

# SUNDAY OBSERVER

www.sundayobserver.lk

SRI LANKA'S ENGLISH NEWSPAPER WITH THE LARGEST CIRCULATION

Vol. 93 - No 15 ★

A Blessed  
Easter to our  
readers



## COVID-19 Hang on until April 19 - Pavithra

By Nadira Gunatilleke

Sri Lanka can be rid of COVID-19 if the country can hang on in this tight situation until April 19, Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine Minister Pavithra Wanniarachchi said.

According to Minister Wanniarachchi, by April 19 all possible COVID-19 patients in Sri Lanka will appear and the people who had it without any symptoms or with mild symptoms will be completely recovered. All we, Sri Lankans need to do is stay at home without going out until April 19. The country can then be saved from COVID-19, the Minister said to the media in Colombo a few days ago.

She said all required medical facilities, including ICUs, human resources, 30 state hospitals, etc to treat 2,000 or more COVID-19 patients are now ready but Sri Lanka will stop long before reaching that number if the people cooperate and stay at home for the rest of the required period following the instructions of the Government.

Minister Wanniarachchi stressed that the three (3) contact circles of all COVID-19 patients had been traced successfully with the assistance of the armed forces. Sri Lanka has this number of COVID-19 patients at the moment because some individuals did not follow Government instructions, violating the rules and regulations.

The country should walk forward slowly for another six (6) months to get back to normalcy. The National Institute of Infectious Diseases (NIID), Medical Research Institute (MRI) etc will be developed to face any similar situations in the future, she added.

## Govt introduces tax free foreign currency accounts

A new bank account termed Special Deposit Account (SDA) has now been introduced for Sri Lankans living in and outside the country to remit their foreign currency earnings, savings and investments to any bank of their choice in Sri Lanka, the President's media announced yesterday.

The account can be operated in the form of Term Deposits either in any designated foreign currency or in Sri Lanka Rupees.

Any Sri Lankan resident in or outside Sri Lanka as well as dual citizens, citizens of other States with Sri Lankan origin, non-national residents in or outside Sri Lanka, Funds, corporate bodies, associations incorporated/registered out-

## NAVY ON HIGH ALERT FOR ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS

The Sri Lanka Navy has commenced a special operation to prevent any migrants from entering the country by sea as COVID-19 spreads across many countries. According to Navy Commander Vice Admiral Piyal De Silva along with the spread of COVID-19, there is a possibility that migrants from other countries may try to enter Sri Lanka through sea routes. "Therefore, the Navy has now increased its surveillance and patrols in the sea around the island and its coastal areas," he said.

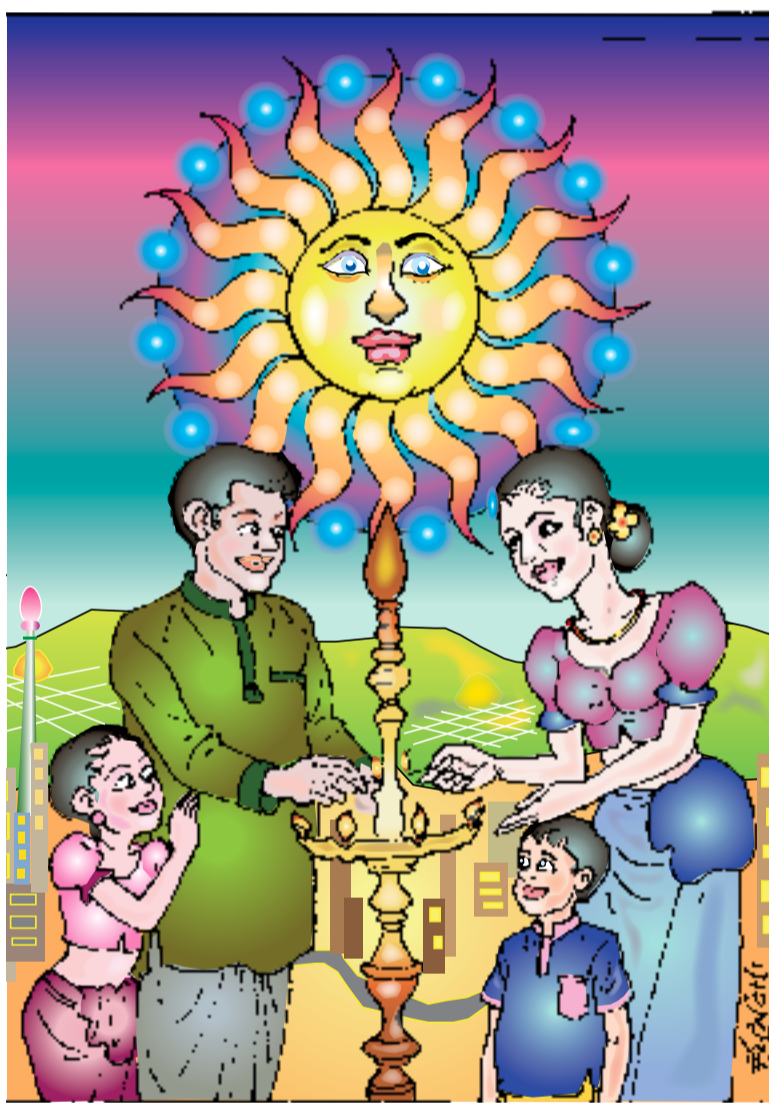
According to De Silva, special

attention will be paid to the waters in Sri Lanka's Northern, North Western, Eastern, Western and North-Eastern areas. "The Air Force has also increased its maritime observations," the Commander said. "We have also informed the Indian authorities to step up their surveillance to prevent migrants from crossing international waters" he added.



The Navy Commander said if any such vessel carrying migrants are detected breaching the country's international maritime boundary, they will be turned back by the Sri Lanka Navy to its port of origin. "We have also asked fishermen organisations and other responsible persons in the coastal areas to be vigilant and inform the Navy of any such suspicious vessels," he said.

We wish our readers  
a happy and prosperous Sinhala  
and Tamil New Year



## Schools re-open on May 11

### GCE A/L in August

The GCE A/L examination will be held in August as scheduled, Examinations Commissioner General Sanath Pujitha said yesterday.

He said all arrangements were being made to hold the examination as planned on the basis that students will not be unfairly burdened, considering the loss of time and education as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.

"During the Easter Sunday attacks too the GCE AL students were affected. These factors will be taken into consideration but we are planning to go ahead with the examination," he said.

Meanwhile, Minister of Education Dulas Allahapperuma said 372,000 students have applied online to sit the exam and about two thousand others will join during the examination.

He said, "We will take a decision that will be least stressful to them".

In view of the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Minister said schools will not be reopened on April 20 as announced earlier.

The Government has decided to re-open schools on May 11.

To preserve foreign currency reserve

side Sri Lanka and any other well-wishers can open Special Deposit Accounts at any Sri Lankan bank of their preference.

All the regulations related to the new account have been incorporated in the Extraordinary Gazette notification issued by the Ministry of Finance, Economic and Policy Development on April 8. The notification announces that all interested Sri Lankans and well-wishers accordingly can instruct their foreign banks to transfer their funds to Sri Lanka.

There is no prescribed minimum amount to be deposited. The mini-

imum period of maturity is six (6) months. Higher interest rates than the normal rates offered to foreign currency deposits will be offered at maturity. Accordingly, 1 percent and 2 percent points per annum for SDA with a tenure of 6 months and 12 months will be paid. Funds are freely convertible and repatriable outside Sri Lanka on maturity.

All these accounts are free from taxes and foreign exchange regulations. All such deposits shall be protected under banking secrecy provision and further benefits with the relevant supporting legislation will be intro-

duced with the 2020 Budget.

Acceptable currencies are United States Dollars (USD), Euro, Sterling Pounds, Australian Dollars, Singapore Dollars, Swedish Kroner, Swiss Franc, Canadian Dollars, Hong Kong Dollars, Japanese Yen, Danish Kroner, Norwegian Kroner, Chinese Renminbi and New Zealand Dollars.

Information could be obtained from the websites of the Presidential Secretariat, the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka or Sri Lankan overseas missions. All Sri Lankans willing to express their solidarity to sustain Sri Lanka's resilience are invited to this opportunity in support of COVID-19 prevention and social security initiative.

## President's New Year message "Join hands to defeat this menace"

I wish the Sinhala and Tamil New Year festival, which is the most splendid cultural extravaganza of the nation, to be a peaceful, a joyful, a prosperous as well as a healthy period for every citizen of our country.

The Sinhala and Tamil New Year that dawns with the transition of the Sun can be considered as a period of cheerfulness, harmony and development of mutual relationships. Nevertheless, a virus that has spread across the world has entered our Motherland, and as a result, at present we are facing the most devastating situation since the era of our ancestors.

Hence, this time we are not able to celebrate festivals collectively as the health specialists have emphasized the importance of maintaining social distance. I appeal to all of you who voluntarily rallied around to conquer any challenge faced by our country and nation, to commit yourselves now as well, to prevent the spread of this deadly virus by maintaining the social distance during this festival time.

The New Year period, nourished with the beauty of nature, is a festival that human beings pay tribute to the environment and nature. We

have now entered an era where the need to integrate with the environment is much felt.

Rituals of New Year that we practised with utmost honour and commitment since a very long time, especially rituals like the lighting of the hearth, boiling a pot of milk, partaking the first meal of the New Year and the traditional transacting can still be conducted at the auspicious times but restricted to family members.

Children are the true beneficiaries of the happiness of New Year. Even though, there are certain limitations to celebrate New Year festivals this time, we, as adults, must create an environment for the children to experience the cheerfulness of this festive season. Therefore, I remind you affectionately to perform New Year rituals confined to your homes while ensuring that children feel and enjoy the spirit of the New Year.

Amidst our New Year resolutions, let us join hands with a strong determination to defeat this menace threatening our people and country.

**May this be a peaceful and a prosperous New Year to all of you.**

- Gotabaya Rajapaksa

In partnership with  
**Middlesex University London**

After O/L's with pending results

## Graduate in London

Enrolling now for

- International Business Administration
- Business Management (Finance)
- Information Systems

Call: 0117 699 499  
32z, Dickmans Road, Colombo 05. | www.acbt.lk

DON'T GET STUCK OFFLINE.  
STAY ONLINE WITH MOBTEL

# DATA LOANS

326 MB RS. 29

896 MB RS. 49

1793 MB RS. 99

Extra charges and Govt. Taxes apply. Conditions apply.

When you run out of Data, get instant Data Loans from Mobitel and never get stuck offline again.

To activate dial #170#

FASTEST INTERNET  
WIDEST COVERAGE  
**4G LTE**

Sri Lanka  
**Telecom**  
**Mobitel**  
We Care Always.

# Feature

## As Covid-19 marks 100 days

# Sri Lanka in safe zone

BY RAJITHA JAGODAARACHCHI

As Thursday marked 100 days since the WHO was notified of the first cases of "pneumonia with unknown cause" in China, Sri Lanka also entered into the 6th week of successful management of COVID-19. From March 11 the day the first Sri Lankan COVID-19 patient was identified, the country has so far detected 190 cases (as of Friday evening) with 7 deaths. Compared to its South Asian neighbours and many other countries, irrespective of their financial or military power, Sri Lanka is still in a safe zone in controlling the new coronavirus, health authorities said.

Of 48 Asian countries, Sri Lanka is at number 36 in terms of the total number of cases, while the COVID-19 spread in the country is still marked as the transmission of 'cluster of cases', according to the transmission classification of the WHO. However, many highly affected countries such as the United States, Italy and Spain are experiencing 'community transmission' which worsens the situation day by day.

### COVID-19 curfew goes on...

The curfew imposed in the high-risk districts, i.e. Colombo, Gampaha, Kalutara, Puttalam, Kandy, Jaffna and certain areas in Ratnapura (Ratnapura and Pelmadulla police divisions) which have been identified as High-Risk Zones will continue until further notice. In all other districts, curfew will be lifted from time to time and re-imposed on the same day. During these curfew periods travelling to and from all districts has been completely prohibited except for essential services.

In the dawn of the Sinhala and Tamil New Year, the Government emphasizes the need to limit traditions and associations during the festive time to members of the family within one's home. People who misuse the regulations introduced with the sole objective of ensuring the efficient functioning of essential services will be severely dealt with according to the curfew law, Police media division announced last week.

To minimise disturbances to the general public, the Government has strengthened the mechanism to supply essential food items and other goods, enabling the people to purchase them while in their homes.

### Food Supply

As rice production, storage and distribution are imperative to ensure food security, the Government on Friday declared the services of all rice millers in the country as an essential service.

In terms of this directive, rice mill owners must produce rice using the paddy stocks in their possession. Under the instructions of the President, the Secretary to the President P. B. Jayasundara had informed the authorities to take all measures to enable small scale rice mill owners to distribute their rice stocks within their respective Divisional Secretariat Divisions, medium scale owners to distribute within the district and large scale owners to distribute in the entire country.

As per Government stats, a harvest of around 3 million metric tons of paddy has been reaped so far and the quantity of rice that can be produced is equivalent to 2/3 of that amount. At a special meeting chaired by both President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, last week, a representative of the Paddy Marketing Board (PMB) assured that the PMB currently has a stock of 50,000 MT paddy in their registries, which can produce up to 30 million kilos of rice.

In a brief interview with the Sunday Observer, Food Commissioner, (Mrs) J. Krishnamurthi assured that there will be no scarcity of essential food items such as rice, dhal, Bombay onions, canned fish and vegetable despite the prevailing situation.

"Normally, SATHOSA purchases food items from us and then distributes to their outlets island-wide. As an exception, we have now distributed all essential food items to all District Secretariats, where the main delivery of essential food takes place currently" she said.

### President meets Health experts

Meanwhile, a meeting between President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and medical experts representing various fields was held at the Presidential Secretariat, on Thursday. The purpose of the meeting was to obtain the much needed expert medical opinion on how to prevent the spread of coronavirus in the country promptly.

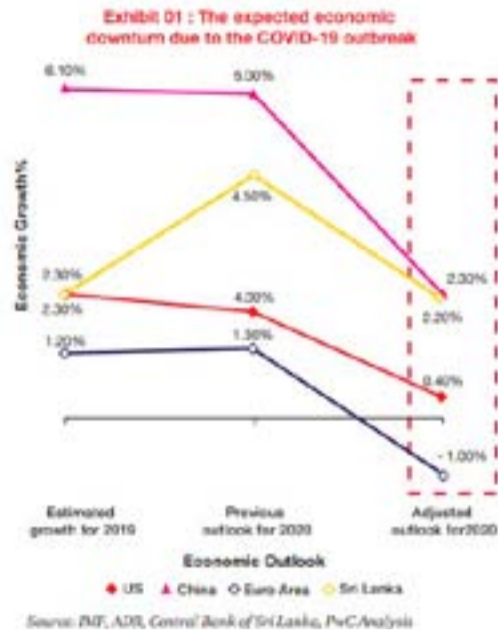
While reviewing the steps already taken by the Government, measures that should be taken in the future to prevent the spread of coronavirus were discussed in detail. The specialists brought to the President's attention the importance of conducting investigations on groups that were in close contact with infected persons and who have had contacts in two stages further.

In a bid to broaden the testing procedure, the President instructed the health authorities to take necessary steps to acquire more test kits to face any situation, despite having sufficient coronavirus test kits at present. Extending assistance to Sri Lanka's fight against the pandemic, 40,000 COVID-19 test units were due to reach the country by Friday night. It includes a donation of 20,000 test units from the world-famous Chinese entrepreneur and Founder of Alibaba, Jack Ma.

The group of specialists also admired the quarantine program launched to prevent the spread of the virus. They highlighted that people with diabetes, asthma and heart diseases need to be more vigilant and the importance of abstaining from smoking.

### Public donations

Responding to the request of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, many individuals, celebrities, private companies and public workers have donated a large sum to the COVID - 19 Healthcare and Social Security Fund amounting to Rs. 609 million as of Friday evening.



### COVID-19 Death rates comparison

In February, the World Health Organisation estimated the fatality rate of the new coronavirus as 3.2 per cent, but currently, the rate is nearly doubled with a global fatality rate of 6%. The United States is currently experiencing a death rate of 20.4% which is the highest in the world. Italy and Spain record 12.7% and 10.7% death rates respectively. However the epicentre of the virus, China only reports 4% death rate which is below the global fatality rate. In the meantime, the COVID-19 death rate in India is 3.2% with 249 deaths to 7,600 cases. Sri Lankan rate is slightly above India's, recording a 3.5% fatality rate with just 197 cases and 7 deaths.

### Economy

Managing Director of International Monetary Fund (IMF) Kristalina Georgieva announced last week that the world would experience the worst economic fallout since the 'Great Depression' in the 1930s. Showing early signs of the impact to the local economy, the Sri Lankan Rupee further depreciated last week passing Rs. 200 against the US dollar for the first time in history. PwC, an independent research institution, issuing a special report claimed that despite the actions taken by regulators, the Sri Lankan Rupee would experience further pressure.

"Hence adequate lines of foreign funding should be sought to manage short term pressures on the currency. In the long term, a strong export base and sustainable FDIs will be critical for a strong currency. Export industries in our view should be provided TAX-FREE status for a considerable length of time to attract investment, create employment and generate foreign exchange" it stated.

The report further pointed out the importance of preparedness of declining tourism significantly in comparison to the revenue generated in 2019. Tourism earnings in 2018 reached USD 4.3bn while the previous year earnings were barely USD 3.6bn, as a result of the Easter attacks.

Minister Chamal Rajapaksa also handed over a donation of Rs.25 million collected by the Essential Food Commodities Importers & Traders Association. The President of Sri Lanka Cricket, Shammi Silva, Sri Lanka cricket captain Dimuth Karunaratne and cricketer Lasith Malinga handed over a donation of Rs.25 million collected by Sri Lanka Cricket to the President.

Minister Ramesh Pathirana handed over a donation of Rs. 7 million collected by the staff of the Ministry of Plantation Industries and Export Agriculture and affiliated institutions to the Ministry.

Airport and Aviation Services (Sri Lanka) Ltd., Public Officers' Welfare Association, Irrigation Engineering Diplomate Association, Kalutara Bodhi Trust Fund, Association of University Administrators, Immigration and Emigration Officers' Association, Public Finance Department, employees of the Ministry of Defence, Sri Lanka Police Department and National Youth Services Council were among the other institutes and organisations who contributed to the fund.

All the donations will be credited to the special account No. 85737373 at the Corporate Branch of the Bank of Ceylon. (Further details can be obtained from K.B. Egodawele, Director General (Administration) of the Presidential Secretariat, on telephone number 011 2 35 44 79).

Meanwhile, a delegation from the European Union (EU) and Ambassadors of France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Romania met the head of Special Presidential Task Force for Essential Services, former Minister Basil Rajapaksa last week to discuss the support the EU can extend towards Sri Lanka's battle against COVID-19. Member states of the EU agreed to provide 22 million euros worth donations to Sri Lanka. This includes medical equipment, supplies and financial assistance to the agriculture and tourism sectors which expects a challenging time in the post-COVID period. The EU funding will majorly focus on small businesses and workers in the Central and Uva Provinces.

## Obituaries

**HON. JUSTICE SURESHCHANDRA - R.K.S** (Retired Supreme Court Judge) - Dearly beloved husband of Savithri (Savi), father of Harshana (Kosala) and Rashantha, father-in-law of Sonali and Indu, precious grandfather of Vehan, Uveen, Ranithu and Sayuni, brother of Amaresh (Canada), late Dianesh, Yamuna (Canada), Mahesh, Buwanesh and Ganga (Germany), brother-in-law of Saroja (Canada), late Deverani, Kanendran (Canada), Ramya, Kokila and Udo (Germany), Panna, Saro, Upali and Devika, expired in Fuji. **Funeral arrangements will be held in Suva Fiji.**  
C12042020002

**NAMASIVAYAM - BALAKUMAN (BALA)** Passed away peacefully in Melbourne, Australia on Sunday 5th April 2020. Founder and Chairman of The Hi Fi Center Limited and a member of Jazz Unlimited. Loving husband of the late Dulcie Namasivayam (nee Bertus), loving dad of Brandon, Marlon and Samantha, father-in-law of Renuka Jesudhason and Senaka Jayasekera, grandfather of Nastassja, Cameron, Hannah and Joanne, great grandfather of Caleb and Savannah. Private Cremation on 9th April 2020. "Many strange roads we love to roam, but best is the road that takes us home".  
C12042020001

**SCHNEIDER-LOOS - MR ERNEST TREVOR** - At Rest with Jesus - Beloved husband of late Marlyn Loos (nee Deckker), loving father of Deborrah Rodrigo, Stewart Schneider-Loos and Jacqueline Nugara, much loved father-in-law of Tania Schneider-Loos and Clifford Nugara, darling grandpa of Aaron Chambalo, Tatum Rodrigo, Danielle and Ethan Schneider-Loos and Adele, Aidan & Angus Nugara (all of Brisbane, Australia), dearly loved brother of Neville Schneider-Loos, late Yvonne Loos, Erin Deckker, Ronald Schneider-Loos, Aureliya Edwards and Benita Holdenbottle, dear brother-in-law of Lilo Schneider-Loos, late Anton Deckker, Marie Schneider-Loos, Robin Edwards, Tyrone Holdenbottle, late Brian Deckker, late Primrose Shedden, Monica Bultjens and Winston Deckker, passed away peacefully in Brisbane, Australia on the 04/04/2020. Will be laid to rest on the 14/04/2020 at the **Bald Hills Cemetery - Bracken Ridge, Queensland, Australia.**  
C12042020003



Academically and professionally qualified son is sought by Principal parents for their daughter born in 88, 5'3", PhD from a Canadian University. Those who are living in Canada or willing to migrate preferred.  
proposal2020gamag@gmail.com  
MB12042020002

Family seeks a partner for Colombo B/G, 41 (in 2020), 5'5' daughter. She is kind, friendly & nature lover. Foreign qualified Teacher works in leading International School, Colombo. Overseas proposals are also considered. Please email full details. Marriageofdr@gmail.com  
MB12042020003



B/G Parents, close to Gampaha seeks a suitable partner for their daughter, 42, very young looking, 5'4", slim, fair, pleasant, well mannered, MBA, B.Sc., values Sinhala, Buddhist Culture, Executive - private, new house, new car. Kmkmkenike7@gmail.com  
MB12042020001

BG Mother looking for a bride for his 37 year old handsome tall Doctor son who is working in Western Europe. Well bought up with sober habits. Never married. Upper middle class family from Colombo. Please reply to proposal010118@yahoo.com  
MG12042020005

Buddhist, Sinhala family (Canadian Citizen) living in Ontario is looking for a pretty daughter for their very handsome second son. He has an Aerospace Engineering Degree from Canada and works as an Engineer in the same field in Toronto. He is 28 years (1992 March), 5' 9". Non smoker. Please reply with details to sonp220191@gmail.com  
MG12042020006

Govi Buddhist professional parents living in Melbourne seek well mannered daughter who is willing to migrate to Australia for their only son 28 years, 178cm tall professionally qualified, duel citizen, working as an IT specialist. Reply with copy of horoscope to kgmproposal@gmail.com  
MG12042020004

“

**May your health flourish  
May your wisdom awaken  
May your bonds strengthen  
and your memories be golden  
May a new spring dawn  
healing the nation**

Happy New Year!

