY WIJESINGHE WELIKANDA - KURUNEGALA

In addition to a surge in dengue cases in the Kurunegala District due to adverse weather, there is an increased incidence of measles during this period, it was revealed at a meeting held at the Kurunegala District Secretariat.

Continued on Page 2

AHP on warpath again No testing facility for patients with Covid symptoms

BY BUWANAKA S. PERERA

The Academy of Health Professionals (AHP) criticised the Ministry of Health yesterday (26), expressing dissatisfaction with the existing system at hospital level to carry out essential Covid-19 tests amidst a renewed surge of Covid cases in multiple countries.

Continued on Page 2

CID PC drowns in Katukurunda seas



BY SUMITH RANAWAKA - POTHUPUTIYA

A police constable affiliated to the CID drowned while sea bathing with friends at the Katukurunda Beach in Kalutara.

The 22-year-old officer, Deshanjana Tharinda, hailed from the Nagoda area in Kalutara.

Continued on Page 2



30 criminals to be repatriated in Special Ops – Minister Alles



BY METHMALIE DISSANAYAKE

Sri Lanka has launched a special operation to arrest and repatriate 30 criminals involved in drug trafficking and underworld activities operating from outside the country. Minister of Public Security Tiran Alles revealed.

Minister Alles participating in an event in Kinuwela said discussions were underway with the concerned countries to extradite these individuals to Sri Lanka and disclosed that

intelligence reports identified 29 underworld members operating in Dubai and one in France. Responding to inquiries about the nationwide Yuktihya operation to control narcotics and underworld activities, Minister Alles assured that there was no decision to half the operation and assured that it will continue.

"Objections to Yuktihya come from those hindering its progress. We aim to completely halt the underworld and drug trafficking in the country within the next six months," he said.

Continued on Page 2

Douglas confident RW's Jaffna visit would expedite release of lands

BY NAALIR JAMALDEEN

Minister of Fisheries Douglas Devananda expressed confidence yesterday (26) that during President Ranil Wickremesinghe's upcoming visit to Jaffna he would give the greenlight to release the remaining lands in the Northern Province currently under the control of various State agencies.

Strict rules set out for Sri Pada pilgrims



An Extraordinary Gazette, bearing the signature of the Ratnapura District Secretary, has been issued outlining regulations to be adhered to during the Sri Pada Pilgrim Season.

Continued on Page 2

Kalutara prisoner dies following alleged assault

BY SUMITH RANAWAKA - POTHUPUTIYA

A Kalutara Prison inmate reportedly passed away last morning (26) after being hospitalised allegedly due to an assault, prison sources claimed.

Continued on Page 2

Matara Prison meningitis outbreak under control

– Prisons Commissioner

BY NILUKA HERATH - GANDARA

The situation at the Matara Prison where several inmates were hospitalised after falling ill, has now returned to normal, Commissioner of Prisons and Media Spokesman Gaminbi B. Dissanayake said.

Continued on Page 2

Another jumbo death from electrocution!



BY GAYAN - MEDAWACHCHIYA

A wild elephant which had been a part of the Heenna Kanda reserve in Medawachchiya for nearly 20 years, tragically succumbed to electrocution.

Continued on Page 2

BY HASFAR A.HALEEM

An event to celebrate the achievements of students from the HOPEInstitute, an organisation functioning for the welfare of persons with disabilities was held on 23 December under the patronage of Rev. Dr. Christian Noel Emmanuel, Bishop of Trincomalee.

During the celebration, special recognition was extended to students from HOPEInstitute, particularly those enrolled in evening classes designed to support economically disadvantaged students preparing for the Grade 5 scholarship examination. Certificates were awarded to successful students, acknowledging their dedication and hard work.

Additionally, certificates were presented to students who

HOPEINSTITUTE FELICITATES DISABLED STUDENTS



successfully completed training programmes in palmistry, tailoring and cake baking offered by the Institute.

The event also featured cultural

performances by students and teachers from the HOPEInstitute. It was a poignant moment when a disabled student in need of a wheel-chair was given one.

by the District Coordinator of Social Services and the Director of HOPEInstitute, V. Rajasekar, Secretary of the Trincomalee Urban Council was the chief

guest. Guests including Nityakalyani Mageswaran; Secretary of the Sri Lanka Let's Help Now Foundation Canada, T. Branavan; District Coordinator

of Social Services, S. Kirupagaran; Director of HOPEInstitute and N. Prabhakaran; President of HOPEInstitute were present.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

SRI LANKA LACKS...

He highlighted the importance of focusing on both the living and dead in the aftermath of a disaster. While recognising the emphasis on the living, Prof. Perera stressed that the deceased too should be

treated with dignity and their bodies should be cremated with respect.

Referring to the 2004 tsunami disaster, where around 40,000 people were estimated to have perished in Sri Lanka,

Prof. Perera said not even ten per cent of them were definitely identified. Many were buried in mass graves, with the government resorting to unconventional measures in handling the deceased.

He spoke of the burial of foreign nationals in a similar manner, but due to pressure from foreign embassies, their bodies had to be exhumed to confirm their

identities. Even today, numerous persons have not had the opportunity to see the bodies of their loved ones who perished in the tsunami.

While acknowledging the measures taken by the Disaster Management Act (DMA) and the Disaster Management Centre in areas such as building plans and arrangements for displaced individuals,

Prof. Perera highlighted the Act's lack of focus on those killed in disasters.

He proposed the setting up of mobile morgue in at least one hospital per district to bury those killed in disasters. Temporary storage facilities should be set up with the suggestion of selecting a main hospital in each district and providing the necessary resources for this purpose, he pointed out.

No testing facility...

AHP President Ravi Kumudesh, expressed concern that there is no specific testing facility and testing request system for patients with Covid symptoms or those presumed to have contracted Covid, emphasising the importance of conducting medical tests for suspected diseases, not only for Covid but any other ailment as well.

Kumudesh said the Ministry of Health issued a press release stating that sample tests are conducted by the Medical Research Institute (MRI), Borella. However, Kumudesh said this information was insufficient to draw conclusive results for the entire country. Therefore, the AHP has urged the Ministry of Health to release a comprehensive report on the research results, including details on how the samples were collected for testing.

Kumudesh raised concerns about the reliance on sample tests with a significant expiration period for instant antigen test kits. He emphasised that avoiding testing suspicious patients at hospital level, coupled with an inconclusive result from a sample test, can lead to numerous complications.

Additionally, Kumudesh highlighted the importance of issuing announcements related to major epidemic diseases with the signature of an officer capable of taking technical responsibility for the information. Given the Director General of Health Services' responsibility under quarantine laws, Kumudesh urged attention regarding the matter.

CID PC drowns...

He fell victim to strong currents that pulled him underwater. In response to his companion's distress calls, local residents arrived at the scene

and rushed the constable to hospital. Despite their efforts, he was pronounced dead on arrival.

The Kalutara-South Police are conducting investigations into the circumstances of the death.

137 unidentified...

Professor Perera explained that bone fragments from these bodies will be utilised for research and studies. He further detailed that portions of these corpses were found in mangroves and swamps in Thelwatta and Peraiyai between one and nine months after the tsunami disaster.

The JMO also highlighted the preservation of

clothes, glasses, and personal belongings of some individuals found with the deceased, emphasising that these items were in safekeeping.

Additionally, Professor Perera said in the initial months following the tsunami tragedy, bodies were displayed at the Teaching Hospital Karapitiya for identification by relatives of the deceased. However, no one has been able to confirm the identity of body parts, he added.

CID questions Keheliya for...

Rambukwella visited the CID premises at 9.00 a.m. and gave a statement until 12.00 p.m. Then informed officials about his need to go home to have lunch and take medicine. Accordingly, a group of CID officials accompanied Rambukwella to his residence and obtained the rest of the statement there.

A group of lawyers were present while the CID was obtaining the statement from Rambukwella.

Notably, several high-profile arrests have already taken place in connection with this case, including the former Secretary of the Ministry of Health, the Director of the Health Ministry's Medical Supplies Division and three other officials from the same division. Additionally, the owner of the company responsible for importing the batch of substandard Immunoglobulin vials by forging documents is also in remand custody.

Measles outbreak in...

Areas such as Kurunegala Municipality, Kurunegala, Kuliapitiya, Pannala, Mawathagama and Polgahawela MOH divisions have reported high numbers of dengue cases in the district. Dengue larvae were detected in several prominent schools and State office premises in the city during inspections carried out on 18 and 19 December.

Health Service Director of the district, Dr. Pramita Swarnalatha said three persons have succumbed to dengue in the district this year. Despite the commencement of the school vacation, given the

upcoming school examination, it was decided to organise Shramadana programmes and clean schools, State institutions and raise awareness about cleanliness at household level.

In the light of the increased incidence of measles during this period, a vaccination programme has been planned as well.

Dr. Swarnalatha stated that the programme is scheduled to commence on 6 January 2024 in the Kurunegala District, with vaccinations being administered at selected medical clinics for children aged between six to nine months.

Strict rules set...

As per the Gazette, only designated locations are deemed suitable for accommodation and the establishment or maintenance of temporary accommodation in other areas was prohibited. Construction of temporary or permanent structures requires written permission from the District Secretary or an authorised officer, the Gazette stated.

The Gazette emphasises that beggars should not ask for alms or receive alms. Distributing alms to beggars within the Sri Pada compound area or ambalan/rest room premises has been strictly prohibited.

Bathing or washing clothes is restricted to designated safe areas identified and declared in the Gazette. Improper disposal of polythene and plastic on the pilgrim route, within the Sri Pada Compound area, around restrooms, or in the environment is strictly prohibited.

The Gazette also expressly prohibits starting bonfires or setting fire that may cause a conflagration in the Sri Pada Site.

Specific regulations have been outlined for trade and dandas during the Sri Pada Pilgrim Season. Pilgrims are not permitted to stay in the Sri Padas Compound after worship, they must depart once their religious observances are complete.

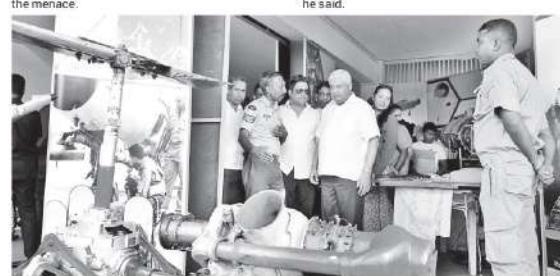
30 criminals to...

Regarding action against underworld members in Dubai and France, Minister Alles pointed out the complexity of legal procedure in these countries. He said there were ongoing negotiations with the relevant nations and the acquisition of red notices for their arrest.

"Despite legal challenges, we are committed to bringing them to Sri Lanka," he affirmed.

When questioned about guaranteeing the complete eradication of the underworld and drug trafficking in six months, Minister Alles acknowledged the difficulty but said he was taking maximum measures to eradicate the menace.

"While complete eradication may be challenging globally, we are dedicated to robust action against the underworld and drug trade," he said.



Kalutara prisoner...

The deceased, identified as 46-year-old P.G. Sunil from Karavita in Molkawa was admitted to the Kalutara Teaching Hospital on Sunday (24 December) following an assault within the prison. He succumbed to injuries early this morning while receiving treatment in Ward No. 05.

The body has been transferred to the Kalutara Teaching Hospital mortuary for a post-mortem.

Meanwhile, the Kalutara Prison Superintendent reported it to the Kalutara-North Police prompting a special investigation. The crimes unit of the Kalutara-North Police is conducting investigating into the matter.

Another jumbo death...

Wildlife officials reported that the deceased elephant was approximately 9 feet tall and was 20 years old.

At the conclusion of midnight on 25 December, the elephant ventured into a farm land in Hinimakanda, Halambagawewa and had come into contact with an illegal electric fence installed by a farmer, biting one of the wires and becoming entangled, the elephant had lost its balance leading to a fatal fall.



It met with its death as a result of an electric shock. Anuradhapura wildlife officials and the Medawachchiya Police are conducting further investigations into the incident.

Douglas confident RW's...

Minister Devananda was speaking at a media briefing held at his office in Jaffna.

"The lands, previously under the control of the Department of Forest Conservation and the Department of Wildlife Conservation, were scheduled for release in 11 stages. Four stages have already been completed and arrangements have been made to release the remaining lands in consultation with relevant officials, with the mediation of President Wickremesinghe," Minister Devananda said.

He expressed confidence that the situation in the region would return to normal, and all issues, including land-related matters in the North, would

be resolved by April 2024.

Minister Devananda emphasised his ongoing efforts to reclaim private lands within high-security zones controlled by the armed forces in the province. He said during the President's forthcoming visit to the North, a positive signal will be given to the lands.

Despite not being able to attend the meeting with President Wickremesinghe due to commitments in Jaffna, Minister Devananda said that he discussed numerous issues affecting the people in the North and stressed the urgency of resolving them without delay.

EPDP MP K. Dhileeban was also present during the media briefing.

Rohan Ratnayake passes away

Chief Lean Officer Global and creative strategic planner, Rohan Ratnayake known for his expertise in implementing new management concepts passed away. Ratnayake served in various countries, including Sri Lanka, North and Central America, Vietnam and Ethiopia.

His remains were repatriated to Sri Lanka on December with the final rites scheduled for today (27) at 4.30 p.m. at Gurugoda Cemetery, Horana. Aged 48, Ratnayake was a distinguished former student of Vidyaloka Vidyalaya, Galle and served as an executive member responsible for foreign relations at the Old Pupils' Scout Association.

His remains are currently placed at his residence, 50/172, Nisalagiri Uyana, Boralgoda in Peruvanwanda.



Setting up sufficient parking facilities, addressing economic challenges faced by businesses

Swift implementation of new tourism plan vital - Dodampegamage



BY NEETA PATHMAKUMARI - NORWOOD

The Nuwara Eliya Tourist Hotel Owners' Association yesterday (26) highlighted the influx of visitors from various parts of the island to Nuwara Eliya city and its surrounding tourist spots, eager to revel in the winter beauty of December during the extended weekend and school holidays coinciding with the Christmas festival and Poya Day.

President of the association Mahinda Dodampegamage expressed concerns about the lack of a comprehensive tourism plan and inadequate parking facilities in Nuwara Eliya, regardless of the increasing tourist arrivals.

Despite the surge in tourist numbers, the current infrastructure does not support smooth travel to many of the popular spots in Nuwara Eliya due to the absence of proper parking lots. He emphasised the urgent need to replace the outdated tourism plan that has been in place for several years.

Advocating for the swift implementation of a new tourism plan, Dodampegamage stressed the importance of developing a special travel plan that incorporates a well-thought-out vehicle strategy. This, he believes, would facilitate both local and foreign tourists in their visit to Nuwara Eliya, ensuring their needs are met without inconvenience.

While acknowledging the past profitability of the tourism industry, the chairman lamented the current severe downturn, attributing it to the substantial increases – 115% in water fees and 118% in taxes – imposed arbitrarily by the Nuwara Eliya Municipal Council. He called for the attention of both the Nuwara Eliya Municipal Council and the Government to address these issues promptly.

He emphasised the critical necessity of formulating and implementing special plans for Nuwara Eliya Tourism Town.

This includes revising the existing tourism plan, establishing sufficient parking facilities, and addressing the economic challenges faced by businesses in the tourism sector. The collective effort of local authorities and the Government is paramount to ensuring the sustained growth and success of Nuwara Eliya as a vibrant tourist destination, he added.



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IN MEMORY OF THE 2004 TSUNAMI TRAGEDY

BY NAALIR JAMALDEEN, NEETA PATHMAKUMARI - HATTON, MADUN GUNATHILAKA - BIBBLE, K.L. SURAWEERA - KANDY AND T. JAWFERKHAN - BATTICALOA

On National Safety Day yesterday (26), a solemn two minutes silence was observed island-wide from 9.25 a.m. to 9.27 a.m. by the Disaster Management Centre (DMC) in memory of those who lost their lives in the 2004 tsunami and other natural disasters in Sri Lanka.

The main event was organised near the Peraliya tsunami memorial statue.

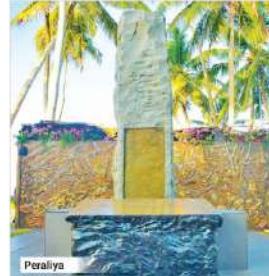
The DMC also announced the initiation of a new programme to raise awareness about tsunami dangers. Major General (Rtd) Sudarshana Ranasinghe, Director General of the Disaster Management Centre, said the awareness campaign will be facilitated through a unique approach – using a caller tune ringtone on mobile phones.

Yesterday (26) marked the 19th anniversary of the 2004 tsunami, a catastrophe that stands out as one of the world's deadliest and most destructive natural disasters, impacting over 10 countries in the Indian Ocean. The devastating undersea megathrust earthquake, registering a magnitude of 9.1, originated off the coast of Sumatra Island, Indonesia, on that fateful Sunday morning of 26 December 2004.

The ensuing series of turbulent waves wreaked havoc on the coasts of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, the Maldives, Myanmar and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The cumulative death toll from the disaster exceeded 230,000 in just a matter of hours. Sri Lanka bore a heavy toll as one of the hardest-hit countries, with over 40,000 fatalities and substantial property damage.

Events were organised in the districts of Jaffna, Batticaloa and Ampara in memory of those who lost their lives.

In the Jaffna district, an was held at the Jaffna



District Secretariat chaired by Ambalavai Sivabalasundaram, Jaffna District Secretary.

Simultaneously, a similar event unfolded in Batticaloa, where a remarkable tribute was paid by Jayeyaraj Abilash, famously known as the "tsunami baby". Abilash, who miraculously escaped the tragedy as a young child, remembered those who lost their lives in the tsunami at his residence in Kurukkalmadam in Kalwachikud.

Abilash, who was just one-year-old when he was rescued, had been admitted to the Kalmunai Base Hospital and astonishingly claimed by nine different mothers. Following a thorough ethnicity and genealogy DNA test, the baby was rightfully reunited with his biological parents.

In Vadamarachchi East, the remembrance was chaired by K. Prabhakar Moorthy, the Vadamarachchi East Divisional Secretary ad was held yesterday morning. The gathering of the public and officials paid

their respects to the victims by lighting oil lamps.

Meanwhile, in the Mannar District, a simple event organised by the Mannar District DMC regional office took place at the Mannar Divisional Secretariat. M. Pradeep, Mannar Divisional Secretary, along with leaders from various religions, participated in the event.

In Hatton, individuals from various communities assembled at the Bodhiya (Bo tree) located in the centre of the town. They illuminated lamps, offered prayers and collectively observed two minutes of silence.

Throughout the two minutes of silence, Hatton Police Officers ensured the cessation of all vehicular movement passing through the city, allowing for uninterrupted period of reflection and remembrance.

In Buttala a memorial was organised at the Civil Security Department premises in collaboration with the Moneragala District Secretariat, Batticaloa Civil Security Department.

In Kandy two-minute silence was observed at an event organised by Sri Veluvanaramaya Temple, Geloys.

In Batticaloa, relatives of the tsunami victims paid floral tribute to photographs of tsunami victims displayed on a podium.

Meanwhile, a special train journey was initiated from Fort Railway Station, Colombo to Bellata paying tribute to the victims among train passengers and railway employees, particularly at the Peraliya Railway Station. The journey commenced at the Maradana Railway Station at 6.25 a.m. yesterday (26) and subsequently departed the Fort railway station at 6.50 a.m.

The train embarked on its journey with the No. 591 train engine, which played a role in the tsunami train wreck at the Peraliya Railway Station in 2004. Officials from the Colombo Fort Railway Station paid floral tribute inside the train during the journey in memory of departed souls in the tsunami train tragedy in 2004.



Notice

Mercantile Investments head office and all other branches will remain closed on 01st January 2024 in lieu of the special company holiday. We regret any inconvenience caused.

Thank you,

Mercantile Investments and Finance PLC

DIALOG MERIT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME ENTERS 20TH YEAR IN COLLABORATION WITH MOE & UGC

In their shared vision of driving equitable access to education by offering scholarships to students who have become district first at the GCE O/L and GCE A/L, Dialog Axista PLC, together with the Ministry of Education and University Grants Commission announced the renewal of their agreement on the Dialog Merit Scholarship programme, marking its 20th year in effect.

The renewal ceremony, held under the patronage of Dr. Susil Premajayanththa, Minister of Education, took place at the Ministry of Education. In 2023, 81 high-achieving students in G.C.E. Advanced Level examinations and 77 high-achieving students in G.C.E. Ordinary Level examinations were inducted into the prestigious scheme based on their exceptional performance. The induction ceremony, held at the Education Ministry Auditorium, celebrated the outstanding accomplishments of these students. Since its inception in 2002, the Dialog Merit Scholarship scheme has awarded scholarships totalling over Rs. 120 million, fostering academic excellence.

Speaking on the initiative, Hon. Susil Premajayanththa, Minister of Education

said, "Dialog and the Ministry of Education recently renewed their agreement for the provision of merit-based scholarships awarded to the highest achievers in G.C.E. O/L and A/L examination. Originally limited to students proceeding to follow the Physical Science Stream for their A/L studies, the scheme has now been expanded to include students from other streams. This agreement, along with initiatives such as the Nenasa distance education programme, demonstrates Dialog's steadfast dedication to supporting education."

Commenting, Supun Weerasinghe, Group Chief Executive of Dialog Axista PLC said, "As we renew the Dialog Merit Scholarship programme agreement with the Ministry of Education for its

remarkable 20th year, we reaffirm our shared vision of fostering equitable access to education. By offering scholarships to exceptional students in-need, we aim to empower the next generation of leaders and changemakers. Together, we will continue to create transformative opportunities that pave the way for a brighter future."

In line with its commitment to provide equitable access to quality education for children, Dialog has invested over Rs 1 billion in the education sector to date, encompassing initiatives such as Nenasa TV, Nenasa Smart Schools and Dialog Merit Scholarship programme. Beyond recognising academic brilliance, the Merit Scholarship programme aims to provide transformative opportunities, aligning with Dialog's broader vision to contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education. This comprehensive approach reflects Dialog's dedication to ensuring inclusive, equitable access to education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, thereby shaping a brighter and more sustainable future.

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RDB Regional Development Bank

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Hatton Plantation workers attend Christmas Mass



C.D.H. HEWEGE - WATAWALA

A large number of Catholic devotees, from several plantations in Hatton, gathered at Holy Cross Church, Hatton for the midnight service to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

The special service on Christmas Eve was conducted by the parish priest of the Church, Father Neuman Peiris. For the safety of the devotees who came for this Christmas Eve service and the church, special security measures were provided by the officers of the Hatton Police.



Ten treasure hunters arrested at Kallachchiya Forest Reserve

BY S.S.H. LUNUWILA - KALUTARA

Police Special Task Force Officers, acting on a tip-off on 25 December, conducted a raid in the Kallachchiya Forest Reserve and arrested ten men, who had illegally entered the State-owned Palai Forest Reserve in Kallachchiya and were engaged in digging the land looking for treasure. The treasure hunters were found to be using a hi-tech metal detector.

All the arrestees, who were aged between 22

and 64 were residents at Thamburthegama, New-town, Anuradhapura, Muruthalawa, Polonnaruwa and Welikanda. They were handed over to the Walachchena Police for further investigations. The arrest was effected by Commanding Officer of STF Vakari Camp, Inspector B.U.S. Wijesinghe with his officers under the guidance of SP Gunasiri of Vavuniya or on the instructions of Chief SDIG STF Police division Waruna Jayasundara.



SRI PADA PILGRIMAGE SEASON BEGINS

BY C.D.H. HEWEGE - WATAWALA

The casket of Sacred Relics and the statue of the god were taken in procession from Galpottawala Rajamaha Viharaya in Pelmadulla to Sri Padasthana in the early hours of 25 December, the day prior to the Unduvap Poya day along four routes, marking the beginning of the Sri Pada pilgrimage season.

One of the processions passed through the Hatton town at 2.00 a.m. yesterday (26).

When the procession reached the Malliappa Saman Devaleya, Hatton, a large number of people gathered to pay their respects and a dansala was also held to serve the crowd.



Navy continues flood relief efforts in Anuradhapura



Driven by a commitment to service, the Sri Lanka Navy has been a constant presence in flood-ravaged Parakramapura of Padaviya, in the Anuradhapura District since December.

Navy flood relief teams have been working tirelessly to help the affected community, and their efforts even continued on 23 December.

According to reports, the Weherathenna and Weli Ela low-water crossings along the Vavuniya-Padaviya road in the Anuradhapura District were inundated as a result of the overflow of the Ma Oya. Due to the prevailing circumstances, access to the Vavuniya-Padaviya road has

been restricted, affecting the daily requirements of the local population. To address this issue, the Rapid Action Boat Squadron (RABS) relief teams are utilising two small craft and lifesaving gear to ensure essential transportation for residents commuting for tasks in the region.

Since 3 December, a total of 7,094 individuals from Weherathenna and starting from 11 December, 2,124 people from Weli Ela have been assisted by the Navy, ensuring their transportation needs are met through the use of dinghies.

Moreover, the Navy is on standby to send out additional relief teams whenever the need arises.



MIDNIGHT'S THIRD CHILD: A CALL TO GO BEYOND BINARIES

Naeem Mohaiemen's creative writings, historical accounts, and opinion essays compiled in a recent publication cover the arts, cinema, literature, and dramatic events in Bangladesh over five decades. They juxtapose a seemingly limitless optimism, a virtue in dark times, countering narrow nationalist definitions.

BY IRFAN CHOWDHURY

Artist, filmmaker, and academic Naeem Mohaiemen's photos, visual and essays on art, cinema and literary stories of Bangladesh over the last few decades, compiled into one anthology, make for a compelling montage.

Mohaiemen teaches at the School of Arts at Columbia University, New York, and works on projects in Dhaka with organisations such as Bengal Foundation, Pathshala, and Chobi Mela. His writing speaks to both Bangladeshi and South Asians who work for a more diverse, multicultural society.

Midnight's Third Child is a recently published collection featuring 31 essays divided into three themes. The first is Sentry in the Attic, a reference to the novel by the prominent Bangladeshi writer Akhtarruzzaman Elias, followed by Land of a Thousand Pictures and Writing on the Wall.

Mohaiemen's creative writings, historical accounts and opinion essays in the collection cover the arts, cinema, literature and dramatic events over the five decades. They juxtapose a seemingly limitless optimism, a virtue in dark times, countering narrow nationalist definitions.

To move forward

The title is a play on Salman Rushdie's famous novel *Midnight's Children*. A third child in a family has their work cut out to survive and grow and often faces aggression from older siblings. As they grow up and enter into adulthood they need to take stock of the past complexities and myriad choices to move forward and perhaps prosper.

The essays, updated versions of Mohaiemen's previously published pieces, still provide relevant insights into events associated with important issues that many may have forgotten. For instance, the planned exhibition at France's Musée Guimet or the controversies surrounding the film *Meherjan*. They discuss complex, conflictual legislative challenges that undermine artistic potential and try to smother free expression, besides the much smaller wins of the arts communities.

As in his previous visual work, documentary films, photography and installations, Mohaiemen delves deep into issues and tries to decipher the essence, often from complicated political, social and ethnic compositions. He also offers alternative views and possible ways to navigate them.

In fact, at the core of this work is an urgent call to readers: discard a binary approach to issues and seek multiple views and contradictions.

This is refreshing, especially in a tumultuous landscape of opinions and debates muddied by varied views and proclamations from left, far-left, right, ultra-right, centrist, pious, agnostic, secular, nationalist, or globalist points of view. Mohaiemen's essays, including the introduction, urge the broader intelligentsia to come together for dialogue rather than foster divisions, to build spaces and communities, and to share ideas.

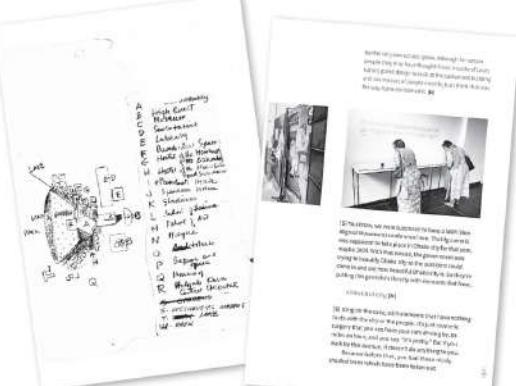
The essays cover distinct areas, exploring minority experiences and a wider Bengal, including, inevitably, West Bengal. The readers are able to make choices from a plethora of interests. Pieces such as 'Mrinal Sen: In a Time of New Uprisings', 'Juktakhor: Stranded on the Borders of Two Bengals' and 'Sarker Protick: Bengal Connected' would evoke a sense of yearning for loss and divisions created by the partition of 1947. They dig deep into reconnecting possibilities as well.