”

Fitch Rating AA (Ika) | +94 112 353 333 | www.combank.lk

**OUR INTEREST IS IN YOU**

# HONOURING THE HEROES OF OUR NATION



# SLIC VIRU ABIMAN

Sri Lanka Insurance, the nation's insurer will honour the heroic efforts of all State Sector employees on the front lines in the fight against COVID-19, with a cover valued at Rs. 1.5 million. The policy provides free financial cover for the families of these employees in the unfortunate event of the employee's loss of life due to COVID-19 in the year 2020. VIRU ABIMAN is extended to all State Sector Healthcare employees, Members of the Armed Forces of Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka Army, Sri Lanka Navy, Sri Lanka Air Force, Sri Lanka Police and Civil Defense Force of Sri Lanka) , Members of the Divisional Secretariats including field officers, Members of the District Secretariats and Members of the Postal Department.

**A FREE COVER WORTH RS. 1.5 MILLION FROM THE NATION'S INSURER**

For more information call  
**0112 357357**

\*Conditions apply

**SLIC**   
Sri Lanka Insurance  
Like a father - Like a mother

## News

**◆ Punya Kalaya or Nonagathaya**  
**April 13 (Monday)**  
Begins at **1.59 pm** (April 13)  
Ends at **2.47 am** (April 14)  
During this time, quit all work and engage in religious activities

**The Sinhala and Tamil New Year dawns April 13 (Monday) at 08.23 pm**

**Auspicious Times of Sinhala and Tamil New Year**

**◆ Preparing of traditional meals:**  
**April 13 (Monday) at 10.05 pm**  
Dressed in white and facing the East, one should prepare milk rice, accompanied by aggala and sweets made of sesame seeds

**◆ Starting of work, exchange of gifts and having meals:**  
**April 13 (Monday) at 10.43 pm**  
Clad in white and facing the East, starting work, transactions and consuming meals should begin

Graphic: Manoj Nishantha

**◆ Anointing Oil**  
**April 15 (Wednesday) at 9.17 am**  
Clad in green facing the north, after anointing with herbal nanu mixed with oil extracted from Kohomba and take a bath

**◆ Setting out for occupations:**  
**April 17 (Friday) at 7.56 am**  
Dressed in light blue, eat a jaggery mixed rice. Leaving the house facing East

# Events to mark Easter attacks cancelled

BY AANYA WIPULASENA

The week-long events scheduled for the week preceding April 21 to remember those who lost their lives at the Easter Sunday carnage has been cancelled owing to the COVID 19 outbreak, a spokesman from Archbishop's House said.

He said there is likely to be one event and they will inform the public closer to the date.

The investigation into the terrorist attacks that killed about 270 and left 500 others injured last Easter is ongoing.

On March 29 police announced that the handler of the suicide bomber who attacked a church in Batticaloa on April 21, 2019 was arrested. The suspect was a resident of Mount Lavinia in Colombo.

"The team investigating into the bombings went through the tele-

phone records (of bombers and suspects), where they have been, and looked into the statements made by suspects. Through this the main suspect who handled and transported the suicide bomber to the Zion Church was arrested today," Police Media Spokesman SP Jaliya Senarathne said.

Sri Lankan police media said about 30 individuals suspected of being involved in the Easter Sunday attacks are held and being questioned by the CID. Another 60 are under the custody of the country's Terrorism Investigation Division

A special mass will be telecasted today (12) as the country celebrates the resurrection of Jesus amid the growing numbers of COVID 19 positive cases. Churchgoers for the first time will take part in the holy Easter event from home.

According to Archbishop's House

arrangements to telecast the event was made due to the curfew and lockdown currently imposed across the island to keep the deadly virus at bay.

This year, the ongoing health crisis will not deter people from celebrating Easter. Speaking to the Sunday Observer Piyal Fonseka said he hopes to watch the mass on television with his family and later have a simple meal.

"I will also call all my relatives and friends. We usually meet and celebrate in person but we have to be careful and help the government at this time," he said.

Fonseka will also observe a minute's silence with his family to remember those who lost their lives during Easter last year.

"This time it is important that we have faith. That is the true essence of Easter," he concluded.

## President's Easter message

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in his Easter Message said at this moment when the country is faced with a grave challenge to the health of the people, the Government expects the Christian community to stay at home in accordance with the advice of the Government and health officials and pay obeisance to Jesus Christ.

The Christian community of Sri Lanka, together with their brethren all over the world celebrates Easter, the commemoration day of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, with utmost devotion.

The intent of the devoted commemoration is to purify the mind and soul.

The Christian devotees spend the lent period in religious activities recalling the crucifixion, suffering, sacrifice, the death and resurrection of Jesus. I believe that peace and harmony attained due to these pious activities help the Christian community to spread the mes-

sage of love, peace and harmony among their brethren in the country.

The devotees are shocked and saddened by the corona pandemic faced by the world community today.

Their desire is to provide relief to the suffering people with the blessings of the divine Father and Son.

The Easter festivities in the past were full of joy and delight. However, last year it left a sorrowful memory of pain and loss. Even today the shock has not been fully erased.

The commitment of the Government is to ensure justice for the people who suffered. Furthermore, the Government is determined to ensure complete eradication of such tragedies from the Motherland.

I wish you, your family and the entire society would be able to absolve yourselves from sins by faithfully recalling the message of Jesus.



## Reward of Rs 5,000 for police officers

BY MANESHKA BORHAM

The Police, issuing a release, announced that a reward of Rs. 5,000 from the Police reward fund will be given to all Police officers carrying out duties in the country's combat against Covid 19. It said that all officers from the rank of Chief Inspector and below engaged in duties from March 11 - April 10 will receive this reward on the orders of Acting IGP C.D Wickramaratne.

"The Acting IGP has approved and given the necessary instructions

to Senior DIG of Provinces on the granting of the reward," the release said. Meanwhile, the leave of all Police Officers have been further cancelled till April 30 given the situation in the country. Earlier the Police had cancelled the leave of all officers till April 10. However, on Friday, the Acting IGP extended the date.

Police Officers who had reported for duty as per the earlier directive will be allowed to continue in these postings, the communique from the Acting IGP stated.

It noted that any officer still on

leave or holiday will be expected to report to work according to the directive issued. Any leave requested during the period for Headquarters Inspectors, OICs and other gazetted officers will only be approved by the Acting IGP. Granting leave for other rankers will be approved at the discretion of the relevant Senior DIGs during the time period.

"It is expected that all Police Officers will support and dedicate themselves with an understanding of the national effort currently underway in the country," Wickramaratne said.



A special Easter Sunday service was held at All Saints' Church, Borella, presided over by Archbishop Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith last night. The service was held sans devotees due to the prevailing situation in the county with the COVID -19 outbreak. The faithful joined in as the service was aired live. (Pic Sulochana Gamage)

## Former Archbishop of Colombo Most Reverend Dr. Nicholas Marcus Fernando called to rest

– Public urged not to attend the funeral

The Most Reverend Dr. Nicholas Marcus Fernando, the 7th Archbishop of Colombo was called to Eternal Rest last night (April 10) at his residence at "Emmaus House" Tewatte, Ragama. He was retired and was 87 years old at the time of his demise.

Dr. Nicholas Marcus Fernando was born on December 6, 1932 and was Ordained as a priest on December 20, 1959.

He was Ordained as a Bishop on May 14, 1977 and served his term as an Archbishop of Colombo from 1977 to 2002 until his retirement on

July 6, 2002.

Issuing a statement the Archdiocesan Director for Social Communications Fr. Jude Chrysantha Fernando said the late Most Rev. Dr. Nicholas Marcus Fernando will be awarded a State Funeral as he had been the Archbishop of Colombo for more than 25 years.

His mortal remains will be brought to the Archbishop House chapel at 4 pm Saturday (April 11).

Today (12) at 11 am. His remains will be taken to St. Mary's church at Grand Street, Negombo, his home

town.

The Funeral mass will be celebrated at 2 pm. Monday, April 13 at St. Mary's Church, Grand Street.

The Archdiocesan Director for Social Communications Fr. Jude Chrysantha Fernando advised all Catholics not to visit the Body and not to participate in the funeral service under the current situation in the country, as curfew is enforced.

He said the funeral of the late Rev. Dr. Nicholas Marcus Fernando will be telecast live on State television.

## China donates COVID-19 test kits



A special flight from Shanghai, China carrying over 20,000 COVID-19 test kits (PCR-Fluorescence Probing) donated by the Alibaba Foundation in collaboration with the Jack Ma Foundation arrived in Sri Lanka on Friday night.

According to official sources the consignment was worth USD 130,000.

The Chinese Embassy tweeted, 'last morning China Eastern Airlines MU 231 landed at 1855pm last night carrying 20k test kits donated by @JackMa, which are to be cleared from Customs on Saturday' The kits, manufactured by DAAN Gene Co are to be donated to the Ministry of Health and it has met the specifications and standards set by the Ministry. On board the flight there were also millions of worth relief goods purchased from China by Overseas Chinese in Sri Lanka, the Embassy also announced.

COMMITMENT TO  
CARING  
AND  
CURING

The Lanka Hospitals, Colombo is the foremost and the most preferred health care provider serving the nation and her people. Our vision is to become the best in Asia. Lanka hospitals is in search of a passionate and committed team player to fill the following vacancy.

CONSULTANT NEURO SURGEON

Ideal Candidate Should:

The selected candidates

- ✦ Be a PGIM Board certified consultant in Neuro surgery with MD(SL)/FRCS or equivalent.
- ✦ Have minimum of 7 years experience in Spinal and Brain surgery with exposure to Neuro Oncology and Pediatric Neuro Surgery.

Please forward your resume along with address and contact numbers of 2 non-related referees and a passport size photograph within 7 days of this advertisement. Write the position for which you are applying at the top left-hand corner of the envelope or on the subject line of the e-mail.

**SENIOR MANAGER HUMAN RESOURCES,**  
The Lanka Hospitals Corporation PLC (PQ 180)  
578, Elvitiyala Mawatha,  
Colombo-05,  
Sri Lanka.  
E-mail :- careers@lankahospitals.com

**LANKA  
HOSPITALS**

Sri Lanka's Premier Health Care Provider

# Heed the advice of health professionals to eliminate the virus – Army Commander

As Sri Lanka grapples with combatting the novel coronavirus, the Army Commander Lieutenant General Shavendra Silva has been tasked with heading the National Operations Centre for Prevention of COVID-19 Outbreak (NOCP-CO). According to him, the success of the measures taken will be solely in the hands of the country's people. In the interview, Silva discussed the quarantine process being carried out by the military, steps taken to provide relief to the people during curfew while requesting them to adhere to the advice given by the country's health professionals.

## Excerpts of the interview:

**Q: What is the progress of the quarantine program to combat Covid 19 that is being led by you?**

On March 7 the President and the Prime Minister decided to establish quarantine centres in the country. The decision set out to achieve three things, i.e. to identify and separate those who may have been exposed to the disease, stop its spread and treat the patients who have already tested positive. The Sri Lanka Army was tasked with building these centres and since March 10 we have established 51 quarantine centres. Around 4,638 were quarantined in these for 14 days on the advice of health professionals. Those who completed the program, nearly 3,500 were released and allowed to go home. Currently, another 1,189 are still in quarantine at these centres run by the Army, Air Force, and the Navy.

We also took steps to quarantine around 20 people from the Atulugama village after it was revealed the first patient from the area had associated with a number of people, and a quarantine centre constructed in the area. Another 88 are being quarantined in Zahira College, Puttalam. These people had associated with yet another patient who had recently returned from abroad. The



**CURFEW HAS BEEN IMPOSED IN SRI LANKA DURING VARIOUS TIMES IN ITS HISTORY. BUT THIS SITUATION IS VASTLY DIFFERENT FROM THOSE. HENCE I HAVE USED THE TERM 'QUARANTINE CURFEW.' THIS IS A CURFEW RELATING TO A HEALTH ISSUE AND IMPOSED FOR THOSE WHO FAIL TO DO THEIR DUTY TO SUPPORT THE EFFORTS TO COMBAT COVID 19.**

Army has provided them with all necessary facilities. Steps have also been taken to isolate Atalugama and Akurana in the Kalutara and Kandy districts, respectively. Entering and exiting these areas continue to be prohibited.

**Q: What steps have been taken to normalize civilian life even under curfew conditions?**

Curfew has been imposed in Sri Lanka during various times in its history. But this situation is vastly different from those. Hence I have used the term 'Quarantine Curfew.' This is a curfew relating to a health issue and imposed for those who fail to do their duty to support the efforts to combat Covid 19. People must understand this. If everyone volunteered to stay home and self-quarantine there would be no need for a curfew. Since they fail to heed the warnings, some method to protect them and others in the country must be taken. However many services and facilities have been provided to the people in lockdown areas.

The President appointed a Task Force for this purpose led by former MP Basil Rajapaksa. Several members of the military are also part of the task force. We looked at ways to ensure that the people get the essentials. Two methods are put in place for those who earn a daily wage and for salaried persons, which commenced a few days back. Therefore there could be some shortcomings

at the beginning, which will be addressed gradually. One issue identified is the problems faced by nearly 658,000 pensioners. The Tri forces were deployed to assist them while Banks were informed to utilize a few staff members to serve them. Similar methods have been implemented for people who visit hospitals to obtain medicine. Now the Postal services are delivering their medicines to their homes. State-run Osusalas are open for those who wish to purchase medicines. Deliveries of essentials to homes are also being allowed. Hence a massive project is being carried out for the people of the country. The public has also been informed of several hotlines to convey any issues they face.

**Q: There has been a proposal to allow people to obtain permits from the Grama sevaka and purchase essentials from shops that will be allowed to open while ensuring they maintain social distance, with the view that it would reduce congestion in towns when the curfew is lifted. Your comment?**

Some have pointed out that this method was implemented in China and that one permit was issued per family. But this can be misused. The husband and wife in a family can use the same permit one at a time. We saw instances where the wife had gone out using the husband's curfew pass. The method sounds favourable and was even discussed



Army Commander Lieutenant General Shavendra Silva

with the Task Force but we believe we have taken the best decision possible. According to medical professionals the coronavirus is not in your home and you can only contract it if you go out. If you save yourself it will save others. Everyone has the responsibility to save themselves from this. If you survive,

everyone will survive.

**Q: Is it true that Military Intelligence Units are tracking down those associated with persons who tested positive for coronavirus?**

Yes, we are in the search for them. For example, one patient

who passed away had been in a private hospital and then admitted to the Negombo Hospital. We identified the first 120 patients because they came forward themselves. We cannot say all those who hide their symptoms and history are unaware because doctors are constantly creating awareness programs and educating the people about the disease. Therefore the public is well aware and must come forward. We have increased the number of hospitals admitting Covid 19 suspected cases.

Therefore yes we are in search of these people. Our MI is talented. The first patient was associated with 64 people and we identified them and the patient has already recovered and left the hospital. The other 64 are keeping well. We were able to do this because we had a good system in place. We know the devastation one such person can cause. Meanwhile, some are questioning why the Army has been deployed to combat the pandemic. We have done what was required of us and the military has the capable manpower and the discipline to carry out the duties. We have been able to help the health sector manage the situation successfully.

**Q: Do you have any request to make of the Sri Lankan public?**

I may not be a medical practitioner but having associated with health professionals through the task force I can say unless you walk out of your house the corona will not come to your home. We are doing our best to protect the people of the country. In the face of adversity, the country has always risen and emerged victorious. Whether we will win or lose is in the hands of the people. During the war, the victory or defeat was in the hands of those who directly faced it but this is a different battle. If people heed the advice of the health professionals we can eliminate this disease from the country. All I ask the people is to protect themselves and their families.

# Consultant trainees in UK expect to return to Sri Lanka

By  
**Aanya Wipulasena**



Eight consultant trainees currently stranded in the United Kingdom expect to return to Sri Lanka citing that the country will lose years long investments if they happen to contract the fast spreading virus.

Nearly 300 Sri Lankan doctors are currently in the UK to fulfil their mandatory training as required by the Postgraduate Institute of Medicine (PGIM) of the University of Colombo to become a consultant here. Only 80 have expressed their willingness to return, some have completed their training while several others have completed most part of the training that takes up to between one to two years.

The Medical Officers' Association (GMOA) Secretary Dr. Haritha Aluthge said Sri Lanka can benefit by bringing these doctors back.

"We understand they have to undergo the quarantine process. After that (when they are cleared) these doctors can help in treating COVID 19 patients in Sri Lanka," he said.

Dr. Aluthge said leaving the trainee consultants in the UK will expose them to great danger as the outbreak in the United Kingdom is at high risk level.

Eight doctors who were battling the outbreak in the UK died after contracting the virus. Among them is Sri Lankan born Dr. Anton Sebastianpillai, a Consultant Geriatrician. Dr. Sebastianpillai who was in his 70s died last Saturday (4) four days after being admitted to Kingston Hospital, foreign media reported.

The Sunday Observer learns that at least eight Sri Lankan doctors in the UK have contacted COVID 19.

Given the seriousness of the issue, PGIM trainees have written to



UK's NHS with a COVID 19 patient

the Sri Lankan Government including the Institute with a plea to make necessary arrangements for them to return to the country.

Cabinet Co-Spokesperson Dr. Ramesh Pathirana said during the Cabinet press briefing this week, the Government has taken steps to repatriate 33 Sri Lankans in foreign airports.

These include two Sri Lankans in the UK. However, an official decision regarding the PGIM trainees' return has not been taken.

Addressing a media conference Director of the Epidemiology Unit Dr. Sudath Samaraweera said there has been many requests to repatriate Sri Lankans living in other countries. "There is no problem in their return. What is important is the quarantining process," he said explaining that at least two weeks of quarantining is mandatory during which time the returnees will be closely observed before sending them to their homes. Early this week the Institute sent



Dr. Anton who died in the UK

a letter to the trainees stating that there was no way to facilitate a



**EIGHT DOCTORS WHO WERE BATTLING THE OUTBREAK IN THE UK DIED AFTER CONTRACTING THE VIRUS. AMONG THEM IS SRI LANKAN BORN DR. ANTON SEBASTIANPILLAI, A CONSULTANT GERIATRICIAN. DR. SEBASTIANPILLAI WHO WAS IN HIS 70S DIED LAST SATURDAY (4) FOUR DAYS AFTER BEING ADMITTED TO KINGSTON HOSPITAL, FOREIGN MEDIA REPORTED.**

return in view of the travel ban imposed by Sri Lanka. "The PGIM will do everything in its means to ensure your safety and other concerns while you are undergoing your overseas training during these exceptional circumstances," it added.

On the same note Association of Medical Specialists wrote to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa voicing their concerns about 400 post graduate trainees who are in COVID 19 high risk countries including the UK, Australia and Singapore. "There is a growing concern about their safety at work and the risk of transmission of infection to their family members residing with them," the association stated in their letter.

Speaking to the Sunday Observer from the UK a representative of the PGIM trainees said they understand the risk doctors face when treating patients. "But our concerns are about the unnecessary exposure to this virus. There is also the government's investment for our trainings," he said adding if Sri Lanka was to lose several doctors from COVID 19 there is a considerably high loss for the country in terms of monetary value



Dr. Haritha Aluthge of the GMOA

and manpower. He said as the situation prevail there is a definite risk of losing consultant doctors.

He also added that some of the trainees are residing in the UK with their families including children and elderly parents. "When we go to hospitals, we are at risk of bringing the virus home to our children and parents," he said adding that the kingdom is already struggling to treat its patients.

## Celebrating LK's 88th Birth Anniversary

## Letters Between Brothers

BY AJITA KADIRGAMAR

April 12, 2020 marks Lakshman Kadirgamar's 88th birth anniversary. While he may be long gone, I continue to discover new information about my father, exposing interesting facets of his life and times.

I have known since my teenage years that my uncle, Sam Kadirgamar QC (LK's eldest brother), collected all manner of family memorabilia (press cuttings, photos, letters and so on) which he stored in 'black boxes' for posterity. What I didn't know was that he had left strict instructions that all material related to my father should be handed over to me after my 30th birthday. It never happened at that time but now several decades later the infamous black box is finally in my possession and what a treasure trove it is proving to be.