Among essays covering art and culture, several explore issues emerging in the Bangladeshi art scene, like 'Cheragee Pahar: Far From the Madding Crowd', 'Dhali Al Mamoon: Unfolding Themselves', 'Chobi Mela: What Was Chobi Mela'.

Far from the Madding Crowd', 'Dhali Al Mamoon: Unfolding Themselves', 'Chobi Mela: What Was Chobi Mela'



Book launch at Pathshala, Dhaka. (Photo by Shadman Sakib)



Drawing by Louis Kahn for National Parliament Building, Dhaka, 1960s, 'Fortress of Solitude', *Midnight's Third Child*, 2023.

What Comes Next' and 'Depart: Magazines in the (Empty) Forest'.

Others capture prominent artists and their work - such as 'Tareque Masud: On Adam Surat and Sultan'. The book cover features a photo of the late filmmakers Tareque Masud and Mishuk Munir, who produced work mostly of the alternative genre.

There are also interviews with personalities like the architect Salauddin Ahmed, artist and teacher Dhalil Al Mamoon and Tayeba Begum Lipi, the co-founder of the Britto Artist Collective. These are invaluable for portraying the thinking of these luminaries around topics during a particular time.

Literary figures

Also included are Mohaiemen's commentaries on well-known international literary figures such as Taslima Nasreen and Zia Haider Rahman. One is in exile (an unproductive period, as the essay suggests) and the other is formed by British Diaspora life.

These essays capture the historical development of the art scene in the country and may provide impetus to future researchers, with materials like the graphic chronology of a photography biennial on pages 138-145.

Mohaiemen shows how to create space and to tease out the noise from real issues. In 'Documentary: Social Realism's Quest for Reality', for example, he offers a brief history of the development of photojournalism in recent decades. Critically examining the wider demands - elements in developing countries, he reveals the disappointing truth of continued dependence on Western countries for financial and technical aid as well as for recognition.

Factors include a lack of maturity in building institutions and relatively slow progress in social acceptance around emerging issues like gender equality or same-sex love. He explores how images and their use in the developed world still

Image of display table designed by architect Salauddin Ahmed for Naeem Mohaiemen's project 'Balkku Roboshyo', curated by Shehzad Chowdhury, Longitude Latitude, Dhaka, 2014; 'The Trouble with Tribbles', *Midnight's Third Child*, 2023. (Photo curated / included in the book by Naeem Mohaiemen)

fail to portray the reality on the ground.

The author's use of the Bengali phrase to highlight issues and to offer remedies over a fairly long period, perhaps underlines how scholars who leave their countries never stop yearning for their homeland.

Is the book worth a reader's time and money? It is well organised, with events and incidents aptly tagged to categories. It has been very carefully anthologised, with each piece stitching a narrative that, in the end, produces a much bigger story of the time. The table of contents alone would serve as a great archive of situations and historical records.

Conflicting voices

It puts a number of quality pieces in one place, some of which one may have missed in the past.

The only downside is the printing quality. The current edition black and white, uses paper that lowers the visual impact of some superbly curated photos. A niche market may be happy to absorb a slightly higher cost for better quality.

Those putting together the next edition might consider publishing the book or parts of it on better-quality paper. Another option would be to create a digital version.

Finally, what is in this book for those familiar with Mohaiemen's work? I, for one, admired his edited anthology Chittagong Hill Tracts in the Blind Spot of Bangladesh Nationalism (2010) and his well-argued riposte to Sarimma Bose's 'Dead Reckoning: Memories of the 1971 Bangladesh War' (2011).

Like many of his art projects, this anthology speaks in conflicting voices. It promotes tolerance and ways for accepting differing opinions and encourages the reader to step back and reflect on harmonious collective effort. It shows how careful consideration and thought-provoking expression on the way forward perhaps would be more useful than polemics.

Aspiring readers and writers, certainly those as curious as this author, could do worse than take a leaf out of this superb book.

Irfan Chowdhury is a public sector policy analyst and adviser based in Australia. He writes opinion columns in Bangladeshi dailies and online platforms, like The Daily Star, Dhaka Tribune, and Alaloud. A believer in diversity, he advocates for minorities and women's rights and indulges in discussions involving Southasia and beyond.

(Sapan News)



China and Europe can learn from each other's energy transitions

When it comes to both energy security and power decarbonisation, Europe and China are on different paths but face common imperatives

BY ANDERS HOVE

how China could achieve a 80 per cent carbon-free electricity system by 2035, years ahead of when China's own planners expect to achieve such an ambitious goal. The model shows that the most important enabling factors are greater flexibility for inter-provincial transmission, combined with a small amount of energy storage and demand response.

Amid this transitional phase, a shared challenge remains: the need to phase out reliance on coal. China grapples with the complexity of integrating its surging renewable output, yet is simultaneously greenlighting new coal projects. In contrast, European countries are rapidly developing policies and experiences dealing with a high share of renewable energy, and are in the process of accelerating the phase-out of coal energy.

The circumstances in Europe and China aren't always as different as they often seem. While Chinese experts typically note the challenge of integrating renewable energy given its seasonal variability and geographic differences are even more pronounced than in China. For example during Germany's winter, solar produces just a third of the output available in summer months. In China, most regions see winter solar output reach at least 60-70 percent of summer output.

In contrast, Europe seems unlikely to triple its own renewable energy capacity, which stood at 750 GW at the end of 2022. The continent would have to more than triple the present rate of installations to reach that goal. Various countries are working to streamline regulations and speed construction of renewables. Despite falling costs for wind and solar equipment, higher interest rates pose challenges to project costs.

Assuming wind and solar simply continue growing at their present pace, China would obtain well over 30 per cent of its electricity from wind and solar by 2030. That is a level where renewables begin to have a significant impact on system planning and reliability.

Given that renewable capacity is still rising exponentially, higher ambition is possible.

Several international and Chinese analysts anticipate that China could reach peak emissions before 2025. Last year, Berkeley scholars modelled

Spanish-Moroccan letters of forbidden love

BY ARTHUR ASSERAF

Confiscated letters written to Moroccan men from Spanish women decades ago reveal a history of taboo affairs during the colonial era.

"When will you come back to Spain?" The deceptively sounding plea had been carefully written out on the page, a sign of how important it was for Carmela.

"Tell me that you are not looking at any other women," she wrote from Granada in 1944.

But the man these words were intended for never got to read them. Carmela's international love letter did not make it to its destination in Morocco.

Instead, it ended up hidden deep in the Spanish archives, in an unexpected stash of hundreds of amorous messages between Spanish women and Moroccan men.

Seized between the 1930s and the 1950s, they chronicle forbidden intimate relationships.

For decades, colonial authorities of the Spanish protectorate in Morocco systematically seized this mail.

The boxes are full of words of passion: "I am crazy for you... I am like a goat for you," writes one

woman from Valencia.

Some contain photographs. Inserted in letter after letter, there are dozens of portraits of women with immaculate hairdos posing to remind their distant lovers what they looked like. One sent a picture of herself riding a bicycle, a carefree snapshot of everyday life.

All were neatly filed away in envelopes by conscientious bureaucrats, and then forgotten amid routine administrative documents.

They accumulated dust until they were found and published by academics Josep Lluís Mateu Díest and Nuria Muñel García.

Each letter contains a tantalising glimpse into an entire relationship, but each one also tells us about the repression that these relationships faced.

Spanish officials tried everything they could to make these relationships impossible.

As one directive stated in 1937: "As a general rule, marriages between Moroccan soldiers and Spanish women must be prevented."

Since 1912, Spain had claimed sovereignty over part of Morocco as a protectorate, dividing the country into two zones, along with France. (BBC)

CEYLON TODAY

Ceylon Newspapers (Pvt) Ltd.

No: 101, Rosemead Place, Colombo 07.
 Editorial Tel: 0117566522, 0117566526, 0117566527
 Fax: 0117566545
 Marketing Manager: 0117566550, 0117566551
 Circulation Manager: 0117566580, 0117566581
 E-mail: editor@ceylontoday.lk

Stop gambling with the lives of our citizens!

In the wake of the 2004 tsunami disaster that left an indelible mark on Sri Lanka and its coastal communities, the construction of 77 early warning towers was intended to be a beacon of preparedness, safeguarding lives in the face of potential tsunamis. Fast forward to the present, and a staggering 57 of these crucial towers stand silent, out of service, casting a shadow of negligence on the responsible authorities and State agencies.

As Sri Lanka is infamous for grappling with the passage of time, forgetting its own history, it is essential to revisit a painful chapter etched in our history – the devastating tsunami of 2004. On 26 December 2004, a catastrophic event unfolded as a result of the Indian Ocean earthquake, striking with a magnitude of 9.1 – 9.3 and originating off the west coast of northern Sumatra, Indonesia. The ensuing massive tsunami unleashed waves towering up to 30 metres (100 feet) high, leaving destruction in its wake.

Sri Lanka bore a significant brunt of this natural disaster, with the south and east coasts experiencing the worst of its impact. The aftermath was nothing short of tragic, as Sri Lankan authorities reported a staggering 35,000 confirmed deaths, with a third of the victims being children. This grim toll only intensified the anguish of a nation grappling with the loss of lives and displacement of one and a half million people from their homes. Several cases of cholera also added to the mounting humanitarian crisis.

Now, let's reflect on the current situation and pose a critical question: Are we adequately prepared for large-scale disasters like a tsunami? It's a fact that no one can combat the force of nature when it becomes violent, despite the progress humankind has made throughout history. However, we can be prepared by taking steps to mitigate the risks. The crucial question for Sri Lanka is: How well-prepared are we? The condition of the tsunami early warning towers can provide the answer to that.

The distribution of these non-operational towers is a cause for concern, with densely populated districts like Galle, Hambantota, and Batticaloa bearing the brunt of the dysfunctional warning system. The gravity of this situation cannot be overstated, as the effectiveness of the early warning system hangs on the seamless operation of these towers across various regions.

The revelation that the technology powering these towers, provided by the American Signal Corporation, has become obsolete adds another layer of culpability to the authorities. It is disheartening to learn that the very company that supplied this critical technology has discontinued its services, leaving the disaster management units scrambling to find solutions. The lack of foresight in anticipating technological obsolescence and securing ongoing support for such vital systems reflects a failure in long-term planning and preparedness.

The Disaster Management Centre's (DMC) attempt to salvage the situation through public rehearsal programmes and daily performance checks is akin to putting a band-aid on a festering wound. The towers' deteriorating condition and the risk of collapse due to their proximity to the sea demand urgent and comprehensive action.

Financial constraints have been cited as a roadblock in creating a technical device for tsunami early warnings. This excuse, while valid to some extent, sheds a light on a broader issue of resource allocation and prioritisation. With that, a burning question needs to be asked: Whenever a question regarding the safety of the citizenry arises, the most famous and frequent answer is, 'there are no funds.' When the State healthcare system and education system are on the brink of collapse, when children are suffering from malnutrition, when there are conversations about protecting the environment, the lack of funding is always the excuse. But then, if funds are not available for these priorities, what are the funds allocated for? Where do the funds actually go?

The safety of coastal communities, especially in a region prone to tsunamis, should be non-negotiable. The Government must allocate the necessary funds to update and maintain these warning systems promptly. Potential risks associated with the collapse of these towers also demand a proactive approach in addressing their technical performance. Delays in decision-making could have catastrophic consequences for the very communities these towers are meant to protect.

It is imperative that lessons are learned from this situation and immediate steps are taken to rectify the shortcomings in the system. The safety and well-being of the people cannot be compromised and any compromise in this regard is an unacceptable gamble with human lives.

CEYLON TODAY

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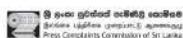
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WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO PHASE OUT FOSSIL FUELS?

Although legal and policy interventions could make fossil-fuel companies pay for the costs they inflict on society, the industry continues to wield undue influence over governments and bodies like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Clearly, new channels are needed



BY NIKKI REISCH

Amid record heatwaves, intensifying and increasingly extreme weather events and increasingly dire warnings that climate change is literally killing us, calls to abandon fossil fuels grow louder. But the fossil-fuel industry is doubling down with investments in new oil and gas projects and major corporate mergers, walking back climate pledges, and making false promises that they can keep pumping without polluting. We need to ditch fossils. But how?

The answer is unlikely to emerge from this year's petrostate-hosted United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai, which could deliver a political commitment to phase out fossil fuels but won't chart the pathway to a fossil-free future. To address what UN Secretary-General António Guterres has called 'the poisoned root of the climate crisis,' we must look beyond the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to forge new forums fit for this purpose.

The good news is that Guterres, the Pope, numerous national governments, and bodies like the International Energy Agency have joined the growing global call for a phase-out of coal, oil, and gas. At the UN Climate Ambition Summit in September, governments acknowledged that the climate crisis is a fossil-fuel crisis. The question is not whether to move beyond oil and gas, but how.

The bad news is that the fossil-fuel industry, buoyed by record-breaking profits in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, seems impervious to such pressure. Worse, these colossal profits are being reinvested in more oil and gas development. As climate disasters intensify before our eyes, the industry responsible for nearly 90% of carbon dioxide emissions is betting that its dirty products will be a mainstay of the global economy for decades to come.

To force a change, we must expose the economic fragility that fossil-fuel dependence creates and its broader toll on human rights. Reliance on oil, gas, and coal makes communities more vulnerable to supply disruptions, affecting everything

from heating and transportation to food prices. Such disruptions fall hardest on the most impoverished populations while boosting the industry's profits.

It is worth recalling that fossil-fuel companies underperformed the market for ten years preceding the war in Ukraine. That decade of decline reflected long-term energy transition trends that the recent uptick in earnings has not changed. With fossil-fuel demand projected to peak globally by 2030, oil and gas remain a bad bet.