Most revealing is the correspondence between the two brothers dating back 60 years to a long gone era of formal letter writing, which provides fascinating insight as to how people communicated before the age of the internet, emails, direct dial international calls, and the like. Sam's letters are full of advice to his student brother, updates on politics and family matters in Ceylon and sometimes a mild scolding and a few harsh words.

Lakshman left Ceylon to attend Balliol College, Oxford in September 1955 at the age of 23. Sam who was 15 years older than LK was very much a father figure throughout his life, and whose counsel LK respected.

Perhaps because both Sam and LK were lawyers, their correspondence was more detailed (especially when discussing ongoing legal cases) and more frequent than one would expect of brothers. They were constantly apologizing for the delay in answering. Often letters used to cross during their trans-Atlantic postal journey, so as older folk may remember one had to commence a letter stating, "I have just received your letter(s) dated..." Many a time LK would acknowledge receipt of three of Sam's letters in one go.

## Financial woes

It is somewhat sad to note that many of the letters between the brothers were purely about money matters. LK gives detailed accounts of the cost of living and studying in England and the struggle to make ends meet with his monthly allowance.

There is detailed correspondence regarding financial, investment and tax matters that are worthy of record. They are testament to a time when foreign exchange was viciously controlled in Ceylon and students like LK had a painful time extricating money out of the country for studies abroad. With-

out Sam overlooking financial matters for his younger brother, as evidenced by the numerous copies of letters to the Controller of Exchange and the Bank of Ceylon, it is doubtful LK would have been able to complete his university education.

In a letter dated May 15, 1956, Sam informs his brother that he has "arranged investments which will produce over Rs. 620/- a month, net profit. This should allay all your fears and you can be assured of an easy and comfortable stay in England without any difficulty." Sixty four years later we cannot even fathom the notion of living abroad on that sum!

The most fascinating thing about old letters (and in this case old preserved receipts) is the details of everyday life and in particular, reference to the spectacular difference in the cost of living of the time. For instance: a suit for LK made by The Prince of Wales Tailoring Establishment, Kandy cost Rs. 157.50 in 1949; three white shirts from Arjan Silk Store, Pettah cost Rs. 27/-; a Raleigh bicycle from Hunter & Co. was Rs. 215.25 in 1950; annual membership to The Automobile Association of Ceylon was a mere Rs. 30/-.

## LK at Oxford

Of eternal interest is the information about LK's London and Oxford days. In May 1956 he tells Sam, "I am looking forward to this spell in Oxford because I can see that it will give me the opportunity I have long wanted, of stretching myself to the utmost, of undertaking a task which if successfully completed, will give me a feeling of achievement and fulfilment. The advantage of staying in a place like London House is that one meets men of great ability and of all types from many parts of the world. One's critical faculties develop rapidly in such an environment and I am sure the process will be continued at Oxford."

In this same letter there is this almost prophetic paragraph: "I intend to explore the possibility of joining some world organization like the ILO or UNO or even the International Court of Justice, preferably, but not necessarily in a legal capacity. Such employment is not impossible to secure if one sets about it in the right way. However, there's plenty of time."

In fact, 18 years later he would be-



Samuel Jothinathan Kadirgamar, Queen's Counsel - 1967

Lakshmanathan Kadirgamar, President's Counsel - 1991

gin his illustrious career at the UN by joining first the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and then the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) where he became a renowned expert on Intellectual Property.

## Political prediction

In a letter to Lakshman dated October 21, 1959, Sam revealed the following prophecy: "I do not know how well posted you are with Ceylon news, especially Banda's (SWRD Bandaranaike) death and the aftermath. Curious it is that he could not keep his date with his portrait at the Oxford Union because he had to keep his prior engagement with his Destiny. I am not saying this flippantly. A friend of mine, Thambirajah by name, who is an obscure govt clerk and a Roman Catholic is also a seer, not an astrologer. In March of this year he foretold to me all the events including the Cabinet crisis in May, the political disappearance of Philip Gunawardene and the complete 'snuffing out' (his words) of Banda by death and assassination. He also, long before the event, foretold the communal riots of 1958 to the very day."

Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike studying at Christ Church, had been Secretary and Treasurer of the Oxford Union in 1923. After he became Prime Minister of Ceylon in 1956, a number of Presidents wrote to him inviting him to speak at the Union. He ignored them all until suddenly in September 1959, he wrote saying that he wanted to speak on the subject "Democracy is unsuitable for developing nations".

It was to be an exciting event SWRD was coming back to Oxford after 30 years. Tragically on September 26, the Saturday before the debate, he was assassinated. Lakshman was asked to speak in his place and had this to say: "Looking back on it now, (and on reading some of the reviews of the time, and in view of the haunting tragedy that had occurred, and I had been somewhat critical of Mr. Bandaranaike in the previous year about certain things he had done), I think perhaps



that was the best speech I ever made in my life. I chose to oppose. I was certain that Prime Minister Bandaranaike would have done the same. The motion was resoundingly defeated. I would like to recall his memory this evening. It is he who made Sri Lanka aware of the Oxford Union." (The Cake that was Baked at Home, Third Ed, Sept 2017, pg. 107).

## A Way with words

Many of my concerns during the 70s as to why my father was always holed up in his home office in the evenings, even after a long day's work, are now clearly explained by the fact that he wrote copious amounts of letters and could never keep up with the backlog. This art of correspondence, however, was the key to his unsurpassed networking skills which were to prove priceless during the course of his professional life. It is clear that the UN job opportunity came about partly due to this networking ability, something he commenced while a student at Oxford, fine-tuned at the Bar in London and further built on during his years practising law in Ceylon.

Though much of LK's correspondence is very formal and businesslike there are flashes of a creative streak that suddenly surface in the most charming manner. For instance:

"I spent a refreshing and rewarding week in Paris. It is a city which in every way lived up to my expectations of it. London has no centre of student life - no cafes, bistros and little restaurants where one can sit for hours on a fine spring morning and see the world go by. The narrow streets and time-worn cobbled pavements of the Latin Quarter with tall, leprous houses lurching towards one another in queer attitudes, as though they had all been frozen in the act of collapse, the gay cafes, bars and nightclubs on Mont-

parnisse - this is the spirited home of sixty thousand students of the University of Paris - some of them miserably poor - and countless waifs and strays who find their way from all parts of the globe." (12/4/56 - Letter to Sam)

"Oxford is gloriously beautiful these days - and our garden is a dream. As luck would have it when we bought this house, we acquired a gardener with it - a fine old man called Kendall who has looked after it for 15 years. The lawn is like a billiard table. The flower beds are ablaze with colour - tulips in one corner and all manner of beautiful things. It is a constant surprise as Kendall himself has delightfully forgotten what exactly he planted last year and where. Every day we look forward to a new burst of blooms. There are climbing roses and lilacs and little flowering apple trees and cherry blossoms. It is marvelously soothing and agreeable and I don't have to look after it myself." (Letter to Sam).

## Finding Collette in Oxford

"I had an amusing experience the other day. When I walked into the Talbot Gallery in Woodstock Road, I saw prominently displayed a crayon portrait of a Churchillian figure in a style remarkably reminiscent of Collette. The gallery owner thought it was a portrait of Churchill by a French cartoonist! I disputed this even before seeing the signature - and there it was - R.L. Pereira by Collette in 1954. RL looking every bit like Churchill - jaw thrust out aggressively, cigar in mouth, half glasses on the tip of his nose, a scowl, a stoop, the commanding presence, the hooded eyes glaring, penetrating. I said I knew both painter and subject. The owner said he bought it at a London auction for £12.50. Who could have sold it? Mrs. West, RL's daughter? The owner would have sold it as a Churchill for at least £25. Once I had

identified it, he had to sell it to me at a cut price of £9 and take the loss for an error of judgement." (Letter to Sam 15/5/1973).

## From the Oxford Union to Parliament

"I made my farewell speech last Thursday and when I finished, I received an unexpectedly long ovation from which I gathered that my term of office had been a success. I was very moved - who wouldn't be - and I know that this experience is of its kind unique. Nothing in life will ever be like it. I have learnt a lot." (Letter to Sam 16/3/1959).

And then there is this gem of a story recounted in March 1972, which I find rather prophetic too.

"I attended the debate last Thursday night. The Tribunal found the incumbent President guilty of grave malpractices; he tendered his resignation on the floor of the House and then pandemonium broke loose. Allegations and counter allegations were flung about by interested parties; the packed House of about 750 undergraduates was tense; blows could have been exchanged any minute. The psychological moment had arrived for me to intervene - and I did. As I stepped up to the despatch box - after 13 years, and now a complete stranger unknown to a single soul in the House, without the authority of the Chair or the trappings of office, the House became quiet and still. I could have been man from Mars, for all they knew. Who is this man, they must have wondered? When man and moment meet there is some strange alchemy at work. A moment before there was booring and hissing and jeering and shouting; but now, out of bedlam a strange stillness was born. I spoke quietly, soothing a savage beast. There was pin drop silence. I had gripped the House again. I had them all in the palm of my hand - and I don't know if I have said this to you before, once you have had the hearts and minds of hundreds of intelligent people completely within your control, even for a few minutes, to do with them as you please, life can never be the same again; one has participated in some primordial ritual of communion."

It seems evident now that this experience in 1972 was a significant moment for LK, the moment that cemented his intellectual destiny, the prelude perhaps to his political career 22 years later. That he was destined for a bigger stage to address international audiences, that he was eminently qualified to face the 'savage beast' (Sri Lanka's Parliament) with his powers of reasoning, and to reach the hearts and minds of an entire nation is now a matter of history.

## PHNOs, the unsung heroes and heroines during COVID-19 outbreak, says NCCP

Carrying out their duties to reach out to the public on coronavirus, the Public Health Nursing Officers (PHNO) deployed to distant high risk places are at constant risk of exposing themselves to the disease

By Carol Aloysius



While the coronavirus continues to swirl around us, many Public Health Nursing Officers (PHNO) continue to perform their duties daily without a break even when exhausted. As Community Cancer Physician Dr Suraj Perera from the National Cancer Control Program (NCCP) told the Sunday Observer, "They are the real heroes and heroines in the NCCP's efforts to help both cancer patients and all other patients with chronic illnesses to get the best nursing care during the COVID 19 outbreak".

He said the work of these unsung heroes and heroines covered a wide range of duties performed at the risk of their own health, taking them to distant COVID high risk areas in various parts of the country. A bunch of photos of the nursing officers taken while at work in their different sites which Dr Perera sent us proved his point. Pointing to one particular nursing officer Seneka Randeniya, who had been conducting an educational class on COVID he said, "He has been at his job from 8 am to 6 pm. He looked exhausted and when I asked him if he was tired, which I could tell by his drawn expression and sweat drenched shirt, he simply smiled and said quietly, "Yes I am tired sir. But how can I stop if I know that even one person who may be at risk of this disease has been left out as these people come only when they have finished

their daily home chores? If I give up half way I wouldn't be able to sleep at night thinking I have not done my job properly".

## Knowledge

Other pictures showing these nursing officers sharing their knowledge in the awareness raising programs conducted within and outside district and provincial hospital complexes such as the Beligala District Hospital and Weeraketiya Hospital were equally an eye opener. They showed residents in the vicinity in their everyday clothes, listening attentively to the message given, as the nursing officers told them what the COVID 19 disease was, how it spread and how to prevent it with simple easy to follow rules such as washing hands the correct way which they demonstrated with available tools such as a basin of water, a wayside tap, a jug. The venues for most part were informal settings - under shady trees or hospital corridors with residents seated on a few benches, plastic chairs, mats, or simply standing.

## Humane

The pictures also illustrated the humane aspect of their approach to treating patients, such as giving palliative care to patients in home setting,



even administering insulin to diabetic patients in their own homes. Pictures of preparation of drugs for distribution and distribution of clinic drugs in home settings also gave a new insight to viewers and readers on the work behind the screen of these nursing officers.

## Duties

Listing the duties they were expected to carry out daily, Dr Perera said that health educational programs on passing correct information to the public living in COVID high risk areas as well as those with



chronic illnesses were a priority as there were many myths surrounding the disease and many were still in the dark on what the disease was. Besides this are, Palliative care, wound care, preparation of drugs for distribution, and distribution of clinic, drugs in home settings as well as preparing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for patients.

"What we found to be the most satisfying aspect of the program to control COVID, is the fact that we were able to work as a team. Everyone involved worked together to share their knowledge, disseminate information and as far as possible help both can-

## History of the disease

The 2019-20 coronavirus pandemic is an ongoing pandemic caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2. The outbreak was first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, in December 2019. The World Health Organization declared the

outbreak to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020 and recognized it as a pandemic on March 11, 2020. As of April, 2020, more than 932,000 cases of COVID-19 have been reported in over 200 countries.

In Sri Lanka since the first case was discovered in a foreign national in January this year, the number of positive cases stands at 185 and 6 deaths at the time of going to press. Recovery rates have risen to 38.

Over 30 district and teaching hospitals and base hospitals, as well as the IDH, the National Hospital of Sri Lanka, Lady Ridgeway Hospital, Mulleriyawa hospital, Castle Street Hospital for women, Chest Hospital Welisara and Kotalawela Defence Hospital are listed as sentinel hospitals to admit suspected cases with the addition of army and navy health facilities and police hospitals.

Meanwhile a new fast track package with World Bank aid for the COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health Systems Preparedness Project in Sri Lanka is expected to help the country prevent, detect, and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and strengthen its public health preparedness, and benefit the entire Sri Lankan population by prioritising stopping or slowing the spread of the virus, reducing case numbers, and preventing outbreaks in communities a recent statement in the media has said. It reportedly added that this support will scale up emergency response mechanisms, strengthen the capacity of laboratories and hospitals, treat patients, train medical staff, and raise public awareness about hand washing, hygiene, and social distancing.

# Discipline important to combat COVID-19 - Former State Minister Rambukwelle

By  
Uditha  
Kumarasinghe



Government spokesman and former State Minister of Investment Promotion, Keheliya Rambukwelle, said when we observe the world trend, as a percentage we have been able to maintain a very good recovery rate of COVID-19 affected patients. This indicates that our health sector is working extremely well with early identification of COVID-19 patients and treating them. In an interview with the Sunday Observer, former State Minister Rambukwelle said the discipline of the people is the most important factor to control the spread of COVID-19 in the country. He said, if the people are not disciplined and willing to adhere to the instructions given by the health authorities, the pandemic will go out of control.

Rambukwelle said in his opinion the country should be locked down for at least another two weeks. However, our supply chain should be much more effective. At present it is adequate, but there are areas where it has not reached the people. Even if the country is locked down for another two weeks, we should look into the supply chain and ensure that it reaches every corner of the country.

## Excerpts:

**Q: The number of COVID-19 cases in the country has gone up to 198 with seven deaths reported. Does this mean we have reached an alarming situation and if so, what preventive steps have been taken to arrest the situation?**

**A:** Even if one more case is found, we have to be cautious and take precautionary measures. It is said that one COVID-19 affected person can infect at least 500 people. At the same time, looking at the world trend, as a percentage we have been able to maintain a good recovery rate of COVID-19 affected patients. This means our health sector is working extremely well with early identification of coronavirus cases and treating them.

**Q: An indefinite curfew has been imposed in the Colombo, Gampaha, Kalutara, Puttalam, Kandy and Jaffna districts. Will the Government take steps to lift the curfew in these districts for certain hours like in the other districts or will it be continued indefinitely?**

**A:** It has to be decided by the Government. My personal opinion is that we should lock down the country for at least another two weeks. However, our supply chain should be much more effective. At present it is adequate, but there are certain areas where it has not reached the people. This has to be looked into. We should look into this and ensure that it reaches every corner of the country. Even if the country is locked down for another two weeks the supply chain has to be maintained. Also, we have to increase the testing facilities for COVID-19 in hospitals. These are the two areas

that need priority to bring the situation under control.

**Q: Medical experts have pointed out that the irresponsible conduct of some people has led to the spread of the disease. Has the Government looked into this issue to take action against those who resort to such irresponsible behaviour?**

**A:** Of course. To control the spread of the disease we need medical facilities and awareness of the disease. However, the discipline of the people is also an important factor to control its spread. If the people are not disciplined and not willing to adhere to the instructions given by the health authorities, the pandemic could go out of control.

**Q: Despite the guidelines issued by the Government and the security forces, there is a rapid increase in the number of those who violate the curfew. What have you to say about this?**

**A:** The Government is very much concerned about it. That is why they use different types of media to educate the people to refrain from interacting with others, as they would then make matters worse for the whole nation. I think discipline should be inculcated in every citizen of the country. In countries like Japan, they are so disciplined that you only have to make the announcement and the people adhere to it strictly.

**Q: Medical experts have warned about the increase of COVID-19 cases during the final week of April. Has the Government focused attention on this?**

**A:** I would say the ongoing curfew should be continued and checking of people carried out and serious action should be taken against those who violate the law.

**Q: The Election Commission Chairman in a letter addressed to the Prime Minister has stated that amidst the coronavirus outbreak, some politicians through the distribution of goods have engaged in politics to promote themselves and their party. How would you respond to this claim?**

**A:** Anybody can make such claims and statements. The fact is, every people's representative has a role to play as they are elected members. Even if there is dissolution of Parliament, they have to mingle with the people. The public sector and the elected representatives must work together. I am not talking of party politics. It may be green, blue, red, purple or any other colour. But as people's representatives, we should get involved in the entire operation.

**Q: A group of representatives of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) led by its leader, Sajith Premadasa, met President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa on April 6 and once again requested to reconvene Parliament. As the President had stated except to extend the state of emergency, there is no legal provision to reconvene Parliament at this juncture. Could you explain?**

**A:** Whether there is provision or



**EVEN IF ONE MORE CASE IS FOUND, WE HAVE TO BE CAUTIOUS AND TAKE PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES. IT IS SAID THAT ONE COVID-19 AFFECTED PERSON CAN INFECT AT LEAST 500 PEOPLE. AT THE SAME TIME, LOOKING AT THE WORLD TREND, AS A PERCENTAGE WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MAINTAIN A GOOD RECOVERY RATE OF COVID-19 AFFECTED PATIENTS.**

not, what is the significance of reconvening Parliament at this juncture? If the need arises and if there is a constitutional provision, then I think we should not violate the Constitution. All those things are secondary to the current situation. All the parties must get together to overcome this crisis. If their personal interest is only to reconvene Parliament, that is because of their ulterior motives. They know that to reconvene Parliament is not possible at this point. We cannot run away from this challenge. We have to accept this challenge and get over it. That must be the priority, not reconvening Parliament or having unnecessary debates in Parliament.

**Q: The Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa has told the media that the Government under the pretext of the COVID-19 pandemic attempts to cover up its shortcomings. What are your comments on this?**

**A:** I think we should not respond to those statements made by Sajith Premadasa.

**Q: The Sri Lankan Rupee remains under tremendous pressure given the fallout of the coronavirus pandemic and it has further depreciated to Rs.200 against the US Dollar. How would this affect our economy?**

**A:** These are unavoidable circumstances. At the same time, our export market will also have certain benefits while we will have a serious problem with the importation of oil. These are the consequences and the dark side of the story during times of such crises. This is a global phenomenon and we have not been singled out.

**Q: As former State Minister of Investment Promotion, how do you look at the corona outbreak impact on our investments?**

**A:** First, we have to solve the ongoing crisis in the country due to the coronavirus pandemic. It is only after that can we think of solving everything else. At present, all the major areas such as foreign employment, tourism and foreign investment are seriously affected. This is not something that has been done purposely, but a consequence of the challenges faced by the entire world due to the corona outbreak.

**Q: Don't you think the need of the hour is for all political parties irrespective of political differences to extend their support to the Government to contain the COVID-19 pandemic in the country?**

**A:** That should be the primary objective of all political parties whether it is green, blue, red or any other colour. At this critical juncture, irrespective of political differences they should extend their support to the Government's battle to contain the COVID-19 pandemic in the country.

**Q: Are you satisfied with the joint efforts of the Government, health authorities and Tri-forces to combat the COVID-19 outbreak in the country?**

**A:** The efforts of the health authorities, Tri-forces and the Police to control the coronavirus pandemic will be assessed by the public. In addition, some state trading institutions such as the CWE and the Co-operative Societies are assisting to keep the supply chain going. These are two areas where it has to go hand in hand. When the curfew is imposed countrywide, the supply chain should function without interruptions. At the moment, all these groups are working well.

**Q: The people in certain areas have faced difficulty in getting food commodities and other requirements. Has the Special Presidential Task Force on Essential Services looked into**

these issues?

**A:** Definitely. On Wednesday too, the Presidential Task Force had a meeting. The idea was to see how best we could fulfil our task on behalf of the people. As I mentioned earlier, if the supply chain breaks down, discipline also breaks down and it becomes impossible to maintain law and order properly. At the moment, we can be satisfied with the ongoing program. However, it has to function without any interruption.

**Q: Do you think the Chairman of the Election Commission will fix a fresh date for the General Election once the country is fully recovered from the coronavirus pandemic?**

**A:** According to my knowledge, the Election Commission Chairman is empowered to declare an election within the next three months. Thereafter, there are certain constitutional constraints which will arise, and we need to seriously look into them. However, it is too early to comment on such things right now.



## ADVERTISE IN OUR E-PAPERS\*

Take your message to thousands of readers across the country and worldwide

Daily News



தினகரன்

SUNDAY OBSERVER



வாரமஞ்சரி



E-mail your advertisement to

webmarketing@lakehouse.lk

Obituary

Acknowledgement

Classified or any other category

Notice

Matrimonial

Contact:

+ (94) 077 220 2225

+ (011) 242 9326

+ (94) 077 296 6502

webmarketing@lakehouse.lk

Pay online by ...



"We make your advertising need convenient"

### FACT-FILE Keheliya Rambukwelle

► Born and raised in Kegalle. A product of S.Thomas' College, Gurutalawa, he is a professional hotelier with a post-graduate degree from the Hotel School

► 1979: Became the youngest film producer when he produced the record-breaking Sinhala movie *Sakvithi Suvaya*

► 1993: Entered politics from Democratic United National Front (DUNF) and elected to the Central Province Council

► 2000: Joined United National Party (UNP)

► 2001: Elected to Parliament from Kandy district. Appointed chief organiser for Kundasale



► 2005: Crossed over to the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) Government headed by the then President Mahinda Rajapaksa

► 2007-2009: Functioned as Defence Spokesman of UPFA Government during the Humanitarian Operation in the war-torn North and the East

► 2010-2015: Minister of Mass Media and Information and was Cabinet Spokesman of the UPFA Government

► 2019: State Minister of Investment Promotions in the Government of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa

## SUNDAY OBSERVER

Two events,  
one aspiration

This weekend, Sri Lankans are celebrating two important national and religious events under the cloud of a global pandemic that has restricted their movements. In fact, we are not supposed to step out of our homes except for the brief periods when the curfew is relaxed and that too only in certain areas.

The Sinhala and Tamil New Year will dawn tomorrow, signifying one of the most important national events in the country. Avurudu or Puthandu (in Tamil) is primarily celebrated by Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Hindus, but over the years it has transcended such man-made boundaries and become a national festival celebrated by all Sri Lankans. Above all, Avurudu celebrates our very close bond with Nature. It is a tribute to the Sun, whose movement from Meena (Pisces) to Mesha (Aries) is the very basis of the traditional New Year. New Year traditions evolved as a result of farmers expressing their gratitude to the Sun and Nature for a bountiful harvest. In fact, the Sinhalese word "Bak" for April signifies "fortune", being a derivative of the Sanskrit root word "Bhagya".

Easter too is all about renewal – of hope and life. Easter marks the resurrection of Jesus Christ after he was nailed to the cross at the behest of Roman rulers of the time. Easter too gives us a powerful message that we can overcome any obstacles in our life. There is another message that Jesus gave us – caring for the sick. This is very important at a time of pestilence. This Easter has an added poignancy, being the first anniversary of the horrific terrorist attacks on several Catholic Churches around the country last year. The pain caused by these attacks can never go away, but we can all pray that such a horrendous loss of life would never happen on our soil again.

But this year, both these festivals will necessarily be on a low key, confined as we are to our homes, except for those working in essential sectors. In fact, this Avurudu and Easter, we should spare a thought for the health workers, Security Forces personnel and Government and private sector workers in essential services. It is because of their selfless service and determination that we can mark Avurudu and Easter at least on this scale.

This year, though, we can make these festivals even more meaningful while staying at home. It is a time to renew bonds within our families. This is very important in a society where the tradition of family sit-down meals has disappeared for all intents and purposes. Today's pressures to relentlessly pursue money and differing interest/work hours of family members mean that no one has the time to enjoy a sit-down meal over free-flowing conversation and plenty of laughter. At best, the whole family might have eyes glued to the TV while having dinner with no conversation at all. Family bonds have taken a severe beating due to modern lifestyles, but Avurudu reminds us that we should do better to keep families together.

While cooking and partaking meals in accordance with auspicious times is important, the foremost place in Avurudu traditions should go to Ganu Denu, which literally means Give and Take. That is sadly a factor missing from our lives for the most part, but Avurudu reminds us of the importance of compromise and the joy of sharing. Avurudu is a season for giving – as well as forgiving.

The demands of commercialism have enveloped everyone in our families, including the children. Unlike in the days gone by, today's children are pressured by parents, teachers and the wider society to study all the time in order to do well at examinations at the expense of their playtime. However, Avurudu literally gives them a break from the tedium of studying and attending classes non-stop.

Avurudu also has a spiritual or religious element. The Punya Kalaya ("time for meritorious deeds") is designed to let us pay homage to the temple or the Kovil to purify our souls. Easter too does the same, though this year the faithful will have to be at home watching the services from home.

Avurudu is a time for a fresh start in every sphere of life. From new clothes to a new coat of paint to new aspirations, it marks a deviation from the old routine and signals that life is ready to take on new challenges in the coming year. Avurudu gives us fresh hopes for a successful, bountiful year ahead.

This Avurudu and Easter, is similar in so many ways to the ones that have gone by. The purpose, meaning and aims of both Avurudu and Easter remain the same as they have always been: to renew our collective faith in humanity and bring us hope and new aspirations. The only difference this year is that we cannot share this noble aspiration at the community level owing to the restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

But we must realize that these measures have been imposed for our own safety and welfare. If we violate the curfew and try to 'celebrate' these events, the result will be truly horrendous. It is therefore our duty to stay at home, observe all social distancing and hygiene rules and celebrate these events with our family members in the fervent hope that we will once again be able to celebrate both Avurudu and Easter in the usual way in 2021. Be safe, stay home and save lives.

## Avurudu in the days gone by

BY PRAMOD DE SILVA

No other annual event brings the country together like the Sinhala and Hindu New Year, which is celebrated every April. Although primarily celebrated by Sinhala Buddhists and Hindus, it has now become a national event that transcends all man-made boundaries. Indeed, those belonging to other communities and religions participate in Avurudu events with great enthusiasm.

This year, we will be celebrating Avurudu in the midst of a global pandemic, which has confined us to our homes. Nevertheless, even a pandemic cannot defeat our collective will as a nation to come together in spirit at this time to celebrate togetherness at Avurudu.

But one question remains: Whether the excessive commercialization of our national events including Avurudu, Vesak and Christmas is a healthy trend. This year this was not so apparent due to the pandemic situation, but it is otherwise a part and parcel of Avurudu.

The message of unity and happiness embedded in the Avurudu celebrations is in danger of being submerged in this torrent of commercialism.

It is a tough battle of tradition versus modernity that could leave the former battered and bruised.

Contrast today's situation with that experienced by generations that knew nothing about commercialism.

I still remember those pre-TV days when Avurudu was a merry occasion without even a hint of artificial gloss. In the village off Ambalangoda where I lived for a good part of my childhood, Avurudu was a unique celebration of life itself.

It brought the entire village together in a spirit of camaraderie, buoyed by an air of festivity.

It marked a new beginning for the entire village, which was heavily dependent on agriculture.

All the families in the village strictly followed the traditions associated with Avurudu, which marked the transition of the Sun from Pisces to Aries in the heavens above.

Avurudu was a marvellous time for children in the village. Unlike today, there was no pressure from adults to study all day



I STILL REMEMBER THOSE PRE-TV DAYS WHEN AVURUDU WAS A MERRY OCCASION WITHOUT EVEN A HINT OF ARTIFICIAL GLOSS. IN THE VILLAGE OFF AMBALANGODA WHERE I LIVED FOR A GOOD PART OF MY CHILDHOOD, AVURUDU WAS A UNIQUE CELEBRATION OF LIFE ITSELF. IT BROUGHT THE ENTIRE VILLAGE TOGETHER IN A SPIRIT OF CAMARADERIE, BUOYED BY AN AIR OF FESTIVITY. IT MARKED A NEW BEGINNING FOR THE ENTIRE VILLAGE, WHICH WAS HEAVILY DEPENDENT ON AGRICULTURE.

and no tuition classes to attend.

This was especially so during Avurudu, where we enjoyed being carefree to the maximum, playing in the open air near paddy fields and bathing in the stream afterwards.

Today, you can walk into any supermarket or pastry outlet and buy sweetmeats (Rasakevili) to your heart's content.

This was not the case all those years ago.

Sweetmeats had to be made at home, and in any case, no one would have it any other way.

We looked forward to this more than any other event associated with Avurudu.

How could anyone possibly

resist the aroma of freshly made sweetmeats? My grandmother specialized in Konda Kavum.

It was wonderful to watch and it was even better when we surreptitiously crept into the kitchen and lifted one or two of them, with the oil still dripping, right under her nose. We found Avurudu Nekaths (auspicious times) rather fascinating.

It was amazing that an entire village (and indeed an entire country) could do one thing at exactly the same time. We would visit the temple, attired in white, during the nonagathaya (Punya Kaalaya or period for meritorious deeds).

Then came the lighting of the hearth, which was a family affair, followed by another even more important (for us) family affair, the partaking of meals.

The Avurudu table was a veritable feast for the eyes, milk rice, kavum, munguli, athirasa, kokis, asmi, aluwa, banana. You name it, they had it.

The partaking of meals was usually followed by an event that we children always looked forward to: the worshipping of parents and elders and the exchanging of gifts.

The latter was often a one-way street, from elders to children.

By this time, we had also received (and attired) new clothes for the New Year, usually in the colour stipulated by astrologers for that particular year sparkling new sarongs, shorts and shirts for boys and frocks for girls. Of course, it took very little time for them to get dirty.

The hisa-thel-gema (anointing of oil) was another highly anticipated event, held at the village temple.

No villager wanted to miss this important event, where the chief priest invoked blessings on all.

Farmers and those who were employed also left for work at an auspicious moment, a couple of days later. Needless to say, Avurudu was easily the most joyous oc-

casion of the year, heralded by the lighting of crackers and the beat of rabanas amidst a profusion of erabadu flowers.

But the villagers often saved the best for the last - the annual Bakmaha Ulela (Avurudu festival) replete with traditional games such as pillow fighting, climbing the greasy pole, bun eating and some modern games such as cross country running. The village lasses got an opportunity to become the Avurudu Kumari. Incidentally, the Bak Maha Ulela has survived largely intact through the years, albeit with a heavy dose of sponsorship and commercialism. These cannot be held right now due to the pandemic, but next year we will see a profusion of them.

Perhaps the best part of Avurudu was not the festivity per se - it was the spirit of giving and forgiving.

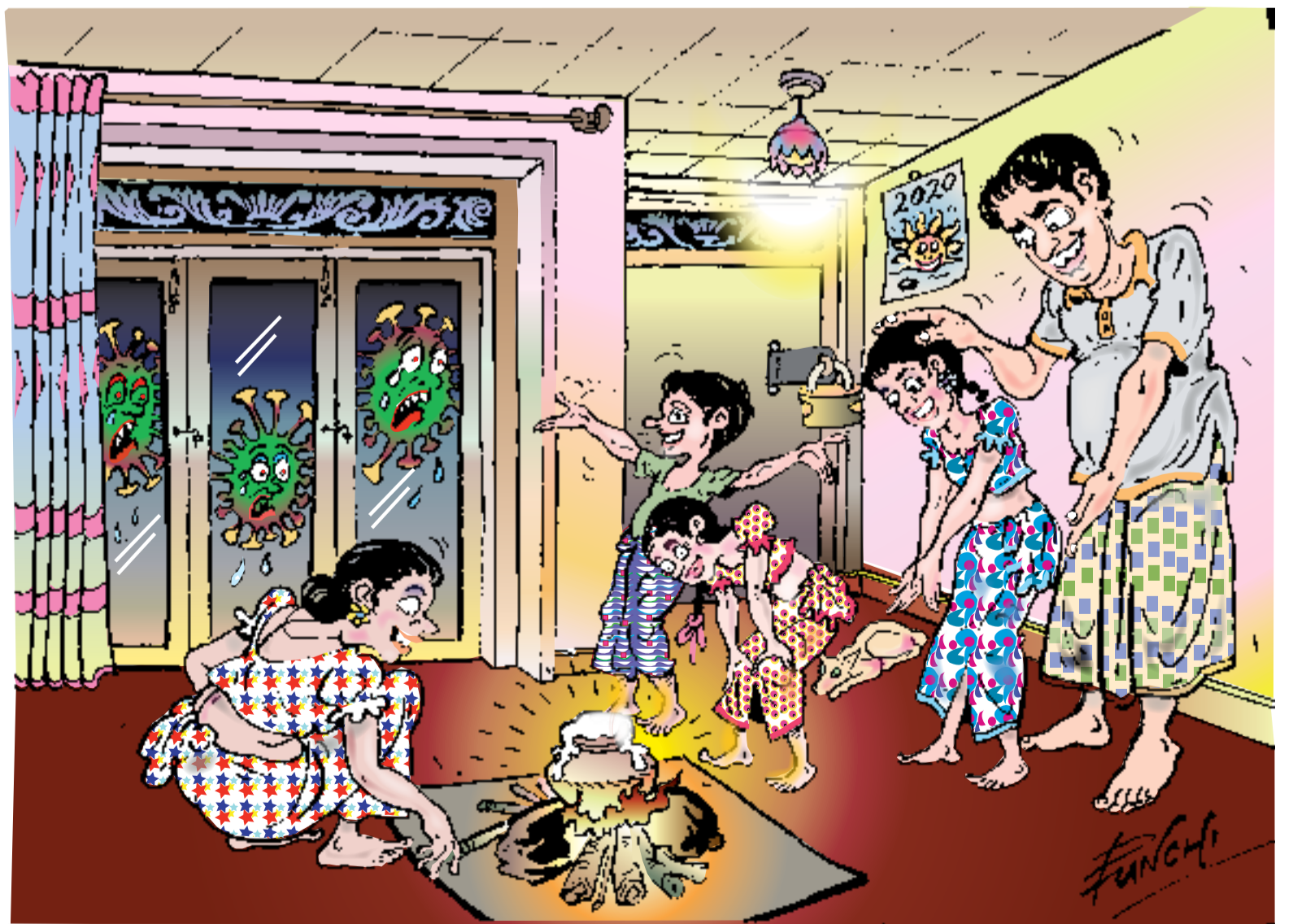
Animosities were cast away in place of friendship. Enemies became friends. People vowed to give up discord and rancour. The betel leaf was the symbol of this.

That was bigger and better than even the sheer joy of Avurudu itself. And visits to friends and relatives far and near, strengthened lifelong bonds. Again, this is not possible this year for the time being.

As we celebrate yet another Sinhala and Hindu New Year, it is time we went back to these basics, these simple pleasures of life.

These are simple things that made Avurudu special for both children and adults all over the country. They still have the potential to do so.

We should be able to see through the veneer of commercialism and extract the essence of Avurudu so that future generations could still benefit from time-honoured traditions which we have inherited from our ancestors. Avurudu once again needs to be the simple celebration of spontaneous joy that it used to be.





# Reflections on the Resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ

By  
Rear Admiral  
Dr. Shemal  
Fernando, PhD



**Alleluia! The Christ is risen! The Son of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Saviour of the world, is truly risen! Easter Sunday is a day of unique joy, light, and life; the Lord has dissipated the night of death and will never cease to fill the whole universe with rejoicing, Alleluia!**

The resurrection of Christ is at the heart of the Holy Bible, Christian theology, and the Gospel. Many places in Scripture remind us of this fact but probably none so clear as the Apostle Paul: "In the first place, I have passed on to you what I, myself, received: that Christ died for our sins, as the Scripture says; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4), and a little further in the same chapter, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith gives you nothing, and you are still in sin" (1 Corinthians 15:17).

The Resurrection by Paolo Caliari (1528 - 1588)

## The Resurrection

The first Glorious Mystery of the Holy Rosary in the life of Christ and His Blessed Mother gives pride of place to 'The Resurrection'. "On Easter morning, the disciples' hearts leap with inexpressible joy to find their Lord - alive again" (Matthew 28:8). And as we contemplate the Resurrection of the Lord, poor sinners that we are, we marvel to discover that the Passover of the Lord touches us. It changes everything in our lives. This day is a day of celebration and rejoicing! By his rising, Christ has opened to us the treasures of salvation and grace.

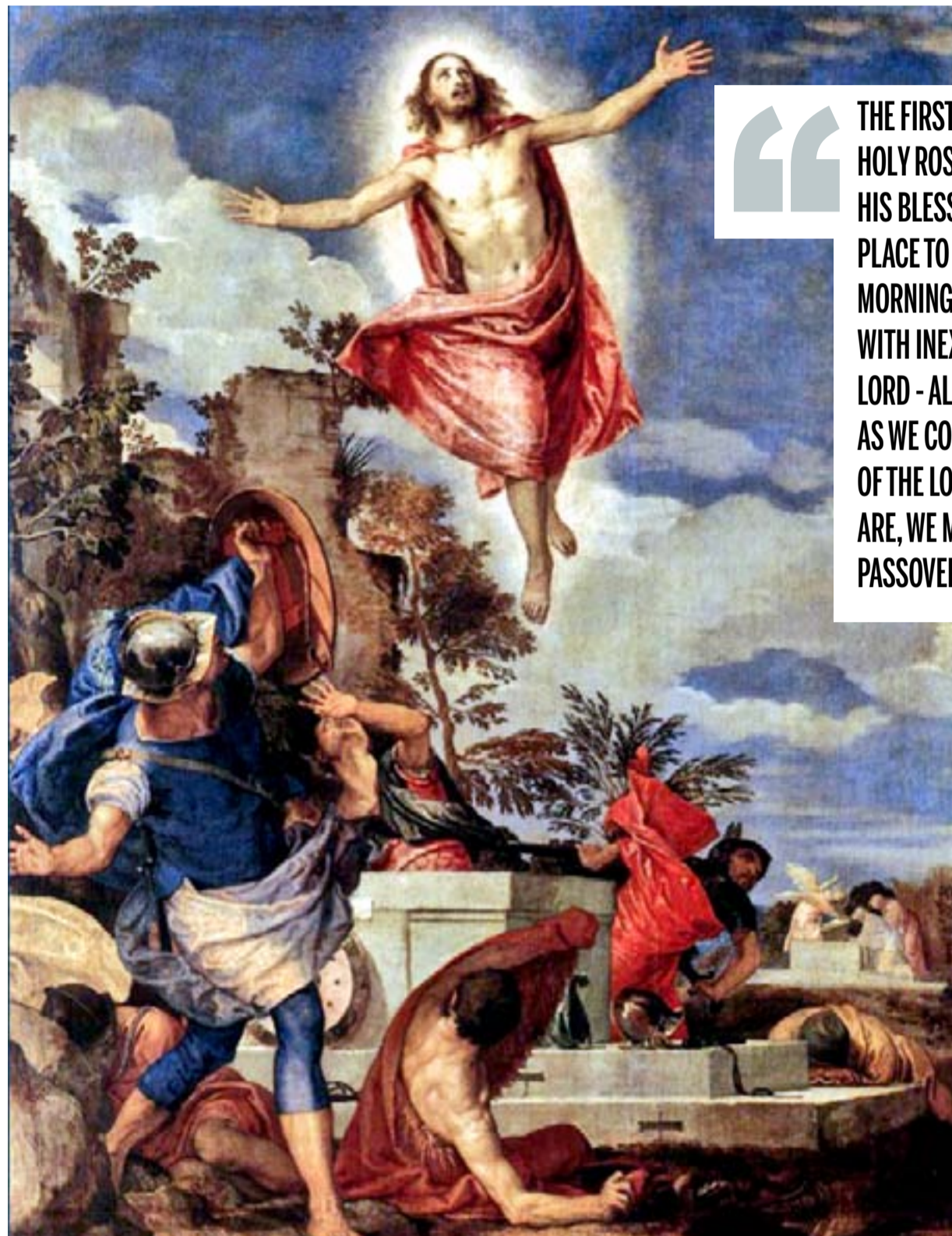
The Father's plan has been fulfilled. The Son sent by God came to save all men from sin and has bestowed upon them, through grace, the gift of becoming children of God. And so we are! The death of Jesus on the cross has washed us and set us free from all sin. His Resurrection has won for us adoption as his brothers and sisters. It is true and such is our faith that from now on, through the grace of the Resurrection, we participate in the life of the Only Begotten Son. We are all children of the same Father, sharing our love for one another in communion with the Holy Spirit! Alleluia!

## Temple of His Body

In the history of the world, only one tomb has ever had a rock rolled before it and a soldier guard set to watch it, to prevent the dead man within from rising; that was the tomb of Christ. What could be more ridiculous than armed soldiers keeping their eyes on a corpse?

Here sentinels are set, lest the dead walk, the silent speak, and the pierced heart quicken to the throbb of life. They say He is dead; they know He is dead; they will tell you He will not rise again, but still they watch. This vigilance at a tomb was not a sudden last-minute fancy. It went back to his prophecies that He would rise again, and to the day when He drove the money changers from the Temple.

His enemies had asked, "What sign canst Thou show us as thy warrant for doing this?" Our Lord answered, "Destroy this temple and



“THE FIRST GLORIOUS MYSTERY OF THE HOLY ROSARY IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST AND HIS BLESSED MOTHER GIVES PRIDE OF PLACE TO 'THE RESURRECTION'. "ON EASTER MORNING, THE DISCIPLES' HEARTS LEAP WITH INEXPRESSIBLE JOY TO FIND THEIR LORD - ALIVE AGAIN" (MATTHEW 28:8). AND AS WE CONTEMPLATE THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD, POOR SINNERS THAT WE ARE, WE MARVEL TO DISCOVER THAT THE PASSOVER OF THE LORD TOUCHES US.

## Mary! Rabboni!

Jesus said to her, "Mary!" That voice was more startling than a clap of thunder. She turns and as her gaze falls on the red, livid marks in the hands and feet she utters but one word, "Rabboni!"-which means Master (John 20:16). Christ had uttered "Mary" and all heaven was in it. It was only one word she uttered and all earth was in it, "Rabboni!" Mary was prepared only to shed reverential tears over the grave; what she was not prepared for was to see Him walking on the hills of the world.

Jesus said to her, "Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them: I am ascending to my Father, who is your Father, to my God, who is your God." So, Mary of Magdala went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord, and this is what he said to me" (John 20:17-18).