Part of the problem is that governments have responded to price volatility by increasing fossil-fuel subsidies, rather than imposing windfall taxes. They also have continued to approve new oil and gas projects, including offshore in protected ocean areas. Planned production is double what's compatible with the target of limiting global warming to 1.5°Celsius above pre-industrial levels; there is simply no room for new oil and gas supply if the world is to avoid climate catastrophe.

Fossil fuels appear competitive with ever-cheaper renewables only because their production has been subsidised and their producers insulated from the costs associated with the damage they cause. The industry's negative externalities, long buried in frontline communities, are now being imposed on people around the world in the form of wildfires, hurricanes, floods, and droughts. If we compelled fossil-fuel companies to shoulder the losses they long saw coming, and redirected public funds to renewable solutions, oil and gas assets would be exposed as the liabilities they are.

This points to another big problem: corporate capture. Although climate litigation is key to holding the industry accountable, the challenge is not just to make polluters pay for the harms they cause. We also must diminish their outsize influence on climate policy. Despite the best efforts of movements like Kick Big Polluters Out, the fossil-fuel industry has never had a seat at the year's climate talks; it is at the head of the table.

There sits Sultan Al Jaber, the CEO of the United Arab Emirates' national oil company, which is currently pursuing its own expansion plans. Al Jaber, COP28 president, is intent on portraying the fossil-fuel industry as the hero,

not the villain, in the fight against climate change. Yet this is a well-known survival strategy for an industry in long-term decline. So, too, is the UAE's advocacy of an 'all of the above' approach that promotes renewables as a complement to fossil fuels, rather than a replacement for them; and that champions carbon capture and offsets, despite abundant evidence that neither leads to significant emissions reductions.

Contrary to what Al Jaber suggested earlier this year, the problem is not just with fossil-fuel emissions; it is with fossil fuels themselves. Focusing only on carbon ignores all the other negative effects of fossil fuels, including their impact on health, such as the eight million premature deaths from air pollution annually.

Though fossil fuels are overwhelmingly to blame for climate change, our UNFCCC-led climate regime has failed to address them, even before the industry was handed the gavel. For decades, the international body that should be leading the fossil-fuel phaseout has conspicuously avoided the issue. Neither the 1992 UN Climate Convention nor the 2015 Paris climate agreement mentions oil, gas, or coal.

This omission was not some casual oversight. It is a symptom of a deeper crisis in global climate governance. Because UNFCCC decisions require a consensus among 198 members, powerful countries can block progress and assure lowest-common-denominator outcomes, or none at all.

COP28 further underscores the need for alternative processes to manage the decline of fossil fuels, free from the influence of those who profit from them. Every day provides new reminders of why we need to phase out oil, gas, and coal. Fortunately, initiatives like the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance, and the Global Parliamentarians' Inquiry offer new ideas about how to do it. Governments must commit to a forum dedicated to fossil-fuel phaseout, so the real work of ending the fossil-fuel era can begin.

Nikki Reisch is Director of the Climate and Energy Program at the Center for International Environmental Law. (Project Syndicate)

EXCHANGE RATES

22.12.2023

| Currency | Buying Rate | Selling Rate |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Australian Dollar | 218.1621 | 226.5822 |
| Canadian Dollar | 240.1454 | 226.5822 |
| Chinese Yuan (Renminbi) | 44.0971 | 46.8867 |
| Euro | 351.7235 | 366.0291 |
| Japanese Yen | 2.2470 | 2.3347 |
| Singapore Dollar | 240.6427 | 251.2460 |
| Sterling Pound | 406.1878 | 421.7423 |
| Swiss Franc | 406.1878 | 389.6485 |
| US Dollar | 321.4635 | 331.3071 |
| Country | Currency | Indicative Rate |
| Bahrain | Bahrain Dinar | 865.6779 |
| Kuwait | Kuwait Dinar | 1,062.1014 |
| Oman | Oman Rial | 847.7003 |
| Qatar | Qatar Riyal | 89.5341 |
| Saudi Arabia | Saudi Arabian Riyal | 86.9993 |
| UAE | UAE Dirham | 86.9993 |

Source: CBSL

Rebuilding Trust: Toward Good Fiscal Governance in Sri Lanka

BY OZLEM AYDIN, SEBASTIAN BEER AND CINDY NEGUS

Corruption comes with substantial costs. By undermining taxpayers' willingness to comply with the tax system and reducing the efficiency of spending programmes, corruption reduces a government's ability to efficiently deliver its policy objectives. But the indirect effects are potentially even more severe.

Pervasive corruption weakens social cohesion and reduces trust in the State, which can result in economic, social, and political instability. Amid significant macroeconomic, fiscal, and governance challenges, Sri Lanka requested the IMF carry out a Governance Diagnostic Assessment (GDA), making the country the first in Asia to participate in that exercise.

The assessment is designed to assess the severity of corruption and associated governance weaknesses that give rise to corruption vulnerabilities across six core state functions, one of which is fiscal governance, the topic of this blog.

The published GDA report identifies governance-related binding constraints on macroeconomic progress along with a set of recommendations for lasting improvement in governance and economic outcomes.

The assessment drilled down on 'hotspots' where governance weaknesses in PFM, tax policy, and revenue administration have created distinct corruption vulnerabilities in Sri Lanka.

On the PFM side, the GDA emphasised that the lack of a robust legal framework and transparent processes resulted in vulnerabilities in many areas.

Weaknesses in budget credibility and commitment controls have led to extensive cash rationing. Poor planning and project preparation result in major problems during the implementation of many projects.

Processes for approving investments and public procurement are similarly opaque, including the acceptance of unsolicited capital investment proposals and concerns over competitiveness and integrity.

State-owned entities continue to play a large role in the economy, but management and oversight are weak, with limited transparency and poor financial performance.

In the tax policy area, governance issues arose from an untransparent and complex tax system that granted wide-ranging tax concessions to selected taxpayers while imposing a high tax burden on others.

Frequent tax design changes that often lacked political and technical scrutiny weighed on the certainty, efficiency, and fairness of the system, ultimately eroding tax revenue and taxpayer trust.

While many aspects of the tax system have improved since the Government embarked on its ambitious reform agenda, some reforms are yet to be finalised.

For instance, generous and long-lasting tax concessions for investments of strategic importance remain, and the process of identifying such projects still lacks transparency and a rules-based character.

Similarly, the Special Commodity Levy, an industrial policy tool, continues to provide uncommon levels of ministerial discretion, jeopardising revenue collections and introducing governance vulnerabilities.

The GDA noted the absence of clear mechanisms for information sharing among authorities responsible for tax policy and revenue administration.

Exposure to corruption in customs and tax administration is substantial, with inadequate means for detecting and sanctioning officials for improper behavior.

Limited progress has been made in digitising processes for tax and Customs administration, reducing the ability to identify integrity issues through data analytics.

Specific issues in revenue and expenditure policies and practices are exacerbated by weaknesses in the overall systems for accountability and integrity, reducing the probability that officials will be punished for failing to comply with rules and regulations.

The GDA provided 16 high-priority recommendations, of which seven are related to fiscal governance. Implementing these recommendations would require medium- and long-term efforts and significant resources, including support from Sri Lanka's international partners.

Identifying and addressing governance and corruption vulnerabilities is essential for sustaining progress on fiscal consolidation, supporting inclusive economic growth, and ultimately achieving the objectives of the government's economic reform program supported by the IMF.

The government's publication of the Governance Diagnostic Assessment demonstrates ownership of the report's findings and conclusions and commitment to fighting corruption. It is an important step toward improving the efficiency of fiscal policy and strengthening Sri Lanka's trust in Government.

Courtesy - The Public Financial Management (PFM) Blog. The Blog was founded in 2008 by Michel Lazare and Bill Dorofincky when they worked for the Public Financial Management Divisions of the IMF's Fiscal Affairs Department (FAD). The purpose of this Blog is to provide a forum for the dissemination of information and views on PFM topics from IMF staff and PFM experts and organisations across the globe.

FINANCE TODAY

To Conclude Debt Restructuring and Restart Japan-Sri Lanka Ventures

JAPAN'S FINANCE MINISTER SET FOR SRI LANKA VISIT IN JANUARY

BY ISHARA GAMAGE

Japanese Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki is planning to visit Cambodia and Sri Lanka in January, as disclosed by Japanese diplomatic sources to Finance Today.

"He will be in Sri Lanka on 11 and 12 January," sources said.

During his visit, he plans to address economic challenges and strengthen financial cooperation between Sri Lanka and Japan.

The Finance Minister is expected to emphasise the critical need to advance debt restructuring efforts in Sri Lanka.

The conclusion of the debt restructuring process is expected to infuse Sri Lanka with renewed hope for an international credit rating upgrade from the current default category. This improved rating is symbolic of heightened trust from domestic and global investors as well as resuming international funding and aid programmes with Japanese financial institutions like the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Japanese diplomatic sources highlighted the issuance of a business improvement order by the Government to four prominent Japanese insurance companies. This action underscores the



Shunichi Suzuki

Government's dedication to maintaining stability and adherence to regulations within its domestic financial entities.

The Government has agreed to initiate diplomatic discussions with Japan to revive the Japan-funded Light Rail Transit (LRT) project.

A government spokesperson highlighted that the execution of the LRT project in Sri Lanka hinges on finalising the country's debt restructuring process.

Simultaneously, Sri Lanka expresses readiness to initiate the television digitisation project with Japanese assistance.

Cabinet approved a proposal by President Ranil Wickremesinghe on July 4, and the Government will prepare a timeframe for the revival. In March 2019, the Japanese government agreed to grant soft loan assistance for the LRT system project, which was to be implemented in 2019 and completed by 2026.

The JICA provided financial facilities under concessionary credit conditions, while the Oriental Consultants Global Company of Japan provided consultancy services.

The project, estimated to cost Yen 246,641 million, was terminated in September 2020 due to heavy operating costs and environmental damage.

Sri Lanka's economic future brightens with IMF support

BY CHITRAL JAYAWARNA



Recently, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved the disbursement of the second tranche from a USD2.9 billion bailout package aimed at strengthening the Sri Lankan economy. This assistance is significant for several reasons. Unlike the overall bailout package, this specific facility is designed to facilitate the implementation of comprehensive economic restructuring across various sectors in Sri Lanka. The conditions set by the IMF are crucial in helping the country navigate through challenging economic circumstances.

One compelling rationale behind this IMF facility is its potential to attract foreign investors and instill confidence in Sri Lanka's economic landscape. With the country declaring bankruptcy in April 2022 and grappling with a staggering debt of over USD83 billion, of which more than USD52 billion is owed to foreign creditors, the IMF intervention becomes imperative. The organisation emphasises the importance of the Sri Lankan authorities' commitment to executing key recommendations outlined in the Governance Diagnostic Report. Addressing corruption risks and reinforcing accountability are identified as essential steps to rebuild economic confidence, fostering more robust and inclusive growth. This will have an impact on building confidence with other donor organisations. Recently, The World Bank released the second tranche of the USD500 million Sri Lanka Resilience, Stability, and Economic Turnaround (RESET) Development Policy Operation (DPO), considering the continued satisfactory progress made by the Government with the reform programme.

The implementation of the IMF's recommendations becomes crucial in steering Sri Lanka towards significant fiscal adjustments. The anticipated fiscal changes are expected to play a pivotal role in navigating the complexities of debt restructuring and treatments. Swift action consistent with restoring debt sustainability will be paramount in dispelling uncertainty that currently hinders Sri Lankan businesses and external financing. Overall, the IMF facility emerged as a linchpin in charting a course for Sri Lanka's economic recovery and instilling renewed optimism in both domestic and international investors.

(The writer is an Economic Analyst / Member of the Sri Lanka Agriculture Research Policy)

70% 'Presidential Wage Hike' threatens plantations - Report

BY PANEECHA AMARASEKERE

The biggest risk facing plantation companies is the presidential call for a 70 per cent wage hike which isn't productivity based, NDBS Securities (NDBS) in a report dated this month (December) said.

The industry which was affected by the fertiliser ban continues to suffer with this, mainly in the rubber sector. Rubber is further affected by a leaf disease, which has reduced the productivity in the plantations. "The tea segment would see short-term reduction in volumes due to adverse weather conditions. However, our channel checks and industry sources expect tea volumes to increase in the medium term with industry headwinds being solved. Palm oil sector is witnessing improving yields. And if the ban on oil palm cultivation is removed, the sector would see yields and volumes further improving," NDBS said.

The plantation sector is turning positive, with steady price increases in all three crops, tea, rubber and palm oil. "We expect a favourable phase for plantation companies in the medium run. We believe the total revenue of the companies to rise as the prices are on an upward movement, despite concerns on volumes and worker wages," it also said. Further, key regional plantation companies (RPCs) have shown profitability prospects.

"All major crop national sales averages (NSAs) have risen in the recent past. We expect tea prices to remain high as a result of increasing demand and improvements in the quality, despite short-term pressure from the rupee appreciation. Rubber prices will remain high as a result of low volumes and increasing global demand. Palm oil prices would come under pressure from reducing global oil prices, however, we remain optimistic on the sector due to rising yields," NDBS said.

Average tea auction prices are up by seven per cent (month on month (MoM)) due to demand and supply dynamics. "We expect prices to stabilize at current levels in the short term as a result of drop in volumes and demand from western markets. However, recovering global demand should boost revenue from tea," it said.

Rubber latex prices increased to Rs700-800/kg (40 per cent year-on-year (YoY) growth). The increase is mainly attributable to lower volumes affected by a leaf disease. Further, recovering demand from China aided in global price increases.

Due to the above 'rubber disease' we expect a 15 per cent total drop for 2023

volumes. Further, the prolonged impact of the fertiliser ban and adverse weather conditions continued to impact rubber volumes," NDBS said. Globally, natural rubber prices have increased and are expected to grow as a result of the increasing economic activities in China and the recovery of other global economies.

However, the drop in crude oil prices as a result of global conflicts could add pressure on prices. Rubber yields have been negatively affected due to low production and volumes in plantations, nonetheless, the increasing NSAs could minimise the impact on margins for rubber plantation companies, NDBS said.

Palm oil prices dropped by 6% YoY in December '23 mainly due to weaker demand and increased production. Locally, prices of fresh fruit bunches (FFB) also dropped, aided by the rupee appreciation. FFB prices have dropped to around Rs 53/kg, compared to 130/kg levels last year.