For Mary of Magdala, there was no terror on seeing the angels; for the world on fire could not have moved her, so much had grief mastered her soul. Worn from Good Friday, wearied by Holy Saturday, with life dwindled to a shadow and strength worn to a thread - she could "take him away". She symbolizes forever the type of love that can banish the hardest burden and think the heaviest burden light.

## The Truth of Easter

Yet, such is the truth of Easter Sunday; the Resurrection of the dead, the triumph of the defeated, the finding of the lost; the spring-time of the earth, the waking of life, the trumpet of Resurrection blowing over the land of the living.

Our Lord's Incarnation was announced to a virgin, Mary. But his Resurrection was announced to a converted sinner, Mary of Magdala. Only purity could welcome the all-holy Son of God into the world, and hence, Mary Immaculate met Him at the door of earth in the city of Bethlehem. But only a repentant sinner, who had herself risen from the grave of the sin to the newness of life in God, could fittingly understand the triumph over sin.

Hence, not to the Blessed Virgin Mary but to Mary of Magdala are the glad tidings of the Resurrection first announced. In this contrast is hidden the great truth of Easter day; the Resurrection is for sinners. It is the final and absolute proof that our Lord has come "not to call the just, but sinners." To the honour of womanhood, it must forever be said, a woman was closest to the cross on Good Friday and first at the tomb on Easter morn.

## Jesus appears to the Apostles

In Jerusalem, as followers gathered together, all in commotion with the stories of the day, silently, suddenly, unaccountably, casting no shadow, stirring no sound, unbarred no doors, the footfall making no echo, He appeared to them, saying, "Why are you upset, and how does such an idea cross your

in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). This Temple, they said, had already been 46 years in building, and this unknown Galilean only 30 years of age would destroy it and raise it up in three days. But the Scriptures say, "He spoke of the Temple of his Body." (John 2:21)

Three years pass and, during his trial, there was no charge made against his expulsion of the buyers and sellers of the Temple, for the spirit that dictated it was evidently noble. But there was one thing, however, that the witnesses did remember. Like all false witnesses, they twisted it as they said, "We heard Him say, I will destroy this Temple made by human hands, and, in three days, I will build another, not made by human hands" (Mark 14:58). This was an obvious distortion of his meaning. He did not say, "I will destroy this Temple" but "Destroy this Temple" which was the Temple of his Body.

## Spectacle of vigilance

On Holy Saturday, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate and said to him, "Sir, we remember that when that impostor was still alive, he said, "After three days I will rise again". Therefore, have his tomb secured until the third day, lest his disciples come and steal

the body, and say to the people: He is risen from the dead. That would be a deception worse than the first." Pilate answered them, "You have soldiers, go and take all the necessary precautions". So, they went to the tomb and secured it, sealing the stone, placing the tomb under guard (Matthew 27:63-65).

The most astounding fact about this spectacle of vigilance over the dead is that the enemies of Christ expected the Resurrection but His friends did not. In three great scenes of the Resurrection drama, we find a note of sadness and unbelief. Mary of Magdala comes to the grave early in the morning with spices, not to greet the risen Saviour but to anoint a dead body. What is more tragic is that she is weeping. When she finds the tomb empty, instead of believing in the Resurrection, she says, "They have taken my Lord, and I don't know where they have put him" (John 20:13).

## Jesus appears to Mary of Magdala

On Easter Sunday, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning while it was still dark, and she saw that the stone blocking the tomb had been moved away. She ran to Peter and the other disciples whom Jesus loved and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have laid him" (John 20:1-2). The disciples, Peter and John came, entered the tomb, saw and went back to their homes wondering.

Mary stood weeping outside the tomb; and as she wept, she bent down to look inside. She saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, and the other at the feet. They said, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She answered, "Because they have taken my Lord and I don't know where they have put him" (John 20:11-13).

As she said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not recognise him (John 20:14). With her eyes cast down, as the brightness of the early sunrise swept over the dew-covered grass, she vaguely perceived someone near her who asked, "Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?" She thought it was the gardener and answered him, "Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and take him away" (John 20:15).

## Angels announce the Resurrection

"Why look for the living among the dead? You won't find him here. He is risen" (Luke 24:5-6). With those words, the angels greeted the women (Mary of Magdala, Joanna and Mary, the mother of James) who had come to Christ's tomb with perfumes and ointments, to care for His body. They had found the stone rolled away, and the tomb empty, and they did not know what to make of it.

But now the angels continue: "Remember what he told you in Galilee, that the Son of Man had to be given into the hands of sinners, to be crucified, and to rise on the third day." And Saint Luke simply says, "And they remembered his words" (Luke 24:6-8).

On Easter Sunday afternoon, some disciples on the way to Emmaus are so depressed that the risen Lord, who walks with them but does not yet reveal himself, asks them, "Why are you sad?" They tell Him that the women found the

minds? Look at my hands and feet, and see that it is I myself! Touch me, and see for yourselves, for a ghost has no flesh and bones as I have" (Luke 24:38-39).

And as He spoke thus, He showed them His hands and His feet and His side. Hands which He would bid the doubting Thomas to touch with his fingers; feet where Mary knelt that morning to see the red, livid marks of the nails; the side where John leaned to learn the secrets of His Sacred Heart. The Temple that was destroyed was rebuilt in three days.

Why was it that, when the Temple was restored and the Body glorified, He did not heal these scars and imprints of a night forever past? First, to convince us that He was the same person who was "born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried."

Second, He wore them as trophies of love. A soldier who has a gash on his cheek or the Purple Heart, is proud of the wounds. The wounds are no mar to his beauty but a badge of honour. Kings wear jewels, so does He; but his ornaments, his fair array, are the battle scars. These wounds He will take to heaven at the right hand of the Father.

A third and most powerful reason is: He wore the scars to remind us that if He had not escaped persecution, neither shall we. He is the cornerstones of the Temple which is the Church, and we are the stones compacted together in the cement of the love of the Holy Spirit.

The scars are a reminder to us of the eternal law that unless there is a cross, there will never be an empty tomb; unless there is the crown of thorns, there will never be the glorified Body. Heaven is won in a war against evil, and God hates false peace in those who are destined for this war.

## Faith comes from God

We know that Christ's sacrifice on the Cross accomplished our salvation, not because we know that He died, but because we know that He lives. And in living, He brings new life to all who have faith in Him. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John narrate events that took place after his death and mentions the names of those who saw the resurrected Jesus.

Can we believe them? We would like more details to support our faith, but even if thousands of interviews with eyewitnesses were published, with images to support the statements, there would always be room for doubt. We do not see him, we cannot find him. Where is he? It is not more difficult to believe in his words, for both go together. "Who has overcome the world? The one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John 5:5). We doubt, not because there is not enough evidence, but because the event overwhelms us.

## Accepting Jesus Christ

How can we believe in a Resurrection? The evidence, nevertheless, is there and has withstood recurring criticisms and even modern research. Saint John (1 John 5:6-9) characterises the three complementary aspects of the Christian experience, which are first seen in Jesus himself: Water: Water is the symbol of cleanliness and of new life; Blood: The blood of the sacrifice, the painful atonement for sin, the blood of martyrs; Spirit: The uncontrollable power that animates Christ's witnesses; the amazing creativity of the people and institutions that are rooted in faith.

These three witness to Jesus Christ and they also characterise Christian salvation. We can easily see that they correspond to the three Sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation. Do not underestimate the step you took in accepting Jesus Christ. Explore and look for the riches which are meant for you and which are found in "Him who loves us" (Revelation 1:5). Peace be with you! Alleluia!

*(The author possesses a PhD, MPhil and a double MSc; his first work appeared in the Sunday Observer in 1988; recipient of National and Presidential Awards for Academic and Sports pursuits.)*

“WE KNOW THAT CHRIST'S SACRIFICE ON THE CROSS ACCOMPLISHED OUR SALVATION, NOT BECAUSE WE KNOW THAT HE DIED, BUT BECAUSE WE KNOW THAT HE LIVES. AND IN LIVING, HE BRINGS NEW LIFE TO ALL WHO HAVE FAITH IN HIM. THE GOSPELS OF MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE AND JOHN NARRATE EVENTS THAT TOOK PLACE AFTER HIS DEATH AND MENTIONS THE NAMES OF THOSE WHO SAW THE RESURRECTED JESUS.

# As things improve, let's hope for the best, but prepare for the worst

by  
Rajpal Abeynayake

more for an indefinite period, after the lengthy lockdown it has already suffered for months has been finally lifted?

## CLOSURES

There is no expert in the country who can answer the question 'when, and how we will see the other side of the Covid-19 pandemic?'. If the current curfew, or the strategy of enforced social distancing works, and if there are no further cases, say at the end of a reasonable period under the current near total lockdown — at least in some districts — it's well and good, and the country would be able to limp back to normal, battered, but not broken.

But what's a reasonable period of time, and who can define that? Is it three weeks? Is it a month? Two months or more?

The length of the period notwithstanding, there are too many variables to predict anything with any degree of certainty. The main question is, can the spread of the virus within the country be reduced to zero at the end of the period of curfew in the key districts?

Let's hope and pray it doesn't happen, but yet, a turn of events in which just one person escapes the dragnet at the end of the curfew period on whichever date it occurs, cannot be entirely ruled out.

Let's assume for convenience, that the curfew in the last district to have it in force, guessing it's Colombo for instance, is lifted on a given date in the near future.

All is well, and the curfew would have been presumably lifted at that time as there are no more Covid 19 patients in the district. But assume just one individual has escaped the dragnet and is diagnosed with the disease, days after the curfew is lifted for one last time after many months.

In the worst case scenario, that elusive individual in his asymptomatic phase, may infect another cluster of people. These people in turn may disperse through the district, and though most can be identified, all of them, let's assume, cannot be contact-traced in good time. As a result more cases begin to appear in various locations in the district.

What happens next? Is the entire district to go under lockdown once

Such a scenario is macabre, and perhaps these are the worst of our fears that would never probably materialize. This writer apologizes for even having to bring up the eventuality. Such a worst case scenario is unlikely to happen in the most damning of our nightmares, but does it mean that the country has to stop planning for one?

The reasonable answer should be a no. Anything is possible, though not probable, and the worst case scenario of non-containment past the eventual lifting of curfew, is a contingency we as a people have to plan for, despite all sanguine indications. Unforeseen difficulties in containment in the long term are possible, given the unpredictable nature of the virus spread so far.

Even if not a single case is reported after all the curfews have been lifted in all districts, airport closures for a long time will probably be a concomitant necessity. There is no point in risking a return of the outbreak in districts which have hopefully returned to normal after a long and painful period of lockdown, by reopening airports.

All that can be said at the moment is that the future is still uncertain. Yes, the virus will go away some day, but when and how is at this point, a massive and unpredictable unknown.

In the worst case scenario, continuous lockdowns that occur sporadically and in serial fashion lasting, say, until the end of 2020, are just not viable, no matter who says what in the various sectors that are stakeholders in the resolution effort that addresses this crisis.

If and only if the foregoing worst case scenario as explained does occur, a painful period of recurring curfews for months on end in key districts would be unviable on several counts.

What the virus doesn't finish off, could be wiped out by a totally crippled economy if such a situation ever comes to pass. Governments the world over would have well intentioned lockdowns, but in many countries, if the restrictions last for anything longer than say the mid point of 2020, the result would be economic chaos.

It's entirely possible that any pro-



longed curfew in key areas, that last beyond the end of June of this year, would cause more deaths of people due to debt, deprivation and pain of mind, than the virus could have caused in the first place, however negative the impact of its spread in the long term.

## JOB LOSSES

Dire prognostications are being made about the global economy in the meanwhile, and IMF head Kristalina Georgieva has said the world would face the worst crisis since the depression of the 1930s.

The number of people filing unemployment claims meanwhile in the U.S, the largest economy, hit a record high

this week. The E.U shut off its borders completely to foreign visitors.

Such unprecedented developments are expected to halve world economic growth for this year.

In such a backdrop the Sri Lankan domestic economy would not be able to protect itself from the impact of the expected depression in the rest of the world, no matter what happens within our borders.

The strategy going forward if total containment of the virus is not possible despite all good intentions before at least the end of May this year, would therefore be of crucial importance.

Government policy makers are already bracing for impact with a planned self sustainability drive, and

calls are being made for domestic agriculture at household level to brace for any impact from potential food import restrictions.

The economy however does not turn on food production alone. Tourism and travel may not revive significantly in the coming months, or even as the end of 2020 approaches.

This would mean major job losses in the tourism and allied sectors in the country. Any prolonged shutdown would significantly affect other sectors as well, and none of these issues can be addressed by domestic agriculture or domestic production only.

## DYSFUNCTION

The best case scenario would be for the virus spread to slow down and come to a complete halt in the next month or so i.e at least by the end of May. If this happens globally and in Sri Lanka, economies could quickly be on the mend, despite everything.

But if there is no vaccine on the horizon and if the virus spread cannot be contained by any chance in this country by the end of May, the continuous lockdown strategy may even have to be abandoned.

Any such change of policy would automatically raise the question of the meaning and purpose of the initial — currently ongoing — curfews. Any change in strategy if the virus continues to spread beyond May could also render the national health sector potentially helpless, if the numbers of the Covid stricken patients increase if the curfews are lifted.

In such a case, rulers and governments of many countries would be potentially damned if they do, and damned if they don't. If curfews and lockdowns have to be continued beyond the end of May/June by any chance, our economy would be under threat of complete dysfunction. If the curfews are not continued beyond May, and if the epidemic spread continues past that month, the health sector will not be able to cope with the outcome, and the shock of possible multiplying fatalities would impact severely on the national psyche.

The best hope therefore under all circumstances would be for a complete halt to the virus spread at least by the end of May, and a resultant lifting of all curfews at that time.

But if such sanguine hopes do not come to pass, some extremely hard decisions may have to be made.

A question could be raised: is the country prepared to end all lockdowns by the end of next month, no matter what?

The possibility of such a drastic decision having to be made in the long term interests of the people's collective well-being looms large in the possible worst case scenario. Drastic decisions may call for a drastic psychological shift or a general preparedness of the national psyche to embrace one option over another. Else, the economy could be in free fall, and the damage would be worse than from the virus in the first place.

## Vulnerability, fear and the legitimizing of prejudice

By  
Malinda Seneviratne



Sudat Pasqual, former Sri Lankan cricketer now resident in Canada, recently wrote to Rachel Notley, Leader of the Opposition and former Prime Minister of Alberta, in response to the 'stay home, stay safe' meme she had posted.

'I understand the science behind staying at home and social distancing but I am very concerned about our obsessiveness and the passive-aggressive manner the concepts are promoted. I say this because I see the confusion in the faces of many who get on my bus. They are uncertain whether to greet me, smile or ignore me when they board the bus. The seniors who get on are the most troubled. It's obvious that they are aware that they are at most risk but they also need to get about like everyone else. Last week some were chatty but not this week. I also hear fellow drivers saying that they don't want to allow people who may be homeless, not because they are coughing, sneezing and/or blow-

ing their noses but simply because they look disheveled or unkempt. It makes me so sad and angry when I hear such prejudice because our vulnerabilities and fears are legitimizing their prejudice.'

Situations vary from country to country. There are no buses plying the streets. People need to get about but most stay at home, the 'straying' if at all being limited to a stroll around the village or up and down a lane in the case of those in urban areas. Distribution of essentials is getting streamlined. The low income earners are getting handouts. People take care of each other to the extent possible.

There are probably lots of gaps and the country is yet to be tested because Covid-19 hasn't really 'taken off' in Sri Lanka. That said, Sri Lanka is doing quite well in terms of making sure people are ok.

And yet, there are vulnerabilities and fears. Daily wage earners are at risk. Take for example the barber in our village, Kudamaduwu. Now he's all about community and solidarity. The man mobilized the entire village to turn an abandoned paddy field into a playground. The young people who make up the membership of the sports club collected money to buy



**'I UNDERSTAND THE SCIENCE BEHIND STAYING AT HOME AND SOCIAL DISTANCING BUT I AM VERY CONCERNED ABOUT OUR OBSESSIVENESS AND THE PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE MANNER THE CONCEPTS ARE PROMOTED. I SAY THIS BECAUSE I SEE THE CONFUSION IN THE FACES OF MANY WHO GET ON MY BUS. THEY ARE UNCERTAIN WHETHER TO GREET ME, SMILE OR IGNORE ME WHEN THEY BOARD THE BUS.'**

the property. Then they levelled it, planted grass and also fruit trees in the perimeter. They organized kite competitions to raise money for all this. The annual avurudu uthsavaya is held at this ground now.

That's background. Sujee Doloswala, as mentioned, is a barber. A good one. An enterprising young man, he saved money and modernized his shop, adding an extra kada kaamaraya the rent from which adds to his income. He has also obtained loans to build his house. With Covid-19, he's lost his business.

'I have to draw from what I saved to pay off my loans. Everyday I would

set aside a part of my earnings to pay the loan. Now that's not possible. If some random person passes through the village in search of people who need to be helped, they won't stop at my house.'

Appearances can deceive, in other words. The state machinery is not ignorant however. There's data. There are officials at the top and at the village-level we have the Grama Niladhari. If patronage-politics and pilfering does not happen, things will be ok. Not amazing, not great even, but good enough. Vulnerability is usually accompanied by fear, but as Sujee said, 'ape game kavruvath

badaginne nehe, badagini venne ida thiyanneth naha (no one in our village starves and we will not let anyone starve either).'

As mentioned above, we are yet to be tested. Let that be a note of caution and a caveat. It is not that there are no prejudices in our society. There's a reason why in certain circles terms such as 'godaya' and 'yakkho' are derogatory. We know also that capitalism is a system that breeds a political class which favours the rich and neglects the poor. Indeed, it is a miracle that we still have a public service that comes through with shining colours each and every time there is a crisis. However, we did see in the early days of curfew how the focus was on the upper middle and upper classes. The efforts were aimed mostly at dealing with their vulnerabilities and fears. That's prejudice too.

There is also the palpable prejudices pertaining to religion and race. Some sections of the Muslim community believe there's persecution. They believe that in the matter of disposing the dead, the dictates of their faith (or at least their reading of the relevant texts — yes, it's all subjective and human-read by the humanly-frail) were ignored. That's prejudice

they say. So there's fear and there's vulnerability. In this instance however it is a double-edged thing. There have been instances where certain Muslims have flouted the rules regarding gathering. It's faith, they say. It's stupid, insensitive and absolutely dangerous, others will say. That kind of faith-assertion feeds fears and vulnerabilities. That kind of dogmatism is also about prejudice.

Fortunately, these are exceptions and not the rule. We have seen over the past few weeks behavioural change among the people. The threat is recognized. The precautions are understood and by and large taken. There is less complaining of things people have had to forego.

And yet, we haven't been really tested yet. Hopefully we won't be tested but this is not the hour of the crystal-gazer. Best to be prepared. Best to expect the worst. Best to do what we can. For ourselves and each other. And, when fear and vulnerability raise their heads, it's also best that we retire prejudices. In short, we need not make things worse than they are.

malindasenevi@gmail.com.



# Effective steps by Govt to combat COVID 19

Representatives of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) met President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa on April 06 to discuss matters relating to the prevailing situation in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. They expressed their satisfaction over the measures taken by the Government to combat the pandemic in the country. Both parties agreed that the battle to contain this disease should continue without political or any other differences. President Rajapaksa elaborated on the measures already taken by the Government to prevent the spread of the disease and future actions to be taken in this regard.

During the discussion the President explained to the SJB representatives in detail the responsible manner which the Government acted following the declaration by the World Health Organization (WHO) about the pandemic. The President said that the Government was able to take several swift actions to safeguard the citizens of the country and added that every possible step has been taken to ensure uninterrupted day-to-day civilian life. The President told the representatives that these timely measures, taken under the guidance of experts in collaboration with the health authorities and the tri-forces, were instrumental in controlling the spread of the disease. President Rajapaksa said pre-testing to identify the infected and those associated with them will continue to ensure early detection of the affected.

The President said the quarantine process continues at 40 centers countrywide while programs have been launched with the assistance of Public Health Officers (PHOs) to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in areas where the infected have been identified. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa stated that if there are any shortcomings in the Government programs, immediate action will be taken to rectify them. President Rajapaksa and SJB Leader Sajith Premadasa requested the employers to attend to the needs of their contract employees earning daily wages including those in the

construction sector as they may be stranded due to curfew.

Ministers Dinesh Gunawardena, Nimal Siripala De Silva, Wimal Weerawansa, Dullas Alahapperuma, Bandula Gunawardana and Johnston Fernando represented the Government while the SJB was represented by its leader Sajith Premadasa and General Secretary, Ranjith Madduma Bandara. Secretary to the President, Dr. P.B. Jayasundara and several other senior Government officials also participated in the discussion. The Government and the SJB representatives focused their attention on future plans for a number of fields including healthcare.

The President explained that after taking the current global economic and social crisis into account, plans are already underway to implement an appropriate economic model suitable to Sri Lanka. President Rajapaksa highlighted that the experts have been consulted to uplift the apparel and tourism industries which have suffered a setback and that the Government will take action according to their instructions when opportunity permits. The Head of the Special Presidential Task Force on Essential Services, Basil Rajapaksa, said that if any individual had not received their allowance yet, he or she is entitled to make an appeal to their respective Grama Niladhari.

Meanwhile, after the discussion between the Government and the SJB representatives, Minister Wimal Weerawansa who also attended the discussion told the media that SJB Leader Sajith Premadasa and other representatives requested the President to reconvene Parliament. However, the President in his response to the SJB members had categorically stated that he had no idea whatsoever to reconvene Parliament. He had told the SJB representatives except to declare a state of emergency, there is no legal provision to reconvene Parliament. The President had also said that he has no intention to declare a state of emergency at this juncture. The Government Spokesman and former State Minister, Mahindananda Aluthgamage, at a recent media briefing

held at his Nawalapitiya residence told the media that the Opposition MPs are forcing the Government to reconvene Parliament with the intention of getting salaries and other perks. He also said that if Parliament is reconvened, a huge amount of money will have to be spent but the people are not requesting to reconvene it. What the people request is for the Government to take steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and provide relief measures to the people.

Prime Minister, Mahinda Rajapaksa on Tuesday (April 07) made a special statement on the current situation in the country and the steps taken by the Government. The Premier in his address to the nation said whether we will live or not will be decided by how steps are taken to control the COVID-19 pandemic. He said our focus, our dedication and our discipline will decide whether we live or die in a pandemic of this nature. Premier Rajapaksa said for this reason, the President and the Government had acted giving great attention to the lives of the general public from the moment this pandemic was reported. It was because this situation was well understood by the Government that steps were taken to send a plane to Wuhan, China, to bring back the Sri Lankans trapped there, even before many other countries did so.

The Premier said that at no time did we take decisions based on political, racial or religious lines. We will not do so in the future either. This is a moment when all political party leaders have with great dedication come forward to assist the Government. This is not a time to be divided along religious or racial lines. At this moment, we can have only one enemy and that enemy is called Coronavirus. He said this is not a time to follow traditions as required by a religion or a race but a time to unite and overcome this huge crisis.

The Prime Minister in his address to the nation further said "We have faced bigger challenges in our history. I am confident that we can rise up without facing the disaster that other countries have faced. We must not only rise as a developed

nation but also as a healthy nation." He said that as soon as the first corona patient was reported, steps were taken to protect the children by declaring a holiday to all schools and universities. We were the first among Asian nations to set up a Special Presidential Task Force on Essential Services in this regard. We stopped arrivals to the country at the airport. Our policy at all times was to satisfy the needs of the public without causing any inconvenience to them. Even during the time of the war against the terrorists, we did not declare curfew. In the current situation, we declared curfew in deference to the wishes of the specialists in the health sector. He said that the Special Presidential Task Force which operates from Temple Trees is fulfilling the responsibility of distributing essential items including food and medicines to the entire country.

Premier Rajapaksa said it is without getting a budget approved in Parliament that we have allocated this large amount of money and given relief to the general public. The President did not have the opportunity to get the assistance of Parliament to do any of these things. The Parliament did not support us when we tried to get an interim budget approved before it was dissolved. The public who have the sovereignty ask us as to what use there is in reconvening Parliament. We have to think now about how we will live after overcoming this disaster. He said that the former Government moved away from state intervention in production, distribution and marketing in the country. In that era, the home garden program that we set up to ensure a self-sufficient home, and even the paddy cultivation, crashed.

Certain controversial remarks made by Minister Wimal Weerawansa on the conduct of the Election Commission were highlighted in the media circles a couple of days ago. The Minister charged that amidst the coronavirus pandemic, the Election Commission had engaged in politics. The Chairman of the Election Commission, Mahinda Deshapriya, in a recent letter addressed to the Prime Minister had said that under the prevailing coro-

navirus threat, some politicians are distributing aid to promote themselves and their political parties. However, after an inspection tour of the Homagama Base Hospital, Minister Weerawansa told the media that what they do right now is not politics. At this juncture, what is needed is to give a social leadership irrespective of party differences. He said that the Government officials alone cannot fulfill this task. If the Election Commission interprets this as doing politics, first they should be given medicine. Weerawansa said "here we are not doing any politics. We are only fulfilling a social responsibility. We don't have any party politics here. Therefore, we call upon the Election Commissioner and his 'gang' to stop the politics that they are doing. Weerawansa queried and said that if they cannot assist the people in a catastrophic situation like this, what is the justice behind it? Who has the right to disturb it? That is our right and we would definitely do that on behalf of the people." The Minister further said a member of the Election Commission had given a statement to the BBC stating that the country is heading towards dictatorship. In addition, the Chairman of the Election Commission as if he has just woken up issues a statement against the program launched to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

Several key important decisions have been taken at a meeting with the ruling party members of the former Parliament held in Colombo on Thursday (April 09). This meeting held under the patronage of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa has focused a number of issues faced by the people due to Covid-19 outbreak in the country. The meeting had been attended the Head of the Special Presidential Task Forces on Essential Services Basil Rajapaksa, Ministers Chamal Rajapaksa, Wimal Weerawansa, Dinesh Gunawardana, Pavithra Wanniarachchi and former State Ministers Mahindananda Aluthgamage, Anura Priya dharshana Yapa, Rohitha Abeygunawardena, Dayasiri Jayasekara, Shehan Semsinghe, Kanchana Wijesekera and former UPFA Parliamentarian Pi-

yal Nishantha. In a bid to prevent any rice shortage in the market, the Government at the meeting has decided to keep all main rice mills in the country open to continue uninterrupted processing of paddy. In addition, the service of all rice mills island-wide has been declared as an essential service to ensure uninterrupted processing of paddy. It has also been revealed at the meeting that the country has ample paddy stocks to meet the requirements of the people and there is no need room for any rice shortage in the country. The President and the Prime Minister have also focused attention on a number of issues in the fisheries sector. Premier Rajapaksa has directed the Finance Ministry Secretary to discuss these issues with the Fisheries Corporation and solve them immediately. The Government has also allocated Rs.600 million to purchase the fish stocks of fishermen immediately and distribute them countrywide under a systematic program.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa had a meeting with medical experts representing various fields at the Presidential Secretariat on Thursday (April 09) with the intention of obtaining much needed expert medical opinion on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in the country promptly. During the meeting, the steps taken by the Government, tri-forces and the health authorities to prevent the spread of coronavirus as well as the steps to be taken in the future had been discussed at length. The group of specialist doctors had commended the President's quarantine program launched with the aim of preventing the spread of the virus. The doctors had said the further strengthening of the existing quarantine process is the most effective approach to prevent the spread of the virus. The specialists have also pointed out the importance of conducting investigations on groups that were in close contact with infected persons. Even though there are sufficient coronavirus test kits available at present, President Rajapaksa had instructed the health authorities to take necessary steps to acquire more test kits in order to face any situation.

## Small scale rice millers request Govt help to purchase paddy

When there are 20 million people who consume rice in Sri Lanka, three large scale rice mill owners outrageously decide on the prices of paddy, maintaining an unethical monopoly in the market, said small scale rice mill owner of Polonnaruwa, Suraj Jayawickrama.

Expressing his views on the paddy and rice monopoly in the market, Jayawickrama said the Government and banks provide very small loans to small scale rice mill owners to purchase paddy. However, they provide a higher number of loans to three large scale rice mill owners, namely, Araliya, New Rathan and Nipuna. Under the pretext of the coronavirus pandemic these leading rice mill owners attempt to purchase paddy and create an artificial shortage in the market and also to fix the price of a kilogram of rice at Rs. 100.

He said that even if the small scale rice mills have been declared as an Essential Service they do not have stocks. We are ready to commence our operations within 24 hours and we have enough workers. Therefore, the Government should take immediate steps to provide the rice stocks in Kilinochchi and Jaffna to small scale rice mill owners. We are ready to provide rice at the maximum retail price declared by the Government. At present, the stocks of rice in the districts cannot be transported due to the curfew. Therefore, the Army can intervene and fulfil this task.

Three large scale rice mill owners measure their stocks early and store them. Then, we only have the remaining paddy stocks of the farmers to purchase. By this time, the three leading rice mill owners have increased the price of paddy so that any small scale rice mill owner is unable to purchase paddy. This is called the monopoly or the 'mafia'. Even the banks should be held responsible for this.

Jayawickrama said that the Nipuna rice mill owner had told the President on April 9 that the rice mills will have to be closed for

10 days so that a rice shortage would be created in the market. These rice mill owners never close their mills or stop their operations. The Government should immediately take over the stocks of paddy of these large scale rice mill owners. As small scale rice mill owners we would convert the paddy to rice and provide enough stocks of rice as requested by the Government.

He said that the Government should intervene to purchase paddy at the next harvest season. Firstly, credit facilities should be given to all rice mill owners to purchase paddy. The Government should also give some targets to small scale rice mill owners regarding the purchase of paddy and the production of rice. At present, there are 5,000 metric tons of paddy purchased by the Divisional Secretaries and the Army. This paddy stock should be distributed equally among small scale rice mill owners. Then we could provide rice for the Government as soon as possible. We are ready to help the Government in this catastrophic situation. The Government should not be scared of these three large scale rice mill owners. There are sufficient rice stocks for the next four months and there is no need to create a rice shortage in the market.

He said that the Government should fix the price of a kilo of paddy at Rs. 40 - 45 so that a kilo of rice can be given to the consumer at Rs.80 - 85. This would not cause any loss to paddy farmers as well. There are small scale rice mill owners associations in each district. In the Polonnaruwa district alone there are 60 small scale rice mills. Steps should be taken to provide credit facilities to small scale rice mill owners when it is time to reap the harvest. We have enough storage facilities countrywide. Therefore, the Government should not dance to the whims and fancies of these three large scale rice mill owners. We have the ability to compete with them. We are ready to commence our operations within 24 hours and provide quality rice without paying the way to create any rice shortages in the market.

## Easter celebrations this year:

# A unique event

BY E. WEERAPPERUMA

We the Catholics and Christians of Sri Lanka celebrate Easter Sunday today, April 12 to honour the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It is a great day of religious significance that we celebrate today in isolation without attending the festive service in churches for the first time. It is undoubtedly a unique Easter for the Catholics and Christians, during COVID-19, this year.

There were no Church Services held in congregation for the Holy (Maundy) Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil (Holy Saturday Midnight) services and Easter Sunday Mass. Amid the Covid-19 pandemic and at a time when the world is struggling to overcome the effects of the virus, and many are confined to their homes or in voluntary self-isolation, we celebrate Jesus Christ's victory over death, the Feast of Resurrection.

We, in Sri Lanka stayed away from congregating in our respective churches due to the island-wide curfew in view of the catastrophic COVID-19 that has eaten into the very fabric of our society.

We are not alone in facing this calamity, almost all the countries are facing it with patience and trust in God the Creator and Protector of the human race and the Universe.

Even the Vatican Office for the Liturgical Celebrations of Pope Francis had to reorganize the liturgies this year.

The coronavirus pandemic challenges the Vatican Office for Liturgical celebrations to find new ways to accompany the faithful during this year's Easter liturgies, Vatican news reported.

"This year believers will celebrate the victory of life hoping to fight death. The COVID 19 pandemic is ravaging the world causing mourning and suffering among all peoples. More than ever, the current events remind us how much hope is a dimension of faith".

A joint Message issued by the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC) said:

"Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the

dead is the culmination of the Passion (Latin *Pati*, *passus* sum means to suffer, bear, endure) of Jesus, preceded by Great Lent, a 40-day period of fasting, prayer and penance.

His Resurrection is the triumph of good over evil, sin and death. It is the principal feast of the ecclesiastical year, the singular event that proves that, those who trust in God and accept Christ will be raised from the dead on the last day.

This day, the last day of the Easter Triduum, marks the end of Holy Week. It sounds the beginning of the Easter Season, of the Liturgical Year. The true followers of Jesus will receive, "a new birth into a living hope through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead".

For Sri Lankans this Easter reminds us of what occurred on April 21, Easter Sunday 2019 where nearly 500 innocent devotees participating in the Most Sacred and Solemn Feast of Resurrection of Jesus Christ, were brutally killed by suicide bombers in two Catholic churches, St. Anthony's Shrine in Kochchikade, Colombo and Katuwapitiya St. Sebastian Church, Negombo and Zion Christian Church in Batticaloa.

Perusing the pages of history, we recall how Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) was targeted during World War II. The Southwest of the country was heavily damaged by the Japanese air attack that occurred on Easter Sunday, April 5, 1942.

This attack referred to as the "Easter Sunday Reid" or the "Battle of Ceylon", was aimed at the British heavy cruisers HMS Dorsetshire and Cornwall by the aircraft of the Imperial Japanese Navy. This was during the South-East Asian theatre of World War II.

A few days after the "Indian Ocean Reid" a similar attack was launched on Trincomalee, targeting British warships and harbour installations. The object of the Japanese attack was to disrupt the war efforts of British Commonwealth Nations and force the British Eastern Fleet to leave the Asian waters.

The word 'Easter' has reference to Eostara, the goddess of rebirth. It is claimed that in early times the feast of Eostara was celebrated to mark the resurrection and

rebirth of the Earth.

The Christian celebration is called 'Pascha' in Latin and Greek, and the word derived from the Aramaic language, has reference to a Jewish festival, known as Passover in English. It recalls the great exodus of the Jewish community from slavery in Egypt.

Although the King of England, Charles I, in the year 1647, declared Resurrection, as a feast to be celebrated on a Sunday, contradicting him, Parliament abolished celebrating the feast along with other festivals of the Church.

It is very much fitting to quote Pope Francis while celebrating this Easter Festival, where we are assured of God's care and protection and that He has not abandoned us.

Pope Francis addressing the faithful during the General Audience last week, said: "During these weeks filled with anxiety and suffering because of the CORONA VIRUS pandemic we may be asking ourselves 'What does God do in the face of our pain? Where is He when everything is going wrong? Why doesn't He solve the problems immediately?'"

The Pope while inviting the faithful to live the 'Holy Week' and the Triduum as "one great domestic liturgy" admonished them to find courage, strength and hope in God's infinite love. The Pope said: "In these days of quarantine when we are secluded at home, let's take these two things in our hands: the Crucified One - let's look at Him - and the Gospel. It will be for us like a great domestic liturgy because we cannot go to church."

Explaining further Pope Francis said: In the same way, Easter tells us that God can turn everything to good, and that with Him we can truly trust that all will be well. "That is why on Easter morning we are told: Do not be afraid! We are not alone, God does not forget us..." the Pope added.

Pope Francis concluded saying that Jesus changed history "by being close to us." Through His death, He conquered death. So we too can change our lives by being close to Him, in the certainty that we are not alone because the Lord loves us, He does not abandon us and He never forgets us".

## Features

## His Grace Archbishop Nicholas Marcus Fernando Called to Heaven on Good Friday

## A Spiritual Colossus of Sri Lanka

By  
Rear Admiral  
Dr. Shemal  
Fernando, PhD



His Grace Archbishop Emeritus Nicholas Marcus Fernando was welcomed to Heaven by the Lord on Good Friday, April 10, 2020. His journey on earth lasted four score and seven. His Grace was at the helm of Sri Lanka's flock as the Archbishop of Colombo for well-nigh 25 years, from 1977 to 2002. He was elevated as an Archbishop at the comparatively young age of 44. Yet, in the annals of Christianity in Sri Lanka, he truly played a decisive role as the Chief Shepherd.

Little has changed in that familiar exterior of 'Emmaus' in Tewatte where the Chief Shepherd spent his retirement in the environs of the Basilica of Our Lady of Lanka from 2002 to 2020. Archbishop Fernando, as he was affectionately referred to was very relaxed always but preferred to respect 'old age' and to be identified as a 'Senior Citizen'.

He was respected as a scholar, a man of great integrity and a linguist of no mean repute. He was fluent in English, Sinhala and Tamil and had a command of many other languages. With constancy and care, Archbishop Fernandolaboured along with the priests, religious lay catechists and the faithful all along his tenure as the Chief Shepherd for not only the effective promotion of evangelisation of the people but also for the provision of the earthly needs of the citizens and social progress of all classes.

## Glimpses of a Shepherd

I am truly blessed to have sailed the early years of my life on the course steered by Archbishop Fernando. We were born as parishioners of St. Mary's Church, Grand Street, Negombo; christened at St. Mary's Church, Grand Street, Negombo; educated at St. Mary's College, Grand Street, Negombo and grew up in the confines of St. Mary's Church, Grand Street, Negombo.

The lifelong reminiscences for a Martyr that era could be the beautiful bronze statue of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary that occupied the niche of the Main Block of the college, the life-like statue of the founder, Rev. Fr. J. B. Vistarini that stands before the facade of the church, his last resting place in the side altar of the church where his grave is identified by a statue of him, and the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes in the precincts of the church. Rev. Vistarini, the parish priest of the majestic church was considered a 'Living Saint'.

Reverting back to the life of Archbishop Fernando, I was the Head Prefect at St. Mary's College, Negombo when the good news from the Holy See in Rome of his elevation reached the city of Negombo, well

known as the 'Little Rome'. I vividly remember how the bells of the grand old church-pealed and how people from all walks of life in Negombo united to share the joy of producing the first son of the parish as the Archbishop of Colombo.

Ever since, I was privileged to associate the then serving Archbishop of Colombo, all along my career as a naval officer. During my schooldays, he was my 'Hero'. In my youth, I preferred him to be my 'Role Model'. As the years rolled by, he became my 'Mentor' and later 'Spiritual Director' - a unique bond of friendship that flourished for 40 long years.

Year after year, I never failed to visit His Grace on his Patronal Feast and birthday and His Grace reciprocated as our birthdays fall on 6th and 16th of December. His Grace never failed to contact me whenever he reads the articles I have penned to congratulate and inspire me. He has always been pleasant, unassuming and easy to talk to.

As I linger down memory lane, many nostalgic events of my association with him flash before me and I would like to share a few. I was privileged to confer on him the prestigious 'Award of Excellence for the Old Maryite of the Century' and deliver the keynote speech at the book launch to mark the Silver Jubilee of his Episcopal Ordination. His Grace always appreciated my efforts to settle him down at 'Emmaus' in retirement and reminded me of our unforgettable pilgrimage to the Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health in Vailankanni amidst severe floods. He was always part of our important family events. I will never forget or cease to appreciate the pivotal role he played in my life. His groundings and counsel has stood me in good stead and given me strength to overcome many tribulations.

## Birth and Divine Call

In the Register of Baptism at St. Mary's Church, Grand Street, Negombo which boasts a legacy of 455 years, the name 'Nicholas Marcus' appears as the 115th entry in the year 1932. He has been christened on December 13th, in the presence of his loved parents, Wilfred Severinus Fernando and Mary Lily Margaret Fernando with Theophilus Fernando and Maria Harriet Fernando as god parents.

He was born a week earlier on December 6th in the renowned fishing hamlet of Munnakkara. Incidentally, it was on their feast day and the church and the city are dedicated to St. Nicholas. Thus, his humble and pious parents who cherished the proper endowment of spiritual values to their children would have been encouraged to name him after St. Nicholas.

Archbishop Fernando is the second child in the family and he has seven siblings. According to the order of birth they are Frank, Archbishop Nicholas Marcus, Benzy, Camillus, Victor, Berryl, Nicholas Alexis and Maureen. Archbishop Fernando had his primary education at the Roman Catholic Mixed School in Munnakkara.



Then, he entered the leading Catholic educational institution, St. Mary's College, Grand Street, Negombo where he was beckoned by God to his vineyard to enable him to fulfill his allotted vocation. The effusive showering of talents and the providential timing of his birth made young Nicholas Marcus more and more conscious of his obligations before God. These ideas and ideals which matured in him from childhood made him what he became.

Responding with devotion to the Divine call, he entered St. Aloysius Seminary, Borellain 1945 and passed the SSC Examination with exemption from the London Matriculation in 1949, the London University Inter-Arts Examination in 1951, and the

London University BA Examination in 1953 and entered St. Bernard's Major Seminary in 1953 for his Philosophical studies.

In the Seminary, he set his goals straight and chartered the correct path. His perfection was to seek God's will and fulfill it and as a result glory and honour followed him - as the day follows the night. And the day dawned for young Nicholas Marcus to approach the altar.

## Ordination and Priesthood

He was sent to Collegiade Propaganda Fide in Rome in 1954 to pursue his studies and obtained a Baccalaureate in Philosophy and a Licentiate in Philosophy from the Ur-

ban University in Rome in 1955 and 1956 respectively and a Baccalaureate in Theology in 1958. He was ordained as a priest by His Eminence Cardinal Agagianian on December 20, 1959 in Rome. Later, he obtained his Licentiate in Theology as well from the Urban University in 1960.

Fr. Nicholas Marcus returned to Sri Lanka and was appointed to the staff of St. Peter's College, Bambalapitiya in 1960. Later, he was appointed to the staff of St. Aloysius Seminary, Borella in 1963 and was elevated as the Rector in 1965. In 1973, he was again sent back to Rome to read for his Doctorate in Moral Theology which he achieved with a Summa cum Laude in 1976.

He was appointed to the staff of the National Seminary of Our Lady of Lanka in Kandy in 1976. With his elevation as the Archbishop of Colombo on March 30, 1977 by His Holiness Pope Paul VI, he became the youngest to be appointed to the office at the age of 44. He also became the first Diocesan Priest to be appointed an Archbishop.

## Spiritual Colossus

A scholar, preacher and spiritual colossus, Archbishop Fernando during his 25 years as the Archbishop of Colombo from 1977 to 2002 expanded the Archdiocese in several directions. He was a spontaneous and a compelling priest, whose interests gave him new strength and greater depth.

Archbishop Fernando welcomed Pope John Paul II to Sri Lanka on January 20, 1995 for a historical visit during which the Beatification of St. Joseph Vaz took place in Colombo. He celebrated the Silver Jubilee of his Episcopal Ordination at St. Lucia's Cathedral, Colombo on May 14, 2002.

It is indeed a rare blessing and a privilege for one to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the Priestly Ordination and His Grace thought it fit to bestow the honour on the parish which nourished him and it was fittingly celebrated with pomp and pageantry and with the participation of all the bishops and hundreds of priests at the beautiful St. Mary's Church, Grand Street, Negombo on December 20, 2009. His Diamond Jubilee was marked by a solemn service at Tewatte on December 20, 2019.