"Our industry sources and channel checks expect prices to further drop as a result of the sharp drop in crude oil prices. Additionally, demand for palm oil would come down in the coming quarters due to the winter season. However, we expect palm oil yields to increase with increasing volumes and the removal of the palm oil ban would see increasing local production."

Investment Risks: What could go wrong? Non-productivity linked wage hike affecting cost of production negatively. President had suggested a 70% increase in wages through a collective agreement. Tea has the highest labour intensity of the three crops and will disproportionately suffer from a decision supporting that.

Government policy on oil palm cultivation: Although officially lifting the ban is in discussion, "we haven't official channels finalising a decision." The Rajapaksa Government previously imposed a policy to stop the cultivation of palm oil trees and to uproot the existing trees at a rate of 10% per annum.

High global fertiliser prices (Urea particularly) impact the cost of production adversely. Availability of labour. An ageing working population in the Country's estate sector, and reluctance of younger generations to seek employment in the sector, have resulted in a shortage of labour.

Adverse weather conditions: Erratic weather patterns and rising temperature levels could affect the volume and the quality of crops. Adverse impact of the rubber leaf disease, commodity price volatility and prolonged slowdown in global demand.

50% of employed impacted by economic crisis - Report

BY PANEECHA AMERESKEKERE

Nearly half of employed individuals encountered changes in their main job due to the economic crisis, Census and Statistics Department (CSD) in a report released on Friday (22) said. These changes primarily include experiences such as work breaks or temporary absences and reductions in working hours, cuts in pay or allowances and income loss," the report titled "Household Survey on Impact of Economic Crisis – 2023" further said.

The survey data also showed that 60.5 per cent of households suffered a decrease in their total household average monthly income due to the current economic crisis, CSD said. The primary reason reported by households for reducing their average monthly expenditure, accounting for 77.0 per cent of responses was to align their expenses with the decrease in income. This means that households adjusted their spending habits to match the reduction in their overall income.

"Limiting or controlling expenses" emerges as the most prevalent coping strategy, reported by 75.3 per cent of respondents. Among patients who altered their treatment procedures, a significant majority (81.7 per cent) reported that insufficient funds as the primary reason for this change. Following closely, the second and third most reported reasons for changing treatment procedures were transportation issues and the unavailability of services or resources, the CSD report said.

The survey findings indicate that currently, 54.9 per cent of households in Sri Lanka are currently indebted, it said. The highest proportion of indebtedness is from mortgage matters (31.0 per cent), followed by banks (21.9 per cent) and money lenders (7.9 per cent).

The report further said that 91.0 per cent of households experienced an increase in their total household average monthly expenditure, 22 per cent of households have got indebted due to the economic crisis, the schooling of 54.9 per cent of individuals (aged 3-21) were also affected by the economic crisis and seven per cent of the total population changed their health treatment procedure due to the economic crisis.

Among households that reported an increase in their average monthly expenditure, the most commonly reported reason, accounting for 99.1 per cent of responses, was the increase in food expenses, the CSD report said. This indicates that the majority of these households experienced a rise in their spending specifically on food items, it added.

The primary strategy adopted by the majority (53.2 per cent) of guardians/parents of school going children affected by the economic crisis was to either reduce their expenditure on new stationery or to completely stop such purchases.

Following closely behind, 44.2 per cent of guardians/parents of school going children have decided to cut down on buying new uniforms or stopped purchasing them altogether. Additionally, reducing the frequency of attending tuition classes or shifting to online classes emerged as the third and fourth most commonly adopted strategies, with 40.6 per cent and 28.1 per cent of respondents opting for these measures, respectively.

Visa Catalyses Card Usage in Sri Lanka's Peak Season

*Avanthi Colombage,
Country Manager for Visa
in Sri Lanka, Maldives*

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

With the bustling holiday season underway, how are consumer shopping and behaviour trends looking from Visa's vantage point, both online and offline?

A: The festive season is a time of celebration, gift-giving, and spending for many consumers around the world and for Sri Lankans. This season is looking positive, with many consumers out and about again, for possibly one of the brightest holiday seasons in the past few years. There is a visible increase in footfalls at shopping malls and retail stores as people gear up for the festivities.

One of the key trends we are observing this season is the shift in consumer behaviour in terms of how they pay for retail purchases, towards contactless payment. Given the convenience of contactless payments, Sri Lankans now simply tap their cards to pay while checking out at a retail store without the hassle of carrying cash, making the shopping experience even more convenient and rewarding. Another trend that we expect to see this season is the rise in e-commerce, as more consumers opt to shop online to avoid crowds and enjoy the convenience of home delivery. With internet users in the country increasing from 30% in 2018 to 51%, we expect a rise in e-commerce on the back of higher awareness and adoption of online payments. To add to the season's festivities, Visa is also running a "Bill Wipe Out" campaign at the Colombo City Centre (CCC) in partnership with Yes FM, which will choose 33 customers to have their bills fully reimbursed if they make purchases using Visa debit cards at the CCC (T&Cs apply).

What is Visa doing to make every day cashless purchases a simple and smooth experience for shoppers? Do you think the tendency to tap and pay is here to stay?

A: Visa has been deeply committed to Sri Lanka's payment ecosystem and its growth for over 35 years. With our network of banks, merchants, and fintech partners, we help consumers pay digitally, simply, and securely every day. As Sri Lankans start to use their cards more, we are also working with businesses and small merchants, more so outside the main urban cities, to ensure they can accept a variety of payments, be it cards, contactless payments, QR payments, or online/e-commerce payments, to ensure all consumers have access to sellers who accept safe, secure, and convenient forms of digital payments. In tandem, our advanced risk capabilities are ensuring an updated, safe, and secure environment for cashless transactions in this dynamic commerce environment.

We believe tap-to-pay is a game-changer and definitely here to stay. Once consumers experience its convenience, especially in stores with long lines or when they've fumbled for cash before, they understand that this is faster and safer than cash. We continue to engage with retail partners and banks on increasing awareness of the benefits of contactless payments to create a smooth consumer experience in-store. In numerous countries where contactless payments are entrenched, we have seen tapping become a habit, and where one cannot tap to pay seamlessly, the consumer experience is less than perfect. We believe that contactless payments are the future of digital payments, as they offer a seamless and satisfying consumer experience.

Tourist numbers are looking up; we are seeing more holidaymakers coming to Sri Lanka as the year ends. What more can be done to make Sri Lanka a preferred or repeat destination for travellers, particularly in terms of digital payments?

A: Sri Lanka is a diverse and attractive destination for tourists from around the world, offering a range of natural and cultural attractions. The country has witnessed a remarkable recovery in tourism with an unprecedented surge in foreign tourist arrivals, a 153% increase last month after a 159.8% jump in October, signalling a robust start to the peak tourism season and in response to the favourable conditions in the country. With visas now free of charge for countries like India, China, Russia, and others, we expect a further boost to tourism.

Given that international travellers are digitally savvy and used to seamless, convenient cashless payments using cards and smartphones, it is crucial to ensure these facilities are available at tourist destinations across Sri Lanka. Visa is working with our network of partners to ensure cashless payment



facilities are available at tourist attractions and cultural sites, which will not only allow for accepting contactless payments with ease and confidence but also formalize the collection of these payments. Further, we understand that the development of digital payment infrastructure would undoubtedly contribute to greater tourist traffic, repeat visitors, and a superior experience.

At this time, we also see more foreign cards being used across the country. How does Visa actively work with partners to ensure cards are accepted at more small merchants, retail stores, etc.?

A: Today's savvy traveller looks for experiential travel beyond hotspots, seeking connections with the local community and culture and "authentic" experiences away from common tourist attractions. So, while segments like travel, hospitality, and tourist hotspots are up the curve, we are now helping smaller merchants, in and outside urban areas, accept Visa cards, including foreign-issued Visa cards. Visa is committed to expanding its card acceptance network and enabling more small merchants and retail stores to accept foreign-issued Visa cards. By working with banks and other players, Visa leverages its innovative products and services, such as Visa Ready, Visa Direct, and Visa Contactless, to offer fast, secure, and convenient payment solutions to merchants and customers alike. The market is growing, and we are creating opportunities for merchants to ride the tourism wave, accept cashless payments, and grow their businesses.

What measures does Visa take so consumers can pay more confidently using cards or digital payments?

A: The digital commerce market in Sri Lanka is projected to grow by 19.08% (2023–2027), resulting in a market volume of USD 7.60 billion in 2027. As a global trusted leader in digital payments, Visa is focused on multiple areas to ensure the growth of this digital commerce ecosystem is secure.

1. Visa has established and maintains globally validated safety protocols, such as EMVCo® standards. 2. We continuously work with banking partners to ensure risk and fraud prevention measures are taken that that ecosystem security is up-to-date. 3. Of course, we also continue to engage with the regulator on best practices for consumer and business payments, both domestic and cross-border.

4. We are also invested in running multiple initiatives to educate end consumers on how to ensure secure digital payments via their Visa cards. We currently have a multimedia campaign "Just Debit It" across TV, digital, and DOOH to encourage Sri Lankans to use their Visa debit cards confidently as they pay for their everyday purchases.

5. Of late, we can see Visa campaigns on using debit cards. Why the focus on enhancing the usage of debit cards for transactions?

Post-pandemic, we have noted that debit cards have become one of the most familiar forms of payment for Sri Lankans. And during the festive season, visiting ATMs may be difficult, and carrying cash may not always be safe. Consumers equipped with debit cards can instead simply tap or dip the card to pay at the merchant. This is also useful for consumers who are not yet using credit instruments for a variety of reasons. We believe our campaigns will encourage more cardholders to use their debit cards, make quicker or safer purchases, and make the most of the holiday season.

One thought you would like to leave our readers with as they get into the holiday mood?

A: With the exciting festivities lined up for all types of celebrations, keeping a tab on one's statements and ensuring optimum use of digital payment modes will be great for consumers looking for safe, secure, and simple digital transactions this season. We wish all Sri Lankans a happy Christmas and a prosperous new year.

Visa (NYSE: V) is a world leader in digital payments, facilitating transactions between consumers, merchants, financial institutions, and government entities across more than 200 countries and territories. Our mission is to connect the world through the most innovative, convenient, reliable, and secure payment network, enabling individuals, businesses, and economies to thrive. We believe that economies that include everyone everywhere, uplift everyone everywhere, and see access as foundational to the future of money movement.

Mad dogs and an Englishwoman

CEYLON RIDING CLUB'S INEKE PITTS SETS NEW STANDARDS IN BUSINESS



Proposed Ceylon Riding Club sites

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

On Sunday, 3 December, 2023, members, friends, and riders of the Ceylon Riding Club (CRC) gathered at Port City, Colombo for the annual seasonal Horse Show and Members' Day. At eight in the morning, the stables were abuzz with children shampooing, grooming, and braiding their horses and ponies in eager anticipation of winning the prize for 'best turned out' of the day.

Nearly 20 riders from four to 17 took part in four classes, and the senior riders competed in a showjumping competition and demo ride. The afternoon was topped off with a Hobby Horse Grand Prix where parents joined in with children in an enthusiastic bid for first place in a relay jump-off.

In the evening, a gathering of members, friends, and special invitees gathered to celebrate the accomplishments of the Club, founded in Port City in September 2022.

The following is a transcript of the Keynote Address delivered by Shehara de Silva, an International Marketing Specialist and Director of listed companies, following the Horse Show and Member's Day held on 3 December, 2023.

"There is an adage that only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the noonday sun. This comes to mind as I look at the brave and seemingly foolhardy endeavours of Ineke Pitts.

Here we have an Englishwoman madly pursuing what seems like a near-impossible dream and delivering despite the odds of economic collapse and a pandemic.

Ineke is your proverbial cowgirl in a new investment frontier, believing in the potentiality of Sri Lanka far more than most of us locals do.

Where did this journey start? Decades ago, she arrived in this country and fell in love with it. Or perhaps when she started a horseback riding school in Piliyandala in 2017.

Now, with the Port City Ceylon Riding Club, she wants to build an international-class riding school comparable to the best in the region. Today, she has over 400 families in her membership, of which 70% are local. CRC enjoys around 70% of the local market share.

Her students have won Duke of Edinburgh awards for horsemanship and level 1 and 2 British Horse Society certification. Several have gone on to follow an equestrian career at top equestrian facilities and leading universities overseas.

Ineke is no lightweight expat, running a project out of ennui. She holds a doctorate in organizational change from Ashridge Business School. She is a businesswoman, Deloitte consultant, and former Regional Director of M&P. She has put skin in the game and so far invested around Rs 100 million in her equestrian business.

The new facility includes an indoor riding arena, a coffee shop, a round pen, and riding

trails. It is being further developed in partnership with CHEC to include a full-size international show arena and themed landscaped gardens, as well as a green lung in the desert that will become the thriving metropolis that is Port City.

The centre currently has 12 horses and ponies and provides classes in basic dressage, organizes show jumping competitions, special needs classes, and courses in stable management, as well as leisure riding for visitors and tourists. In 2024, there will be at least two international schools offering riding as an extracurricular activity, which will soon lead to inter-school riding competitions for the first time in Sri Lankan history.

The facility also works closely with the mounted division of the Sri Lanka Police and the Army cavalry unit and has provided support to both at different times.

Port City and its 600 acres are expected to attract USD 13.8 billion in FDI, it is the largest project since Mahaweli and is a gimmer of Sri Lanka. Port City can be a game-changer. Investing has its risks, but this is par for the course in business. More so with any new frontier.

Globally, every leading city has riding clubs. It is a USD 420 billion global industry, providing 16 million full-time jobs. Today, there are more than 1,880 riding schools in China; since 2010, it has grown by leaps and bounds. Hong Kong has six riding clubs: Jakarta (40), Malaysia (93), and India (300). Just looking at the industry in India and China alone, two countries where we have strategic intent in driving inward investment to Port City and Sri Lanka, we can clearly see the opportunity that lies here, attracting substantive investment in due course and providing leisure activities that suit the lifestyles of high-net-worth families from these countries. An important box they will tick when choosing a country to live, work, and educate their kids in. A catalyst for optimising investment locality or country choice.



Ceylon Riding Club's Ineke Pitts sets new standards in business

These days, the CRC charges much less than what it costs to ride horses in Singapore, Bangkok, Dubai, London, or Beijing. It is a bargain for visitors and accessible to locals. It will be an added attraction to Port City with its targeted investment sectors of an international school and a world-class hospital, all are critical factors in attracting FDI.