Archbishop Fernando is a man of utter simplicity, disarming humility and of patient holiness and piety. All along his long and distinguished religious duty spanning 60 eventful years, he endeared himself to the poor and the rich alike.

He maintained a good rapport with all bishops, priests, nuns and friends to their admiration until his demise. His entire life had been nothing short of miraculous. Archbishop Fernando was like the good and faithful servant in the parable - he was faithful in small matters, therefore, he was put in charge of great matters.

(This article is an adapted version of the author's tribute to Archbishop Fernando on his 86th Birthday appearing in the Daily News of December 5, 2017)

## Aftermath of Covid-19

By  
Poornema  
Balakumar



The nation hopes that the ongoing COVID 19 control actions will be successful and life will return to normalcy in the island. And we believe that the nation will be safe again. However the COVID 19 pandemic has left Mother Lanka in danger and our main concern is how we will face the hit once again like what Easter attack gave us back in 2019.

The COVID19 pandemic has left the country with the most dangerous economic shock in history. It could have a major collision on the economic giants in developing countries such as Sri Lanka. The Government has taken adequate measures to lift the country at its worst time. We are always a nation who blooms after every winter. However with self discipline and individual responsibility we should be able to fight the battle.

Let us look at some sectors and the potential economic impact of the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic.

One of the major economic uplifting sectors of Sri Lanka is Tourism. Though the country enjoyed a well established tourism for the past ten years, it took a slight hit in 2019 after the Easter attack and now

a major hit after the COVID 19 pandemic. There will be limited tourist arrivals even after the pandemic is controlled as it now faces zero tourist arrivals. A study reveals that this may continue for not less than 8 months. This impact gives the global airlines to face an overnight insolvency or liquidation. Sri Lanka's airline industry employees too face a situation of work dismissal. However cash rich airlines around the world may survive this hard economic climate. Also the other supporting units such as Hotels and other tourist supporters could face bankruptcy with a chain of impact.

Another important element for the country's income is the garment exports of which over 75% are to European countries, and this is the period of peak for garment orders from European countries. However due to the prevailing situation these countries are facing a recession which would have an impact on the demand for the export orders. This would in turn result in the deployment of staff in the garments export sector, a key element in creating employment and earnings for the country.

Yet another important sector for the government income is the tea industry. This too is exported to various countries of the world. Due to the COVID 19 pandemic the small scale tea producers may have to face a hit in the international tea prices, which could again result in

wages being revised. Rubber production too will experience a massive hit as countries may halt vehicle manufacture so that the need for the export of rubber may not be important as before and can cause work deployment. On the other hand informal sectors such as wayside boutiques, beauty salons, lottery sellers, etc. which amount to 48% of employment and a contribution of 40% - 45% to country's GDP would have to face a hard time financially as they are not protected by the Government like the other major sectors.

The construction sector too will face a major hit as the real estate sector will face difficulty in sales which would impact banks that have lent finance for the construction. Another main concern is the Lankan rupee depreciation of 4.7% which will lead to inflation.

The banking industry may experience losses due to high Non performing loans NPL, as it will create an imbalance of the accounts. Though the Central Bank has given alternatives to balance the situation the banks may have to reformulate their daily proceedings of the collection of debts.

The only good sight is the agricultural sector which is safe at present, and continues with its daily work even during this situation. However less spending by the people during the pandemic could be a negative impact as prices will rise.

The above study reveals that the country will face a massive economic downturn, large scale unemployment, inflation and a recession, which is normal in a situation like this.

Apart from this the poor struggle to survive the situation, without any money to buy the essentials to feed the family. These people can be categorized as daily wage earners, involved in small scale labour works such as masons, carpenters and wayside boutique keepers. However, many charity workers seem to be involved in various projects to assist them during this time of need, as witnessed in social media.

The government however is handling it efficiently through many measures.

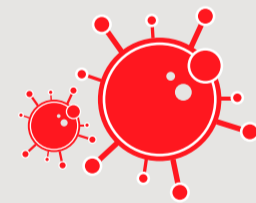
The Samurthi scheme is working round the clock to implement government instructions providing relief measures to the poor. The health sector including ward attendants and the minor staff are doing a tremendous job with the support of the Tri-forces to bring the country back to normalcy.

Considering the prevailing situation let us all join hands to overcome this pandemic by being responsible towards government instructions and bloom back as before.

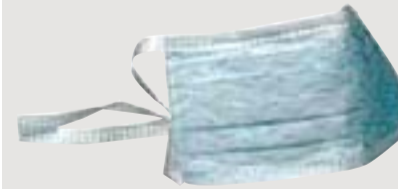
STAY HOME STAY SAFE



## Main types of medical face masks



The World Health Organisation (WHO) and more countries are advising people to wear a mask when they go out in public, as growing evidence suggests that even a simple cloth face covering could help prevent the spread of coronavirus disease (Covid-19). Health officials are now advising public, whether or not they have symptoms of Covid-19, to cover their face with a mask or cloth covering whenever social distancing is difficult to maintain - such as in grocery stores and on public places.



■ **Surgical mask:** Fits loosely over mouth and nose. Helps prevent spread of large respiratory droplets when wearer coughs and sneezes. Does not protect against smaller airborne particles. Leakage occurs around edge of the mask when user inhales. Designed for one-time use.



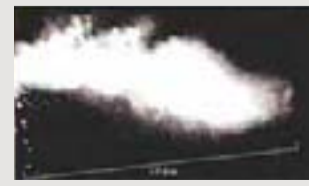
■ **N95 respirator:** Fits tightly to face. When user inhales, minimal leakage occurs around edges if respirator is properly fitted and donned. Gives wearer greater protection against airborne viruses, filtering out at least 95 percent of small particles.



## Wearing face masks (current WHO guidelines)

- Masks are effective only when used in combination with frequent hand-cleaning with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water and dispose it properly
- Wear mask if you are coughing or sneezing
- Healthy people only need mask if they are caring for others suspected of being infected

**High-speed image of human sneeze:** Fast-moving cloud of gas contains droplets of varying sizes - smallest of which can reach up to 8m away, according to U.S. research. Current WHO guidance is to keep distance of at least 1m from anyone coughing or sneezing to avoid risk of infection.



Sources: BBC, WHO, Graphicnews Graphic: Mahil Wijesingh

# US Govt's pardons vs Sri Lanka's pardon of Sgt. Sunil Ratnayake

BY SHENALI WADUGE

There is much hullabaloo over the Presidential pardoning of Sergeant Sunil Ratnayake by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The usual set of culprits are 24x7 pre-occupied in carrying out a globally hyped campaign against the decision. When some of those pointing fingers have more than questionable records themselves it behoves us to showcase examples. Everyone does make mistakes. People are after all human. There is no 100% perfect entity. No one is not unbiased. Plenty of Judges have given questionable verdicts. Plenty of lawyers have misled the jury. Plenty of witnesses have misled the Court too. In such a scenario we must be able to use our common sense to derive our own conclusions. Let us compare the Mai Lai massacre with the Mirusuvil massacre.

## US in Vietnam

US decided to deliver democracy to Vietnam during 1962-1971 resulting in the killing of 400,000 people and 500,000 babies born with birth defects with some two million continuing to suffer cancer and related illnesses from the 20million gallons of chemicals including Agent Orange dumped by US military on Vietnam.

The Mail Lai village massacre took place on March 16, 1968 by some 100 American soldiers led by Lieutenant William L Calley.

The 11th Brigade Charlie Company is alleged to have killed over 500 civilians ordered by Calley, 182 women – 17 of them pregnant, 173 children – 55 infants and 60 – old aged men.

Calley's three day court martial ended on March 29, 1971 (three years after the Mai Lai Massacre)

The Army jury convicted ONLY Calley of mass murder of 22 persons. He was sentenced to life of hard labour but President Nixon intervened and ordered Calley's release from Army prison. Calley was put under house arrest and then freed three months after Nixon left office. Calley was a free man by 1974.

Ironically the US Army filed charges against 14 officers just like the 14 Sri Lanka Armed Forces personnel arrested in connection with the Mirusuvil murder in Sri Lanka in 2000.

Let us take the account of Seymour M Hersh who had visited and written a series of articles in the 1960s and even returned to Vietnam in 2015 (at 78years).

His 1971 article was first published by the New Yorker.

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/03/30/the-scene-of-the-crime>

At the Army inquiry it was disclosed how Calley allegedly ran after a two or three year old boy, caught him and threw him into the ditch where all others were killed and shot him dead too.

Some soldiers claimed to have disobeyed Calley's orders but Private First Class Paul Meadlo had joined Calley in the shooting. The next day Meadlo had stepped on a land mine and his right foot had blown off. A GI also recalls Meadlo cursing Calley when he was being evacuated "God will punish you for what you made me do". Injured Meadlo returns to US and Hersh locates him at his farm home in Indiana. His mother Myrtle was to tell Hersh "I sent them a good boy and they made him a murderer."

Meadlo estimated that he had killed fifteen people in the circle. "We all were under orders," he tells Hersh.

Finally, Hersh located Calley in Fort Benning. Hersh had been allowed to read and take notes from a classified charge sheet that accused Calley of premeditated murder of 109 'oriental human beings'. When Hersh interviewed Calley in 2015 he was 76 years.

Hersh had also been privy in 1998 to an unpublished August 1967 report by retired Pentagon Official W Donald Stewart at the request of Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara (later became President of World Bank). The report showed that US troops in South Vietnam did not know the Geneva Conventions. The soldiers, "felt they were at liberty to substitute their own judg-



ment for the clear provisions of the Conventions. . . . It was primarily the young and inexperienced troops who stated they would maltreat or kill prisoners, despite having just received instructions" on international law.

Stewart tells Hersh that he understood why the report was suppressed "People were sending their eighteen-year-olds over there, and we didn't want them to find out that they were cutting off ears."

In 1968 Meadlo was 19years, married with 2 children and William Calley was just 28years.

An article published by Evie Salomon in May 2014 claims US President Nixon attempted to cover up the Mai Lai Massacre following release of mostly hand-written notes of meetings with Chief of Staff H R Haldeman in 1987.

1 December 1969 'Task Force' – Mai Lai "dirty tricks" and "discredit one witness" in order to "keep working on the problem" (clarification that the tricks would 'not be too high a level')

Who were the 'dirty tricks' meant to discredit? None other than pilot Hugh Thomson and gunner Larry Colburn who from their helicopter saw the massacre in progress and tried to stop it and even saved a boy from the ditch and took him to hospital. But when they returned to US they were treated as traitors. Colburn says "The U.S. claims to be concerned with collateral damage with civilians that are caught up in war zones, but I don't believe that," Colburn says. "That's lip service."

Their story came out in 1998 – "Back to Mai Lai" produced by Tom Anderson, reported by Mike Wallace and aired on March 29, 1998.

Both travelled back to Mai Lai in 2001 and met the 8 year old boy they saved who was now 41 years. Thompson died in 2006.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/document-points-to-nixon-in-my-lai-cover-up-attempt/>

The alleged Mirusuvil massacre of 8 Tamils including a 5 year old child in Jaffna, North Sri Lanka allegedly by Sergeant Sunil Ratnayake: He was convicted by a High Court Trial-at-Bar by a 5 member Supreme Court bench though the judgement does not state anywhere that Ratnayake PERSONALLY killed any of the 8 victims. Did those issuing statements read the judgement? Probably not.

The incident is alleged to have taken place on December 19, 2000 around 4p.m. The only 'evidence' is based on one witness – Maheshwaran against 14 Sri Lankan soldiers.

Maheshwaran's account of the incident is an exercise in imagination.

Only he had been blindfolded

**US DECIDED TO DELIVER DEMOCRACY TO VIETNAM DURING 1962-1971 RESULTING IN THE KILLING OF 400,000 PEOPLE AND 500,000 BABIES BORN WITH BIRTH DEFECTS WITH SOME TWO MILLION CONTINUING TO SUFFER CANCER AND RELATED ILLNESSES FROM THE 20MILLION GALLONS OF CHEMICALS INCLUDING AGENT ORANGE DUMPED BY US MILITARY ON VIETNAM.**

and beaten unconscious despite other men being present.

Only he had been carried by two Sri Lankan soldiers and tossed over the fence and he was so lucky that the blindfold got caught to the barbed fence and he could see.

He was the lucky one to be even taken to the supposed sight of the 'murders' and shown the crime and we have to next imagine him running clad only in his underwear ¼ mile to his aunts. The next morning he was so lucky that his father came where he was to look for him and then both went to complain to EPDP office

Major Sydney de Soyza was in charge of the military police in the Jaffna region. Section 140 states that members of an unlawful assembly shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to six months, or with a fine, or with both and Section 146 of the Penal Code states that if an offence is committed by any member of an unlawful assembly in prosecution of the common object of that assembly, every person who, at the time of the committing of that offence, is a member of the same assembly is guilty of that offence.

Count 10 was causing hurt to Maheshwaran, an offence punishable under Section 314 of the Penal Code read with Section 146 of the Penal Code. Section 314 of the Penal Code states that whoever voluntarily causes hurt shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine which may extend to one thousand rupees, or with both. Counts 11 to 18 are again counts of murder in respect of the persons referred to in Counts 2 to 9, however the basis of liability under the said Counts is Common Intention articulated in Section 32 of the Penal Code and Count 19 again is the corresponding charge of causing hurt, referred to in Count 10, based on Common Intention.

Section 32 of the Penal Code states that when a criminal act is done by several persons in furtherance of the common intention of all, each of such persons is liable for that act in the same manner as if it were done by him alone. The High Court Trial-at-Bar acquitted the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th accused, but convicted the 1st Accused Lance Corporal Sunil Ratnayake on all counts referred to above. On appeal, the Supreme Court unanimously set aside the conviction of Lance Corporal Sunil Ratnayake, on Counts 1 to 10. What remained were Counts 11 to 19 which are based on the vicarious liability of common intention under Section 32 of the Penal Code. The SC also made the following observations:

- The entire prosecution case hinges on Maheshwaran's testimony.
- This is a case where the court has to decide, mainly on circumstantial evidence.
- The acquittal of the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th Accused by the High Court Trial-At-Bar was due to the failure on the part of the prosecution to establish the identities of those Accused to the degree of proof required by law.
- However, the spontaneous identification of Lance Corporal Sunil Ratnayake by witness Maheshwaran at the scene of the crime (as recounted above) remains unassailed.

## A borderline case

On the basis of the above, the SC held that Lance Corporal Ratnayake was not only liable for the acts committed by him, but also for the acts committed by others who were with him as well, according to Section 32 of the Penal Code. When the deceased were seen last, they were detained by Ratnayake and the other Army personnel who were present. It was on that basis that the SC up-

held the conviction of Lance Corporal Sunil Ratnayake, on Counts 11 to 18 and on Count 19 of causing hurt to Maheshwaran. Thus it can be seen that Ratnayake was not convicted due to evidence indicating that he personally killed the eight victims but on the basis of vicarious liability for the whole incident under Section 32 of the Penal Code. The principal witness Maheshwaran accused Lance Corporal Ratnayake of assault but did not say that he had seen Ratnayake killing anybody or even holding a weapon which may have been used to kill the people concerned. Because the conviction has been affirmed on the basis of Section 32 of the Penal Code, there is a borderline element in this case.

Certain international and national parties whose interests are only too well known, have rushed to condemn the release of Sunil Ratnayake. However when President Maithripala Sirisena released an LTTE suicide cadre who had been convicted of complicity in a plot to kill him, his action was welcomed as reconciliation. It is a well-known fact that the general idea prevalent among these interested parties is that members of the armed forces should be jailed and members of the LTTE released. The former for 'accountability' and the latter for 'reconciliation'! This works out to be a neat arrangement whereby the local and international backers of the LTTE are able to punish those responsible for their defeat. The double standards applied to the release of convicted LTTE cadres on the one hand and convicted armed forces personnel on the other, is going to preclude the chances of success of any homegrown method of clearing up certain residual issues still remaining after the war.

On page 9 of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's presidential election manifesto, it was stated that steps would be taken to either indict or release those who had been arrested on terrorism charges and had spent a long time in remand. This is a reference to the small number of hardcore LTTE cadres still in custody. The government rehabilitated and released over 11,000 LTTE cadres who had surrendered with their weapons. If the government applied the vicarious liability provision in Section 32 of the Penal Code to these cadres, the likelihood is that many of them would have been convicted by now. But the government chose not to prosecute the vast majority of LTTE fighters even though quite a number of them would be responsible for atrocities far in excess of the Mirusuvil incident. If the President is to ever actually implement what was said on page 9 of his manifesto in relation to the LTTE cadres still in remand, the pardoning of individuals like Ratnayake is a sine qua non. It should be borne in mind that at the time the government defeated the LTTE, the latter had been officially designated as the deadliest terrorists in the world outranking even Al Qaeda.

It was 11,000+ terrorists with such a reputation that the government rehabilitated and released. It is doubtful whether the government of any other country would have done that. Unlike its predecessor, the present government cannot follow a stated policy of jailing armed forces personnel while freeing terrorists. If the LTTE cadres still in remand are to be released, that has to be preceded by the release of con-

victed or remanded armed forces personnel irrespective of whether they happen to be borderline cases like that of Ratnayake or not. During the Yahapalana rule we saw the spectacle of ex-LTTE terrorists enjoying their amnesty in peace while armed forces personnel, sometimes long after retirement were being hounded with arrests, investigations and court cases. When former LTTE cadres are released, nobody asks for a breakdown of the crimes and atrocities they are known to, or suspected of having been involved in. Yet everyone knows that these are dastardly terrorists who managed to outdo even Al Qaeda and come out as number one in world rankings.

Everyone also knows what their common intent was in terms of section 32 of the Penal Code. They are nevertheless rehabilitated and released in the name of restoring normalcy to the country. The word 'impunity' is used by the interested parties mentioned above, only in relation to the armed forces of Sri Lanka or those who were terrorists earlier, but had later defected to the side of the government. That term is never used in relation to the LTTE. In fact, they welcome immunity granted to the LTTE, as measures aimed at promoting reconciliation. Amnesty is defined in the Encyclopedia Britannica as a sovereign act of oblivion or forgetfulness for past acts and is said to have been derived from the Greek word amnesia. The rehabilitation and release of over 11,000 ex-LTTE cadres is for all practical purposes an amnesty granted to them. If amnesties are being granted, it goes without saying that individuals on both sides of the conflict should benefit from them if there is to be any fairness in the process.

<https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2019/12/nixons-lemency-after-may-lai-hurt-veterans-trumps-will-too/161905/>

Sergeant Sunil Rathnayake was arrested under a UNP government in 2002

Sergeant Sunil Ratnayake was convicted of murder under a UNP government in June 2015 under a legally questionable 'national government' cobbled after a Presidential Election in January 2015.

If charges were brought against all 5 armed forces under the Penal Code section 32, 146 and 296 – why did 4 suddenly get acquitted on the ground that their identities could not be established at the Trial-at Bar and only Sunil Ratnayake was convicted.

Sunil Ratnayake's verdict was based on CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE GIVEN BY A SOLE SURVIVOR (Maheshwaran)

How possible is it for ONE PERSON to commit all 8 murders, dig a large hole to hide dead bodies and dig another large enough ditch to bury the bicycles while all others stood watching – even the Supreme Court admits this was 'highly improbable'? If so, is it fair to release all others and pass all blame to one man?

The President's powers to pardon comes with a process that passes through the Attorney General, the Minister of Justice and thereafter to the President. Therefore, all those barking should first read Article 34(1) of the Constitution before howling. The howlers should ideally question the system that has actually failed Sergeant Sunil Ratnayake instead of demanding his death!

# Issues affecting the construction industry due to Covid-19

by  
Hemantha  
Kulatunga



The construction industry is a sector that will be severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Unless positive intervention is made by the stakeholders, millions of construction workers will face dire consequences in the immediate future. In an interview with the Sunday Observer, the President Elect of the Chamber of Construction Industry (CCI) Architect Jayantha Perera, an industry veteran of over 40 years of experience, and past President of Sri Lanka Institute of Architects (SLIA), past Chairman of South Asian Architects, member of the Advisory Council to CIDA and currently the Chair of Practice of Commonwealth Association of Architects, presented main solutions to the issues and proposals to develop the industry

## Excerpts:

**Q. What is the contribution of the construction industry to the GDP and employment generation in Sri Lanka and what will be the impact of the coronavirus pandemic?**

**A.** The economy of any country runs on two major arms, the Manufacturing Industry and the Service Industry. With a 'complete lockdown' in the country due to coronavirus, 90% of the Manufacturing Industry has shut down and the supply chain severely affected. This means one arm of the country's economy is disabled. This would ultimately transform in to huge losses once the lockdown is removed. Construction is part of this process and somewhere along the chain we as construction industry stakeholders will also be facing the brunt of it.

The spread of the virus and getting it under control is only part of the issue: the aftermath of the epidemic is highly unpredictable and the current forecast of a world-wide recession will certainly impact on the construction industry adversely, especially in Sri Lanka, where the industry has not recovered from the Easter Sunday tragedy of 2019. When other sectors such as foreign employment, apparel industry and tourism will take precedence, construction contractors and consul-



tants will be adversely affected.

The contribution by the Construction industry to the GDP and Employment generation is about 8%. Gross Domestic Capital Formation contribution is about 42%.

The construction industry employs over 1 million people of which a majority are labourers and semi-skilled workers. Mostly, they belong to the lower echelon in society and are the sole wage earners of the family.