The riding centre also offers internationally-accredited practice that supports special needs, especially for children and adults with autism, Down's syndrome, and cerebral palsy, as it builds cognitive development, muscle tone, balance, and coordination. Horses are also beneficial for personal development and well-being. Ineke is a highly qualified equine-assisted coach and leadership trainer. Hippotherapy is another potential game-changer; the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (or PATH) exists in 80 countries with 700,000 child and adult members.

Let me finish my spin on why I am humbled and delighted to say a few words as we tail-end a very difficult year of economic instability and look out for a glimmer of hope for rebuilding our nation to its usual unmarketed, and unfilled potential. Given the timing and the risks involved, Ineke has taken a leap of faith when even we locals are reluctant to believe in the future of our country. We have become a nation of naysayers and wingers. Will any of us have the courage of our convictions to support her or similar high-risk projects in an emerging space that has lagged in basic enabling infrastructure and the externalities of global volatility, domestic policy uncertainty, and the escalating cost of capital? There will never be a perfect moment. There will always be risk-takers and dream-makers who herald change and growth. Perhaps Shakespeare said it best:

"There is a tide in the affairs of men."

"When taken at the flood, it leads to fortune."

"Or, if it be not so, it leads to shallow." (Julius Caesar)

The moral is that fortune favours the bold. Those that shall lose out on reaching the impossible dream. And in this particular case, our lone Englishwoman has put her heart and soul into bringing Sri Lanka's world-class equestrian centre to our city. There are many more steps and hurdles to jump, but like her horse jumping drill, I do not doubt that Ms. Pitts will be up for it. I can't help but raise a toast to her entrepreneurial zeal. More strength in her hoofs, and more fire in her belly.

One day in the not-so-distant future, we shall stand here and understand why opening up new frontiers takes a few good women and men to move into the trenches and carve a path to a promised future, or El Dorado, that fortune or land of gold".

SLT-MOBITEL relocates Ratnapura Branch to elevate customer experience

Reinforcing its commitment to delivering unmatched services and an elevated retail experience to customers, SLT-MOBITEL, the National ICT Solutions Provider recently unveiled its newly relocated branch in Ratnapura.

Located at No. 428, Main Street, Ratnapura, the new branch upholds SLT-MOBITEL's strategic focus on bringing connectivity closer to customers. Equipped with modern aesthetics, alluring interiors, spacious layouts, and a customer-friendly setting, it creates a warm and welcoming environment for both corporate and retail customers.

The new Ratnapura branch will provide all core services available at SLT-MOBITEL's flagship stores, encompassing customer service, new connections, billing assistance,



Mobitel (Pvt) Ltd. Chief Operating Officer, Sudharshana Geeganege opening the new Ratnapura Branch accompanied by officials

and inquiries, enhancing overall customer convenience.

Dedicated staff at the branch will offer personalised attention and expert advice on products tailored to specific lifestyles, aiming to deepen SLT-MOBITEL customer relationships beyond mere transactions. Furthermore, the branch will feature enticing

promotional offers on devices, new connections, and eSIM offers tailored to meet the evolving digital needs of Sri Lankan households and businesses.

Customers can explore a range of devices, Fixed & Mobile solutions, and enterprise offerings, receiving guidance.

from knowledgeable staff within a seamless in-store journey facilitated by smart digital touchpoints. With the unveiling of the new branch, SLT-MOBITEL strives to revitalise its regional prowess, ensuring outstanding convenience for customers across locales and connecting to every conceivable need.



Ceylinco Life draws early winners of mega promotion

Overseas leisure travel for an entire family has become unaffordable for many, but five families of Ceylinco Life policyholders have just received news of an all-expenses-paid holiday in Malaysia courtesy of the life insurance market leader.

The five families from Hatton, Ragama, Nugegoda, Maharagama and Matugama are the first overseas holiday winners selected at a draw conducted for the 17th edition of the Ceylinco Life 'Family Savari' mega promotion. Another 100 families have been chosen at the same draw for a day at Pearl Bay theme park in Bandaragama.

The overseas holiday winners already selected will be joined by the winners of the grand prize of a holiday in Turkey for five families, and another five families that will win a holiday in Malaysia at the final draw of the promotion to be conducted in January 2024, the Company said. That draw will also select another 150 families to spend a day at Pearl Bay.

Family Savari 17 marks the return of overseas holidays for the family as the main loyalty reward under this annual extravaganza, the largest customer loyalty promotion of its kind in the local life insurance sector.

This year's Family Savari promotion will reward a total of 265 policyholders and their family members, numbering 1,060 people in all, for their loyalty to Ceylinco Life. The mega promotion has to date rewarded more than 35,000 people in this manner.

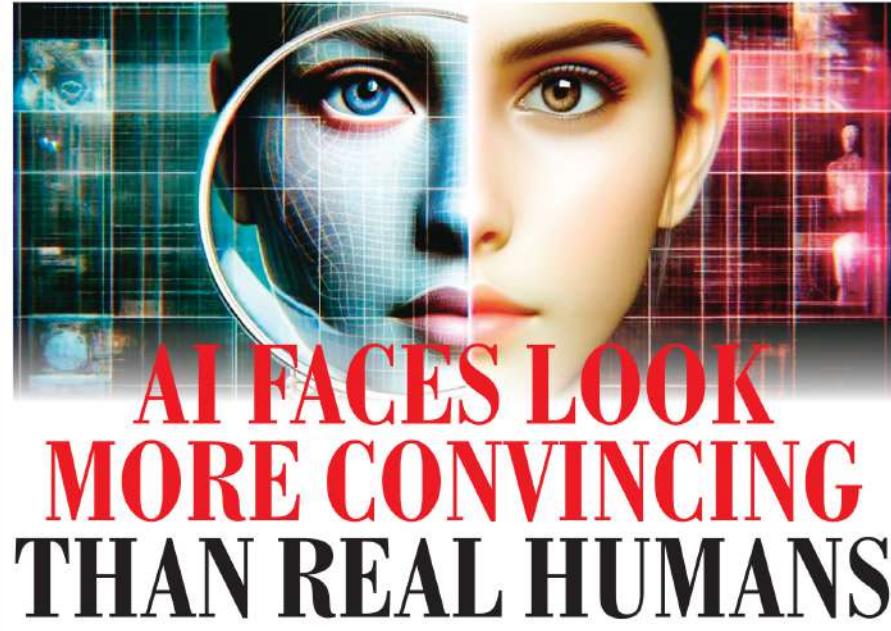
To be eligible to win overseas holidays or the local excursion at the Family Savari draws, Ceylinco Life policyholders are simply required to continue their existing policies with the Company or maintain a minimum account balance in their retirement plans during the promotion period, 1 September to 31 December. Additional winning chances are given to customers who pay their premiums directly to the company and further chances are assigned corresponding to the time they have been Ceylinco Life customers.

Grand-prize-winning families at previous Family Savari promotions have visited Australia, Italy, England, Germany, Switzerland, Japan, and France, while other winners have toured China, Dubai, and Singapore.

The Family Savari promotion is supported by its celebrity brand ambassadors, popular actor Roshan Ranawana and his wife Kushhani.

Adjudged Sri Lanka's 'Brand of the Year' and 'Service Brand of the Year' by the Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing (SLIM) and 'Best Life Insurer in Sri Lanka' by World Finance for the ninth consecutive year in 2022, Ceylinco Life was conferred the 'People's Life Insurance Service Provider of the Year' title at 2023 SLIM Kantar Peoples Awards for the 17th consecutive year and was recently named one of the 10 Most Admired Companies in Sri Lanka. Ceylinco Life has been the country's leading life insurer for more than half of the 35 years it has been in existence. The Company was also ranked the 'Most Valuable Insurance Brand in Sri Lanka' across both life and general insurance categories by Brand Finance in 2023 and certified a 'Great Workplace' in Sri Lanka for the third consecutive year in 2022. Ceylinco Life has close to a million lives covered by active policies and provides innovative life insurance solutions which offer protection while de-risking the goals and ambitions of the Company's policyholders.

CONNECT TODAY



AI FACES LOOK MORE CONVINCING THAN REAL HUMANS

New research shows that AI-generated white faces appear more realistic than real human faces, signalling potential risks of racial bias and misformation in AI technology.

White faces generated by artificial intelligence (AI) now appear more real than human faces, according to new research by experts at The Australian National University (ANU).

In the study more people thought AI-generated white faces were human than the faces of real people. The same wasn't true for images of people of colour.

The reason for the discrepancy is that AI algorithms are trained disproportionately on white faces, Dr. Amy Dawel, the paper's senior author, said.

"If white AI faces are consistently perceived as more realistic, this

technology could have serious implications for people of colour by ultimately reinforcing racial biases online," Dr. Dawel said.

"This problem is already apparent in current AI technologies that are being used to create professional-looking headshots. When used for people of colour, the AI alters their skin and eye colour to white people."

One of the issues with AI 'hyper-realism' is that people often don't realise they're being fooled, the researchers found.

"Concerningly, people who thought that the AI faces were real most often were paradoxically the most confident their judgments were correct," Elizabeth Miller, study co-author and PhD candidate at ANU, said.

"This means people who are mistaking AI imposters for real

people don't know they are being tricked." The researchers were also able to discover why AI faces are fooling people.

Why AI faces are deceptive

"It turns out that there are still physical differences between AI and human faces, but people tend to misinterpret them. For example, white AI faces tend to be more in proportion and people mistake this as a sign of humanness," Dr. Dawel said.

"However, we can't rely on these physical cues for long. AI technology is advancing so quickly that the differences between AI and human faces will probably disappear soon."

The researchers argue this trend could have serious implications for the proliferation of misinformation

and identity theft, and that action needs to be taken.

"AI technology can't become sectioned off so only tech companies know what's going on behind the scenes. There needs to be greater transparency around AI so researchers and civil society can identify issues before they become a major problem," Dr. Dawel said.

Raising public awareness can also play a significant role in reducing the risks posed by the technology, the researchers argue.

"Given that humans can no longer detect AI faces, society needs tools that can accurately identify AI imposters," Dr. Dawel said.

"Educating people about the perceived realism of AI faces could help make the public appropriately sceptical about the images they're seeing online."

(scitedaily)

Teejay wins Silver at NCE export awards

Teejay Lanka PLC took the Silver Award in the 'Extra Large' category of 'Textiles and Garments' sector at the Annual Export Awards 2023 presented by the National Chamber of Exporters (NCE), ending 2023 on a winning note.

The NCE Export Award followed similar accolades for export excellence, including a 'Best Exporter' Award and a Certificate of Merit at the 2023 Presidential Export Awards presented by the Export Development Board (EDB), and a Merit Award at the CNI Achiever Awards for Industrial Excellence presented by the Ceylon National Chamber of Industries (CNCI).

The NCE Export Awards programme is a strategic initiative to highlight and celebrate exporters that have excelled in crucial dimensions, focusing on People, Profit, and Planet. The Chamber places distinct emphasis on recognising businesses that not only achieve financial success but also contribute to societal and environmental well-being.

The assessment of contenders for these awards also encompasses a commitment to innovation, value addition and research & development, reflecting a proactive approach in line with the economic perspectives of the Sri Lankan Government.

Commenting on the NCE Export Award won by Teejay, the Company's CEO Pubudu De Silva said: "This award serves as a reaffirmation of Teejay's unwavering commitment to



achieving business growth while contributing significantly to the development of the Sri Lankan economy and the textile industry. We value this award because it is not simply about business volumes, but a recognition of the multifaceted contributions of expertise, to sustainability, innovation, and economic progress."

Teejay Lanka's first multi-national textile manufacturer, the Teejay Group owns manufacturing facilities in Sri Lanka and India, along with a state-of-the-art printing facility in Sri Lanka. An ISO 9001:2015, ISO 14001:2015 and OHSAS 18001:2007 compliant company and the first in the industry to develop green fabric, Teejay Lanka was also the first textile manufacturer in Sri Lanka to receive membership of the US Cotton Trust Protocol. Teejay is a public quoted company with 40 per cent public ownership.

and the backing of Sri Lanka's largest apparel exporter Brandix Lanka which has a 32 per cent stake in the Company. Pacific Textiles of Hong Kong, whose key shareholder is the Tokyo Stock Exchange-listed Toray Industries Inc., owns 27 per cent of Teejay Lanka.

Teejay Lanka was ranked the No. 1 corporate entity among 100 public-listed companies in Sri Lanka for Transparency in Corporate Reporting in the TRAC 2022 assessment carried out by Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL), the local arm of the international corruption watchdog. The TISL assessment was carried out on three areas crucial to fighting and preventing corruption: reporting on anti-corruption programmes, transparency in company holdings and the disclosure of key financial information in domestic operations.

Agromet Asia wins at NCE annual export awards



Pakistan, and Indonesia.

Agromet Asia also takes pride in being the only Gravity Die Casting manufacturer of non-ferrous alloys in Sri Lanka, catering to both domestic and international markets. It produces world-class

Transmission and Distribution Components, Railway Overhead and 3rd Line Components, Complex Non-Ferrous Castings, Safety-Critical Components for challenging environments as well as precision castings for various engineering needs, with exports to major power sector and railways spanning across Europe, the USA, South East Asia and India.

Agromet Asia is an ISO 9001:2015 and 14001:2015 certified, and REACH certified (EU and UK REACH) company.

With a rigorous R&D in-house team backed by globally renowned German expertise and state-of-the-art infrastructure, Agromet Asia continues to grow from strength to strength since its inception in the year 2000, and has ambitious plans to

expand their operations and footprint to other markets, whilst contributing significantly to Sri Lanka's exports and economy including employment opportunities.

Agromet Asia is also making strides towards sustainability, regarding itself as not just the leading but also the most admired, compliant, and socially responsible non-ferrous metals company. Its facilities are powered by solar energy. The company was also awarded the EcoVadis Bronze Medal for Corporate Social Responsibility in 2022 and 2023, placing Agromet among the top half of companies assessed by EcoVadis, whose rating is one of the key elements of supplier assessment systems used by companies operating in various sectors around the globe.

Agromet Asia engages in various community development initiatives, such as building much-needed infrastructure, a community centre, and taking care of the nearby community in the Horana region.

Israel-Gaza war

NETANYAHU VOWS TO INTENSIFY CAMPAIGN

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said Israel will intensify its fight against Hamas in the coming days.

He told members of his party that he had visited Gaza on Monday morning and that Israel's military campaign there was "not close to being over".

His comments come days after the US Secretary of State said, Israel should lower the intensity of its strikes.

The war began on 7 October after Hamas led a deadly attack on communities inside Israel.

Gaza's Hamas-run Health Ministry said, on Monday that some 20,674 Palestinians had been killed in Israeli bombardments since then. It says most of the fatalities have been women and children.

Some 1,200 people, mainly civilians, were killed when Hamas gunmen stormed across the border on 7 October. About 240 people were taken back to Gaza as hostages. Israel says 132 are still being held.

Netanyahu has vowed to destroy Hamas and return the hostages to Israel. He told a meeting of his Likud party that troops he met on



his visit to Gaza had urged Israel to keep fighting "until the end".

"We're not stopping. We're continuing to fight, and we're intensifying the fighting in the coming days. It's going to be a long war that's not close to ending."

Later on Monday, the Prime Minister was heckled by relatives of hostages demanding the immediate release of their loved ones during an address to Parliament.

"We will not be able to release all the abductees without military

pressure ... we will not stop fighting," he said, as families chanted "Now! Now!" from the gallery.

Israeli and Arab media say that Egypt has proposed a plan for a ceasefire between the two sides.

According to reports, the plan would see the phased release of all Israeli hostages and an undetermined number of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails over the course of a month and a half, ending with a suspension of Israel's offensive.

A previous temporary truce deal negotiated by Qatar saw dozens of hostages released from Gaza in exchange for Palestinian prisoners. So far, both Israel and Hamas have resisted growing calls for a ceasefire.

On Sunday the Gaza health ministry said an Israeli air strike killed at least 70 people in the Al-Maghazi refugee camp in the centre of the strip, with a densely populated residential block destroyed.

The Palestine Red Crescent Society said "intense" Israeli air strikes led to the closure of main roads between Maghazi and two other refugee camps, Al-Bureij and Al-Nuseirat, "hindering the work of ambulances and rescue teams".

In a statement to the BBC on Sunday, the Israeli military said it had received "reports of an incident in the Maghazi camp".

Despite the challenges posed by Hamas terrorists operating within civilian areas in Gaza, the IDF (Israeli Defence Forces) is committed to international law including taking feasible steps to minimise harm to civilians," it added.

(BBC)



UN says no let-up in Israeli air strikes in Gaza

militias on US bases in both Iraq and Syria, and stressed that the US would not hesitate to protect its people and facilities.

There has been an escalation of activity by Hezbollah and other armed militias in the region following Israel's military operation in Gaza.

Tom White, Director of the UN Agency for Palestinian Refugees UNRWA, told the BBC World Service's NewsHour programme that there were currently an estimated 150,000 people in central Gaza who had received evacuation orders from the Israeli military.

Also speaking to the NewsHour, Connell said: "What I saw at the Al-Aqsa Hospital in (the city of) Deir al-Balah was absolute carnage."

There were, she said, many casualties there with "extremely severe wounds but [who] cannot be treated because the hospital was 'absolutely overloaded'."

"And some of those that I saw were people who were hit in the strike yesterday (Sunday)," she said, in a reference to a reported attack on the Al-Maghazi refugee camp in central Gaza.

The Hamas-run Health Ministry says at least 70 people were killed in the Israeli strike.

(BBC)



Bodies of five people found in flat in Paris

Prosecutors in France have launched a homicide investigation after five bodies were found in a town north-east of Paris.

According to local media reports, the victims are a woman and her four young children.

Their bodies were found in the town of Meaux which is just over 41km (25 miles) from the French capital.

They were discovered in an apartment, the local prosecutor told France's AFP news agency.

According to news website Actu17, which first reported the case, Police are looking for the 33-year-old father, who is "on the run".

Prosecutor Jean-Baptiste Bladier confirmed to French media the Versailles judicial police service was investigating.

The Paris region has recently seen a series of infanticides:

- In late November, a 41-year-old man confessed to killing his three daughters, aged four to 11, and turned himself in.

Police found them dead in his home in the town of Alfortville, in the south-eastern suburbs of the capital

- In October, a Policeman killed his three daughters before killing himself at his home in Vemars in Val-d'Oise.

(BBC)

Thousands join huge migrant caravan in Mexico

Thousands of migrants have set off on foot from southern Mexico in an effort to reach the United States border.

Around 7,000 people mainly from South and Central America, including thousands of children, are estimated to have joined the migrant caravan.

They left just days before US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is due to discuss how to curb mass migration with the Mexican President. Several border crossings have recently been closed due to a migrant surge.

White House national security spokesman John Kirby said US President Joe Biden and his Mexican counterpart, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, shared concern about the "dramatic" increase



in migrants crossing their joint border.

The number of people apprehended at the US southern border exceeded two million both in the 2022 and the 2023 fiscal years.

In September 2023 alone, US Border Patrol apprehended more than 200,000 migrants crossing

the US-Mexico border unlawfully, according to US Homeland Security figures. The latest migrant caravan left from the southern Mexican city of Tapachula, near the country's southern border with Guatemala, on Christmas Eve.

(BBC)

Beijing shivers through coldest December on record

The Chinese capital, Beijing, has experienced its coldest December since records began in 1951.

Temperatures in the city have frequently fallen below -10C this month.

It has been a year of extremes in the capital: six months ago, Beijing recorded its hottest ever June day at just over 40C. China has been hit by several waves of extremely cold weather already this winter.

A Beijing weather observatory recently recorded more than 300 hours of below-freezing temperatures in under two weeks, according to the State-backed China Daily news agency.

The cold snap has affected provinces across China, with schools in some areas being forced to close and transport services facing difficulties.

Persistent cold weather has put energy supplies in Henan Province under strain, with reports that some heating boilers have broken down.

Meanwhile, parts of northern Japan have seen huge snowfall - far above the usual amount for this time of year.

Heavy snow alerts have been issued for some areas over the past few days, with around a metre (39 inches) of snow falling in the Gifu and Hokkaido prefectures.

There has been an extreme swing in temperatures in South Korea in recent weeks - ranging from 16C to below -12C, according to the Korean Meteorological Administration (KMA). It is not clear how people are coping with extreme weather in neighbouring North Korea.

One possible reason given for the cold snap is a weakening in the Polar Vortex - an expanse of cold air that normally sits around the Arctic - allowing the air to move further south than normal.

However, there is debate among scientists about what part climate change plays in this.

(BBC)



Plane held over trafficking fears lands in India

A plane carrying hundreds of Indian nationals, who were held for days at an airport in France, over human trafficking fears has arrived in India.

The chartered Airbus A340, which had been flying from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to Nicaragua, aroused suspicion during a refuelling stop.

It left with 276 passengers but 25 people including two minors remained in France after applying for asylum.

Two suspected traffickers also remain in France for further investigation.

However, the two were set free by Courts.

The Legend Airlines flight landed in Mumbai early on Tuesday local time.

Photos shared by news agency ANI show several passengers sitting on plastic chairs at the Mumbai airport after the flight landed. Some of the passengers could be seen leaving the airport but BBC Marathi reports that most of them refused to answer questions from the media.

The plane had initially been prevented from leaving Chalon-Vatry Airport, about 130km (81 miles) from Paris, on Thursday after authorities received an anonymous tip-off that some passengers might be "victims of human trafficking", Parisian prosecutors say.

Most of those aboard were believed to be Indian citizens working in the UAE. A third of the passengers are reported to be from India's affluent western State of Gujarat.

French authorities reportedly also travelled to Nicaragua before attempting to enter the US or Canada.

It was not clear whether authorities had definitively determined that no crime had been committed before allowing the plane to leave.

It was also unclear why the flight went to Mumbai instead of resuming its journey to Nicaragua.

Legend Airlines is a Romanian charter airline with a fleet of four planes, according to the online flight tracker Flightradar.

(BBC)

When a Sri Lankan conquered the world 50 years ago

REVISITING LAFIR'S MAGNIFICENT TRIUMPH TO BE CROWNED WORLD BILLIARDS CHAMPION IN 1973



M.J.M. Lafir displayed feather touch control

There was hardly any fanfare when M.J.M. Lafir brought glory to Sri Lanka becoming world billiards champion in 1973. He established himself as the king of the green baize in Bombay beating the more fancied Indian cueists Satish Mohan and Michael Ferreira in their backyard.

A true patriot, he spurned offers to turn professional when he emerged runner-up in 1969 when the championship was held in London. After winning the crown, he was promised riches by those in authority, but like most champions he passed away at 51 a decrepit man.

"Many used me, and if I had not been for my faith in God and my resolve to win, I would not have come so far," he was reported to have confided in his last media interview in 1981.

After his first world-class win over the South African Mannie Francisco in the 1967 event in Colombo "my hand stood on all over my body. I suddenly shouted 'Allah' and thanked Him for my victory," it was reported.

Messenger Street was renamed in his memory, a postage stamp was issued to mark his monumental feat and Asian Snooker champion is awarded the M.J.M. Lafir challenge trophy since 2006. But to many Sri Lankans, his epoch triumph is just a distant memory.

It is fascinating to revisit how this genius maestro of the green baize achieved his date with destiny half a century ago. He fulfilled a prophecy after displaying wizardry with the cue from the age of seven following in the footsteps of his father who was a player of some repute.

"Mohammed Lafir, who learnt to play Billiards on his family dining table using a broomstick for a cue, marbles for balls, a saring for a cloth and a cycle tube for cushions, won the World Amateur Billiards Championship at the Cricket Club of India, Bombay, winning all his nine matches and making a new world record break of 859," wrote Clive Everton, Editor of Snooker Scene on Lafir's magnificent triumph.

"In many ways it was a surprise

win, not only because Satish Mohan, the Indian champion, started as odds-on favourite, but because Lafir, 8th out of 12 in the World Open in New Zealand last year and a poor fourth in the World Amateur in Malta in 1971, seemed to be falling away from the form which had taken him into second place in the 1967 event in Colombo and joint second in the 1969 championship in London," states Welshman Everton who finished fifth in the 1973 championship.

In another analysis, Everton described how Lafir held sway with the "Postman's Knock" a scoring system based on manoeuvring the object which dead on the top cushion directly behind the red.

"In Bombay a few whirling fans high in the asbestos roof did little to alleviate an outside temperature in the 90s. But far more important than the marginal advantages of these playing conditions and local diet, was the fact that for the previous six months Lafir had been playing the best billiards of his life," stated Everton.

"Not only was the outside temperature in the 90s about what he is used to at home in Colombo, but Indian food suited his digestion. After competing in All-India Championships for some 15 years he was also thoroughly familiar with Indian conditions. Perhaps even more to the point was the fact that he had been playing the best Billiards of his life in the preceding six months, with 27 breaks over 500, including one of 879," he observed.

He adds: "Lafir also received the priceless gift of a set of Super Crystale balls from his great friend Bert Demarco, who had earlier sent him E50 to help him keep going."

What of the equally, perhaps more, important mental factors?

First, the store of experience in international competition he had steadily built up over 15 years in the All-India Championships and 10 years in World Billiards and Snooker Championships, enough in fact to make him the most experienced man in the field. He was a sporting

Second, the confidence supplied by those reassuring string of big breaks. Third, the physical comfort of congenial diet and climate and familiar playing conditions.

Fourth, the peace of mind which in Lafir's case inextricably linked with deep religious convictions. "Before every match, I think of God," says Lafir. "And after a match, whether I win or lose, never fail to thank God. I need God's help. And if I play with that need, I feel at peace. Of course, I must also try. If I close my eyes and say 'God help me' and do nothing myself, that is foolishness," Everton revealed. The times of three of Lafir's matches were in fact altered so that he could attend mosque.

The conjunction of all the factors necessary for success coincided with the pressure of home crowd expectation which lamed the efforts of both Satish Mohan and Michael Ferreira, who finished second and third.

Lafir set a new world record four hours aggregate of 2,850 points against Scotsman Luis Umberto Demarco and topped it with a new world record amateur break of 859 in 49 minutes 47 seconds against New Zealander Eric Simons, surpassing Australian Bob Marshall's mark of 702.

In 1974, Lafir recorded a rare double of winning the national billiards and snooker titles – the fourth cueist to register the double.

The previous three were Wilson Jones (1960), Robert Marshall (1962) and Satish Mohan (1968). Lafir won the snooker title for the seventh time having first won it in 1957. This was his first victory in billiards – the closest he had got to it was in 1965 when he finished runner-up.

For a nation obsessed with

cricket and the 1996 World Cup triumph, Lafir's incredible feat remains just a postage stamp. They forget the fact that Lafir was Sri Lanka's first ever world champion. A player who was lyrical on the green baize and had the gentlest touch with cue in hand, Lafir was a consummate professional during an amateur era. He was a sporting

legend born ahead of his time and there will never be another like him.

M.J.M. LAFIR TIMELINE

Mohamed Junaid Mohamed Lafir was born on 27 May 1929. Family consisted of two brothers and one sister. Educated at Hameed Al Husseini Maha Vidyalaya. Started snooker from age seven using broomstick as cue and lime fruits as balls, on the family dining table.

National

17 times National snooker champion. 16 times National billiards champion. Performed the double ie. Billiards and Snooker titles 13 times in Sri Lanka. Holder of highest break in billiards in Sri Lanka 500 unbroken in 20 minutes made in the Nationals in 1973.

International

Eight times All India snooker champion, which is still a record in Indian Nationals. Once All India billiards champion in 1978. Five times Western India snooker champion.

World

Billiards

1967 World Billiards Tournament in Colombo - Runner-Up

1969 World Billiards Tournament in London - Runner-Up

1971 World Billiards Tournament in Malta - 4th Place

1973 World Billiards Tournament in India - World Champion, made highest break of 859 in 49 minutes and 47 seconds, which is still the existing world record.

1979 World Billiards Tournament in Colombo - 4th Place

Snooker

1963 World Snooker in Calcutta - 3rd Place

1966 World Snooker in Karachi - 4th Place

1968 World Snooker in Australia - Quarter Finalist

1970 World Snooker in Scotland - Semi Finalist

1974 World Snooker in Ireland - 7th Place

Expired on 26 April 1981 aged 52 years



M.J.M. Lafir with India's Arvind Saur

Under-13 Division III

Charana (204) guides Sooriyawewa NS to first innings win

Saditha match bag of 11 wickets for 27 runs

Charana Malimbada, left-handed opener of Sooriyawewa National School, scored 204 runs in 134 balls with 27 boundaries and 9 sixes against D.A. Rajapaksha College Medamulana, while Saditha Ilankoon of Shastravardha Vidyalayana Gokarala had a match bag of 11 wickets for 27 runs against Ibbagamuwa Model School in the Under-13 Division Three inter schools cricket tournament.

Dumindu Chenath's all-round performance (64 and match bag of 7/7) steered Sri Sumangalodaya MV to an innings and 66 runs win against Batopola Central College.

In Weeraketiya (Sooriyawewa NS) won on first innings)

D.A. Rajapaksha: 54 (32) (Denusha Priyinda 4/1, Tharun Kavishka 2/1, Charana Malimbada 2/9, Mithun de Silva 2/15) and 80/2 (19) (Yashith Deewima 45+, Denusha Priyinda 2/32)

Sooriyawewa NS: 282/5 d (41) (Charana Malimbada 204)

In Kalah (Sri Sumangalodaya MV) won by innings and 66 runs)

Batopola: CS: 57 (28.4) (Budhima Lakshan 4/19, Dumindu Chenath 3/8) and 42 (22.4) (Shal Induwara 21, Dumindu Chenath 4/11, Buddhima Lakshan 4/22)

Sri Sumangalodaya: 167/4 d (36) (Dumindu Chenath 64, Charanaka Lakshmi 25+, Yahinsa Nethum 3/39, Sethu Diwun 2/29)

In Ibbagamuwa (Shastravardha Vidyalayana won on first innings)

Ibbagamuwa MS: 28 (Udara Rathnayaka 5/4, Saditha Ilankoon 5/5) and 40 (16.5) (Rashindu Rushan 24, Saditha Ilankoon 6/22, Udara Rathnayaka 3/14)

Shastravardha Gokarala: 36 (Dahan Senevirathna 6/6) and 15/2 (5.5) (Dahan Senevirathne 2/8)

In Manavila (Upapanda NS won on first inning)

Upapanda NS: 68 (43) (Rashen Nirmada 23, Mohammed Asim 5/13, Senodi Nehmina 3/11) and 33/1 (12) (Udara Kumaraasinghe 21+)

St. Aloysius Gal: (B): 50 (26.4) (Oshaka Gayana 6/10, Rashen Nirmada 3/13)

In Udammita (Match drawn)

Sunder Gampaha: 134/6 d (38.2) (Minudu Irusala 46, Hesandu Nesadi 32, Risika Methadam 4/30)

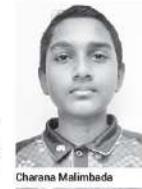
Galahiyawa CC (B): 22/2 (9)

In Dombagoda (Match drawn)

Royal Horana: 13 (35.3) (Danidi Basnayake 49+, Yasanga Minihara 14, Pawan Maliecha 4/30)

Seetharathna MV Dombagoda: 58/7 (31.1) (Anurah Wickrama 4/10)

(IR)



Charana Malimbada



Dumindu Chenath



Saditha Ilankoon

Shakib Al Hasan played with one eye in ICC World Cup 2023



Shakib Al Hasan

Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan had a below-par ICC World Cup 2023. The veteran cricketer has revealed that he played with a blurred vision throughout the global tournament. His vision was impacted by stress-related issue.

In 7 matches, he scored 186 runs at an average of 26.57. Shakib also returned to Bangladesh mid-way to practice with his childhood coach. He was found wanting against the short-pitched deliveries.

As quoted by Cricbuzz, the all-rounder said that he experienced blurred vision in one side of his left eye.

"It was not in one or two games, but I had to face it throughout the World Cup," Shakib said.

"It happened," he said when asked if he was batting with one eye and was not sure about the line and

length of the ball. "I was in discomfort while facing the ball," he added.

"I paid a visit to one of the doctors as there was water in my cornea and retina. I was given drops and told to lower my stress. I am not sure if that was the reason behind my eye problem. I got my eye checked in America after the World Cup as

there was no stress."

Shakib refused to blame captaincy for his stress, but claimed that it would have been nice if he was given the leadership role in advance.

"I don't want to make any excuse for my stress, but things would have been fine had I got the captaincy in advance. The team was not ready to play according to my philosophy."

Bangladesh became the first team to be eliminated from the 2023 World Cup, following six consecutive defeats. They managed to beat Afghanistan and Sri Lanka.

Shakib has entered politics but is not ready to quit cricket. "I can manage cricket and politics. I don't think there will be any issue between me and the Bangladesh Cricket Board."

(Agencies)

South Africa, Bangladesh stars surge in Women's rankings after ODI series

There was a ton of movement in the latest MRF Tyres ICC Women's ODI Player Rankings at the conclusion of the series between South Africa and Bangladesh.

South Africa's comeback victory from 1-0 down to 2-1 has helped their players rise in the weekly update of the MRF Tyres ICC Women's ODI Player Rankings.

Laura Wolvaardt was the star of the show in both games, with a half-century in the second ODI followed by a 50+ in the final match.

Despite not climbing in the rankings, she conceded her 4th spot on the batters list, now just two rating points behind Chamari Athapathu (No.3) and 14 behind Beth Mooney (No.2).

Anneke Bosch's maiden ODI fifty and Player of the Match-winning performance in the second match resulted in a 71-spot rise to No.70.

Fargana Hoque's century in the second ODI might have gone in vain but it gave her a two-spot ranking boost as she climbed to No.13 for batters.

South Africa's ace all-rounder Marizanne Kapp had two wickets apiece in the two matches. She jumped one place to No.8 in the bowlers' rankings and also to the top of the all-rounder rankings, having previously jointly held the spot with Australia's Ashleigh Gardner until last week.

Among the other big movers in the bowlers' list for South Africa were Nadine de Klerk (up four places to equal No.19) and Nonkuloko Mlaba (up six places to No.24).

(ICC)



Laura Wolvaardt

SPORTS TODAY

'We have one eye on the T20 World Cup'
- Hathurusingha

Bangladesh are hopeful that their maiden ODI win in New Zealand will prepare them for the upcoming T20I series against the hosts. Bangladesh managed to break the ODI jinx in New Zealand after 18 successive defeats and in T20I cricket, they have an abysmal record again losing all nine matches in this part of the world so far.

"We haven't won a T20 game over here. This was the same as one-day cricket but then we managed to win the last game," Bangladesh head coach Chandika Hathurusingha told reporters ahead of the first game in Napier.

"Certainly, it will help (ODI win over New Zealand at Napier) mentally when you have a good win like you feel good and because you have done something you want to repeat again no matter what the format is and that will give us confidence leading into the T20Is," he said.

Bangladesh will also be looking forward to keep their unbeaten streak intact in the shortest format having won all the three T20I series they played so far in 2023 with the wins coming against England, Ireland and Afghanistan at their own back yard. A T20I series win in New Zealand will be the icing on the cake for the tourists as they prepare for the next T20 World Cup.

Bangladesh will play 11 T20Is before the showpiece event that includes these three matches against New Zealand, while they are also scheduled to play Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe. Apart from that the players will be playing in the Bangladesh Premier League as well. "Plan wise condition dictates. Lot of the plans we want to play at the same time we want to keep one eye on the T20 World Cup and so we are trying to get our plans right for that," Hathurusingha said.

"We got 11 games now and then the BPL as well, but this is a national team so we are trying to get our

combination and give the players kind of roles that they will play during the World Cup and so that's the plan," said Hathurusingha adding that they are not losing their sleep over lack of games ahead of the tournament.

"I said 11 matches from now to the World Cup and that's what we got in terms of matches. Whether it's ideal or not that's all we got we have to get our plans and roles right within that period," he added.

Hathurusingha also reserved praise for Soumya Sarkar after he scored a century in the second game while picking up three wickets in the third game. "Very happy with the way he (Soumya) performed and I always knew that he is capable of playing," the coach said. "He has shown before when I was here and we all say that class is permanent. Form affects many things, especially what goes through your head. The more clear you are and the more you understand the role and the more comfortable you are with the environment, every player maximizes their potential. He is in good head space and there is no reason that he can't perform in the T20 World Cup."

"The second ODI was like a make or break moment for him. What we did we trusted him and gave him confidence and whole team trusted him. That's what I think he drove strength from," concluded (Agencies)



Under-13 Division One 16 Teams advance to PQF Round

16 Teams advanced to the Pre-Quarterfinal Round of the Under-13 Division One Inter Schools Cricket Tournament conducted by Sri Lanka Schools Cricket Association and sponsored by Sri Lanka Cricket.

75 Teams participated in the tournament and were divided into 11 groups and competed on a league basis. 32 Teams advanced to the second round.

PQF schedule
Isipathana (A) Vs Richmond
Galle in Colombo
Dharmapala Kottawa Vs De
Mazendan (A) Kandana int

Colombo
Ananda (A) Colombo Vs Carey (A) at Ananda Mawatha
Royal (A) Colombo Vs St. Joseph's (A) Colombo int
Colombo
President's (A) Kotte Vs St. Sebastian's (A) Moratuwa in Kotte
Dharmanraja (A) Kandy Vs St. Servatius Matara in Kandy
St. Peter's (A) Bambalapitiya Vs Devapathirana in Bambalapitiya
D.S. Senanayake (A) Colombo Vs St. Anthony's (A) Kandy at Wijerama Mawatha
(IR)

SLC Limited Over Tournament 2023/24

SSC CONTINUE TO IMPRESS MAINTAINING UNBEATEN RECORD

Sebastianites Cricket and Athletic Club lead Group 'A'

BY MUSTAQ SYDEEN

Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC) continued their dominance in the SLC Limited Over Tournament with an unbeaten record in Group 'B'.

They are sitting comfortably on top of the table with 11 points from 6 matches, winning 5 with 1 being washed out. SSC are also the only unbeaten team so far in the tournament.

SSC has got a power batting lineup with the likes of Kusal Mendis, Nipun Dhananjaya, Charith Asalanka, Nuwanindu Fernando, Dasun Shanaka and Avishka Fernando to name a few.

Though the likes of Kusal Mendis and Nuwanindu are yet to find their form with the bat, former white ball skipper Dasun Shanaka has been on song in the tournament, smashing 3 consecutive half centuries. He has also fared well with the ball showcasing his all-round talent.

Adding more strength to its batting power, Danushka Gunathilaka - who faced a ban - was also cleared to play domestic matches, and his return to the team will no doubt boost their top order.

Bowlers have also played a major role so far for SSC to keep them on top. Prabhath Jayasuriya leads the spin attack along with Charith Asalanka, while Nisala Tharaka comes in handy with his medium pace alongside Dasun Shanaka.

Jayasuriya leads the spin attack along with Charith Asalanka, while Nisala Tharaka comes in handy with his medium pace alongside Dasun Shanaka.

SSC have four more games in their group phase – against Bloomfield on 28 December, Panadura SC on 30th, Chilaw CC on 3 January and Sri Lanka Army on 7 January.

Meanwhile, in Group 'A' Sebastianites Cricket and Athletic Club lead the table with 8 points from 6 matches. Thevindu Senaratne has been a consistent performer with the bat, while Ishitha Wijesundara and Dushan Vimukhi have fared well with the ball.

They have 3 more matches to play in their group - Ragama SC on 28 December, Moors SC on 30 December, and Negombo SC on 7 January.

Individual performance

Irosh Samarasooriya of Galle SC currently leads the batting chart with most number of runs - 346 from 4 innings at a strike rate of 80.84.

Parvez Rasool of Badureliya SC tops the bowling chart with most number of wickets - 17 scalps in 5 outings.

The SLC Major League will recommence on 28 December after the Christmas break.

ACB likely to not grant NOC to Mujeeb, Fazal and Naveen



Contracts: Starting from 1 January, 2024, the three players shall not be eligible for the central contract for one year. In this case, ACB will consider and decide their participation in events when needed.

2. Delay Granting No Objection Certificates (NOCs): Consideration of these players as non-eligible to obtain No Objection Certificates (NOCs) for two years. All current NOCs shall be revoked immediately.

3. Transparency communicate ACB's stance to the cricketing community, including the ICC, the ACC, Member Countries/Cricket Boards, and the Afghanistan Public.

The decision by the Afghanistan Cricket Board is made with a focus on national priorities, aligned with the ACB's core values and principles. It highlights the necessity for every player to maintain the ACB's principles and prioritize the country's interests above their personal ones.

(Agencies)

National & Junior National Short Course Swimming Championships 2023

Stars shine on Day One

BY DILSHAD HANIFA

The National & Junior National Short Course Swimming Championships 2023 conducted by Sri Lanka Aquatic Sports Union (SLASU) is being held at Hillwood College, Kandy from 26 – 30 December by popular demand. The shift from Colombo and forthcoming Advanced Level Examination decreased the number of competitors by almost 50%, though it did not deter ace male swimmers like brothers Mathew and Kyle

Abeysinghe, Sandeep Seranathine, Anusara Abeygoonewadura, Manuja Gamage, Binura Thalagala, Gavin Karunaratne, and their female counterparts Gangi Senevirathne, Hiruki de Silva, Nabashie Perera, Seneshi Heath, Christina Perumal, Jessie Senevirathne including 300 others from participating. 27 swimmers from Swimming Association of Maldives also took part.

On day one in the Boys' Junior National Segment, Lithium de Silva (GCC – 1 Gold) and in Girls' National Segment Hiruki de

ANN Dabare (AC – 1 Gold), MM Eknelligoda (AC – 1 Gold) was joined by Girls' Junior Nationals Ginuki Tharuya (LEISP – 1 Gold) R. Rajawewaka (KCA – 1 Gold), Senushi Vilhangi (LISG – 1 Gold) as top runners for individual honours.

In the Boys' National Segment Binura Thalagala (KWA – 1 Gold), Mathew Abeysinghe (KWA – 1 Gold), Sandeep Seranathine (SLA – 1 Gold), Heshan Karunaratne (KWA – 1 Gold) and in Girls' National Segment Hiruki de