**Q. As an industry specialist, what is your suggestion to overcome the short term issues?**

**A.** Due to the Easter tragedy in April 2019, the industry was adversely affected. In the short term Cash flow issues resulting timely payments issues to employees. Owing to non-payment to contractors and consultants for ongoing projects, they are already facing financial difficulties. As a result of the coronavirus, all construction sites had to be closed. To ensure wages to employees for the months of April/May/June the companies require a stimulus package as a short term measure. Therefore, my suggestions are as follows:

a) Items such as computer servers, electronic items, manufacturing tools, testing equipment, documents idle in offices, sites and workshops and would be damaged or destroyed due to non-maintenance. Also, there can be damages to important data due to overheating, rats and termite attacks preventing resumption of businesses. Therefore, I suggest allowing, with some control, at least a technician and the owner to be present to minimize losses.

b) Working from home is not possible unless computer facilities, software, essential hard copies, soft files etc. are provided to the employees. Arrangements have to be made by the authorities in this regard. However, physical working at sites is still not possible at this point in time.

c) Provide financial assistance to sustain employees without terminating them.

**Q. What are the medium term solutions to uplift the industry once**



President Elect of the Chamber of Construction Industry (CCI) Architect Jayantha Perera

the issue of the virus is cleared?

**A.** Restarting projects which were in the pipeline including those supposed to be stopped or postponed. Also offer some benefits to investors to invest in the industry to uplift the industry.

It is important to accelerate the approval process to avoid frustration of the investors. In the medium term local industries (E.g. the brass industry which existed in Kiribathgoda and Pilimathalawa) should be revived. Light fittings productions

“ THE SPREAD OF THE VIRUS AND GETTING IT UNDER CONTROL IS ONLY PART OF THE ISSUE: THE AFTERMATH OF THE EPIDEMIC IS HIGHLY UNPREDICTABLE AND THE CURRENT FORECAST OF A WORLD-WIDE RECESSION WILL CERTAINLY IMPACT ON THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY ADVERSELY, ESPECIALLY IN SRI LANKA, WHERE THE INDUSTRY HAS NOT RECOVERED FROM THE EASTER SUNDAY TRAGEDY OF 2019.

by local SMEs should also be restored.

Mechanism to promote and protect SMEs involved in construction with guaranteed payment system with standard agreement should be developed for industries such as steel fabrication, carpentry / joinery, furniture, artifacts, personal protection / safety equipment and so forth.

**Q. What are the opinions and future trends predicted by industry experts in the global arena?**

**A.** It is the view that the construction industry will be facing harder times throughout the world. These countries will individually concentrate more on nationalism to protect their own interests.

They will seek self-sufficiency in selected sectors through slowing down non-essential segments. As per their opinion, most will look for environment friendly indigenous based construction industry. In my opinion this phenomenon will probably end globalization as we know it.

**Q. What do you suggest as the long term remedies for the industry sustainability?**

a. Carry out comprehensive research studies on the construction industry to take rational decisions based on accurate information.

b. Conversion of the industry to a more factory / off site based assembling industry.

c. Digitalization of the processes

including adopting Building Information Modeling (BIM).

d. The epidemic and the predictions of environmental changes are bound to reset the status quo. Therefore, the industry may need to be more flexible and ready to effect structural changes: in effect, shed the shackles of a system that is destined to change may be even beyond recognition. We need to commence a dialogue and identify weaknesses and recommend adjustments and/or re-orientation.

e. Even without the coronavirus epidemic having to force us to re-think, there were construction specialists who were critical of our industry in the last few decades of not specifying local building materials but opting for imported varieties. Consultants, have not been contributing to the development of local industries and creation of local employments and thereby have been playing a marginal role in that arena. In the long term, consultants need to play a more significant role in the development and refining of local building materials.

**Q. What are the possible actions to be implemented while COVID 19 is in existence?**

a) Prepare guidelines for working at sites, offices and workshops during post COVID 19 period. Some countries have already prepared this.

b) Draft a master plan, new economic strategy and design facilities for industries that are to be prioritized such as agriculture, education, IT and telecommunication infrastructure in managing the time.

c) Call a report from professional institutions on sustainable construction to make meaningful development considering future possibilities and economic strategies.

## Ragging - A simple analysis - Part II

By  
Dr. Thilan U.  
Hewage



I ended Part I of this analysis last week (Sunday Observer, April 5, 2020), with a reminder to the reader about the two main factors influencing one's behaviour as one's Genes and the Environment (G+E) in which one is living. The interested reader can find ample information about the new findings in the field of 'Epigenetics' that describe the effects of the environment on our genes. Though the interest in 'Epigenetics' as a relatively new area of research, at present, is on the rise, this idea of 'Genes being influenced by the Environment' was first introduced to the world of biological research, by a French Biologist/Naturalist named Jean-Baptiste Lamarck\* in his book Philosophie Zoologique in 1809. Therefore, Genes and the Environment may not even be considered as two different factors in the future giving a holistic meaning to the old African proverbs I mentioned last week, 'it takes a village to raise a child'. I would also like to remind the reader that, just for the convenience of writing, I will be using the word 'ragger' to refer to a person who engages in such acts of harassing the newcomers and the word 'raggee' to refer to a person who is victimised by the ragger(s).

Before I take you along the possible paths through which a newborn to the world of humans may become a ragger in 21 to 22 years of living, especially in Sri Lanka under the current conditions, I would like to examine the possible reasons why a second, third or even a fourth year undergraduate student in one of our

state universities may turn out to be a ragger after entering the university just in year (or two or three years) ago.

Of course, before they say anything about the motives behind their actions, each ragger strongly denies that they were involved in any form of ragging, but they just wanted to make the acquaintances of the freshmen so that they would feel free to come and ask for any help they need from the seniors. The people who have entered the university before you, are addressed or referred to as *aiya* (elder brother) or *akka* (elder sister), according to the current culture within the student body. At times, it is embarrassing to listen to some of these students, being undergraduates in the university, contradict themselves and just put on a blank face and stay silent when those contradictions are pointed out to them. For example, the ragers, when asked whether they knew what ragging means, usually say they don't know. Then, in the same conversation they deny ragging anyone but just having a casual chat with the freshmen. If we ask, "how do you know whether you were ragging or not, if you didn't know what ragging means?", they would remain silent with a blank face. Almost all the ragers will provide the same answers very much like reading from a script. This shows they are as well organised as an organised crime gang/families in Hollywood screenplays.

I will try to list some of the common reasons ragers themselves have stated as to why they ragged the new students. 1. Just for fun. 2. Freshmen should be taught how to respect the seniors and the culture of the university. 3. We have to make the freshmen understand that it is not the administration, the marshals, the student counsellors,



the lecturers or any other employee including the security guards who have the power over them; therefore, they have to obey our orders, because the consequences of disobeying would be serious including physical attack. 4. If we didn't, the other group of seniors (our rival group) will get the freshmen to be their slaves and followers and thereby increase the number of people in their group. We cannot let that happen. 5. Just wanted to help the freshmen. 6. Just trying to find a girlfriend' (this answer was given by some of the male students).

Though almost all of the ragers usually have the experience of being raggees, let me start the analysis by randomly picking a young adult from the group known as 'Senior

Students' from one of the state universities in the country. This can be a male or a female student. I will try to analyse them separately if and when a particular behaviour was known to have been effected, by different factors or circumstances, and the gender of the individual. If we pick a ragger, then he/she may either be a raggee in his/her freshmen year or not. In the rare event of the ragger not being a raggee in a previous year, we have to examine the motive(s) behind his/her actions carefully since the common revengeful motive of 'do unto others as the world have them do unto you' is not a possibility. Since some of the harassments and torture reported by some raggees were completely unfathomable to a sane

human being, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the ragers who are proven to be capable of inflicting such pain and suffering on other human beings are insane and therefore, should be directed to psychiatric evaluations and suitable programs of treatment before the punishments recommended in the UGC guidelines or in the Criminal Code of the country are carried out. Then, there are ragers who enjoy shouting at freshmen using all kinds of derogatory language and demanding them to perform various sexual acts in front of others. These types of ragging take place mostly in hostels, both male and female, and some of the acts reported over the years are even more brutal than the worst gang rape cases you may

have heard around the world. These ragers themselves could have been victims of sexual harassment in their younger days or may have developed a twisted way of thinking and creating their sexual satisfaction due to perhaps living in a sexually deprived society. There can be a lot of other factors involved in fashioning the mind of a 21-22 year old man/woman into a state where he/she would try to satisfy his/her sexual needs by engaging in such barbaric acts as watching their younger brothers and sisters raping each other. Therefore, it is our responsibility to make sure that ragers who are proven to have inflicted such physical pain on others are also given psychiatric evaluations first and then decide on a program of treatment and/or a suitable punishment as mentioned above.

These are just two, (physical/sexual torture), of the many ragging methods the seniors use on the newcomers. Hopefully, through the next couple of articles, I will be able to share with you some of the other examples I have been able to evaluate as one of the investigators of such complaints over the years, examine some more of the possible motives of ragers and discuss what we, as responsible citizens of this country, can do to eliminate this virus of ragging from our society while helping the ragers and also 'would be raggers' to overcome the weaknesses in their thought process to get rid of such anti-social behaviours.

<https://ucmp.berkeley.edu/history/lamarck.html>

The writer has served the higher education sector as an academic for over twenty years in the USA and thirteen years in Sri Lanka and he can be contacted at [thilanh@gmail.com](mailto:thilanh@gmail.com)

# Pictorial



The Government relaxed the curfew to facilitate the farming community islandwide to ensure food security during the covid 19 pandemic. Here vegetable farmers engaging in their organic farming at Polwatte, Maharagama last week



The Fire Brigade assisting to take out a coffin from a flat during curfew



The Fire Brigade assisted to bring down the coffin of a person who died of causes other than Coronavirus during curfew in Colombo, from a house in the upper floor of a flat. The men disinfected themselves afterwards as a precaution



During curfew Kahatuduwa West Grama Seva Officer Lalani Niranjala delivering an elders' allowance to the doorstep of a recipient



People took a welcome break from Coronavirus confinement as a super 'pink moon' rose in the sky on Tuesday night



With the whole world trying to overcome the Coronavirus epidemic, Sri Lanka too has been under lockdown for weeks and these two children were trying to forget the danger by engaging in a Avurudu game at home without the company of their friends



The Police Special Task Force and an Army Officer at a checkpoint enforcing the island-wide curfew



Members of the Sri Lankan Police musical band perform in a bid to boost people's morale in the fight against the Covid-19



The Army Band performing near the iconic apartments in Rajagiriya on Sunday (April 5) evening



People watching at a social distance between each other during the performance



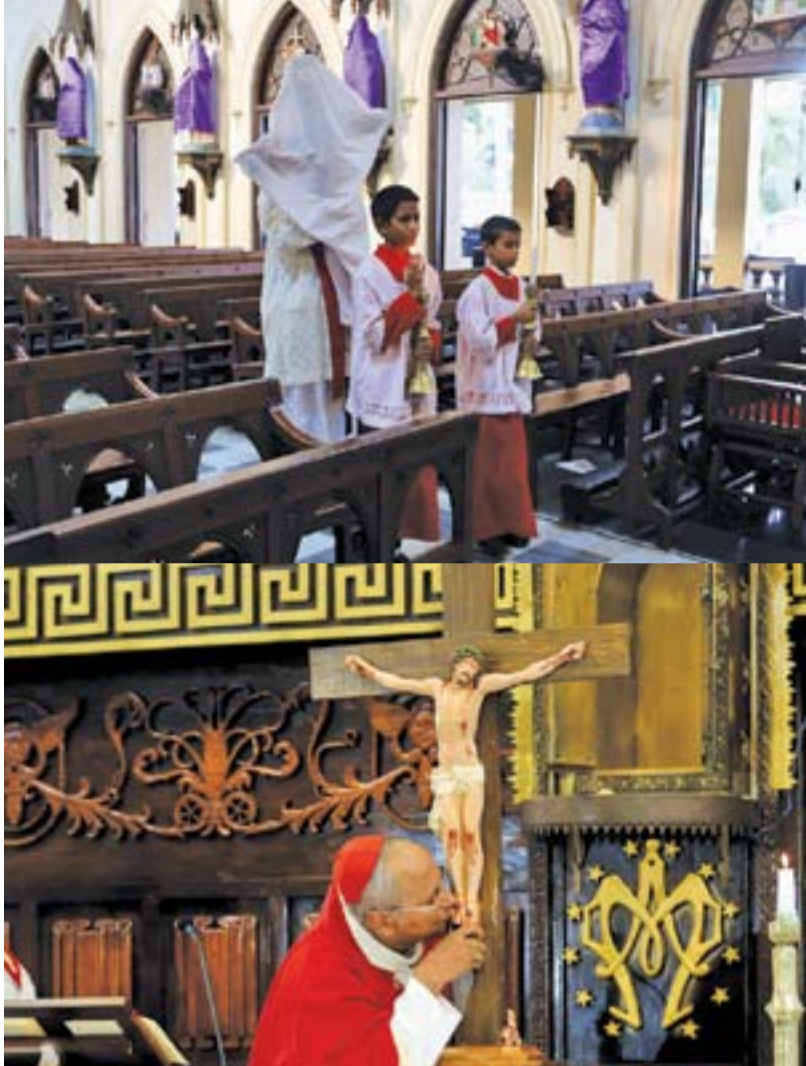
Army Commander Lieutenant General Shavendra Silva, joined in to enjoy the music

Pix By  
 Sulochana Gamage,  
 Hirantha Gunathilake,  
 Saman Sri Wedage and  
 Sudam Gunasinghe



## Live broadcast on Good Friday

A live broadcast of the Holy Mass on Good Friday during curfew, to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus at All Saints church in Colombo (Pix by Sulochana Gamage)



## Lotus Tower dressed to salute heroes

To salute the front line medical workers and other heroes including the Tri Forces and the police fighting Covid-19 outbreak in the country, the Lotus Tower was illuminated in red at 7pm yesterday. In view of this spectacular event the Chinese Embassy tweeted, "at 7pm tonight, #lotustower will be dressed in red and illuminating the darkness, ....pray for a brighter future in coming Sinhala & Tamil #NewYear with all #SriLankan." (Pix by Sulochana Gamage)







Karl McDermott astride his machine

## SAVIOUR OF LOCKDOWN LORD'S

It's every cricket lover's dream to be locked inside Lord's. And for one man at the iconic Home of Cricket - it's exactly the position he finds himself in.

The coronavirus pandemic and lockdown across the UK have put the sporting calendar on hold, including what would have been the start of the county cricket season over Easter weekend.

For Lord's head groundsman Karl McDermott, he finds himself as just one of just a handful of people currently allowed to pass through the famous Grace Gates.

His team's meticulous hard work during the long winter months to get the square and outfield ready for a new season have been for nothing.

But McDermott, who lives inside the ground with his young family, is still working hard, spending hour after hour either sat on the lawn mower or the heavy roller - in isolation of course - to ensure that if cricket is

given the thumbs up to resume later this summer, Lord's will be ready immediately.

"Getting up in the morning and being at work on your own and not greeting the lads is a bit strange really," he told BBC Sport.

Had the coronavirus lockdown not been enforced on 23 March, Lord's would have been a hive of activity for the past couple of weeks, with McDermott and the rest of his ground staff in the final stages of pre-season pitch preparations before Middlesex's opening County Championship Division Two fixture against Worcestershire on 12 April.

Across the square and outfield, a typical day would have seen three people on rollers getting the wickets ready and another three to four staff members cutting the outfield each day.

"I haven't sat on the roller so much in years," McDermott said. "My deputy still comes in a couple

**"I WOULD HAVE LIKED TO USE THIS DOWN TIME TO COMPLETE SOME MORE RESEEDING AND TOP-DRESSING OF THE WICKETS, BUT YOU HAVE TO PRIORITISE THE BIG JOBS WHEN YOU'RE WORKING ON YOUR OWN**

of days a week and he is looking after the Nursery Ground, but we're working in complete isolation from each other.

"That's a great help, I can concentrate on the main ground and it's sort of a throwback to being a club groundsman, where you're managing everything yourself."

The enforced break from cricket comes after one of the busiest and eventful summers in the game's history last year as Lord's hosted England's dramatic World Cup final win over New Zealand before witnessing Jofra Archer steaming in at full pace to Steve Smith and company during the subsequent Ashes series.

"It's nice for the square to have a rest," McDermott added. "We spend six months of the year trying to make it look pretty and the other six months beating the living daylight out of it."

"I would have liked to use this down time to complete some more reseeding and top-dressing of the wickets, but you have to prioritise the big jobs when you're working on your own." (bbc sport)



The England squad at the 2019 World Cup

## England World Cup squad 60 percent new

England head coach Eddie Jones says his squad for the next Rugby World Cup could be '60% different' from the one that reached the final in 2019.

It was announced last week that Jones has signed a contract extension through to the 2023 tournament in France. And the 60-year-old is expecting considerable change to the set-up between now and then.

"I don't think this group can have another World Cup in them," Jones admitted to BBC Sport.

"While there will be core members of the team who will be able to continue to the next World Cup, there will be a new influx of members coming in."

Jones' selection strategy for the World Cup in Japan saw him dispense with a swathe of experience close to the tournament, with stalwarts such as Mike Brown, Danny Care and Chris Robshaw missing out and regular captain Dylan Hartley also not involved.

And while the team beaten by South Africa was the youngest to reach a World Cup final, many of the key players - for example Mako Vunipola, Jamie George, Owen Farrell and Jonny May - will be into their 30s come 2023, while the likes

of Ben Youngs and Courtney Lawes will be 34.

"If you look at the squad this year we have changed it by 20%," Jones added. "There will be another 20% change in the second year, and another 20% in the third year."

"By the time we get to the World Cup [in 2023] it could be 40% of the squad from the 2019 World Cup and 60% new members."

**England 12-32 South Africa:** Springboks win World Cup for record-equalling third time

**England have been beaten up - Paul Grayson**

Jones will now look to discover new players of the calibre of young flankers Tom Curry and Sam Underhill, who made their debuts only two years before excelling in 2019.

"That's how you get the growth in the team," Jones continued. "You have to continually look for better players and players who can add value to the team."

"We were the youngest team ever to play in a World Cup final, so if those players have the desire and want to keep working and improving then we are going to be in a good position because we are going to have a hell of a competition for spots.

England head coach Eddie Jones says his squad for the next Rugby World Cup could be '60% different' from the one that reached the final in 2019.

It was announced last week that Jones has signed a contract extension through to the 2023 tournament in France.

And the 60-year-old is expecting considerable change to the set-up between now and then.

"I don't think this group can have another World Cup in them," Jones admitted to BBC Sport.

"While there will be core members of the team who will be able to continue to the next World Cup, there will be a new influx of members coming in."

Jones' selection strategy for the World Cup in Japan saw him dispense with a swathe of experience close to the tournament, with stalwarts such as Mike Brown, Danny Care and Chris Robshaw missing out and regular captain Dylan Hartley also not involved.

And while the team beaten by South Africa was the youngest to reach a World Cup final, many of the key players - for example Mako Vunipola, Jamie George, Owen Farrell and Jonny May - will be into their 30s come 2023, while the likes

of Ben Youngs and Courtney Lawes will be 34.

"If you look at the squad this year we have changed it by 20%," Jones added. "There will be another 20% change in the second year, and another 20% in the third year."

"By the time we get to the World Cup [in 2023] it could be 40% of the squad from the 2019 World Cup and 60% new members."

**England 12-32 South Africa:** Springboks win World Cup for record-equalling third time

**England have been beaten up - Paul Grayson**

Jones will now look to discover new players of the calibre of young flankers Tom Curry and Sam Underhill, who made their debuts only two years before excelling in 2019.

"That's how you get the growth in the team," Jones continued. "You have to continually look for better players and players who can add value to the team."

"We were the youngest team ever to play in a World Cup final, so if those players have the desire and want to keep working and improving then we are going to be in a good position because we are going to have a hell of a competition for spots." (bbc sport)

## Ex-champion Royal athlete Roshan Fernando pledges boost for Kandy sports

BY HAFIZ MARIKAR



Roshan Fernando

Former Royal College athletics captain and Public Schools meet record holder Senior Deputy Inspector General Roshan Fernando who is the present Senior DIG of the Central Province has pledged to give his best to promote sports in Kandy saying he will leave no stone un-turned in his quest.

Except for rugby, most sports in Kandy are in a state of neglect and it is hoped that the presence of this sporting policeman will help to turn things around.

At one time Kandy police did well in sports like cricket, football, hockey, athletics, volleyball, cue sport, lawn tennis, table tennis, netball and in the inter police rugby tournaments.

In the past all the top police officers who were stationed in Kandy gave their best for sports promotion. From the time of LI de Silva, a great cricket lover and the man who expanded the police ground with the help of Sylvestrian schoolboys, FND Jilla, KSC Van Rooyen, Merick Gunaratne, M. Shanmugam, Gamini Gunawardena, Premadasa Udugampola, TB Talwatte, Walter Perera, AA Samarasinghe, NBH Wijeratne, PB Ekanayake, Chandra Mendis, Bodi Liyanage, Mahinda Balasuriya, Lakshman Seneviratne, Gamini Navaratne, Pujith Jayasundara, Asoka Ratnaweera, M. Gunatillake, J. Gammanpila, R. Kasthurirathne, Jagath Abeyseriwardene, Nimal Mediwake, M. Karunaratne, B. Peramune, P. Ganegama, MB Ellepola, Sisira Kumara, M. Tennakoon, Edmund Mahendra, SM Wickremasinghe and Sudath Marasinghe to name some of them, gave a big hand for Police sports.

Roshan Fernando sees sport in Kandy as a worthy cause and has already pledged to organise workshops for all sports under the framework of qualified coaches no sooner the current coronavirus situation is over.

It must be recalled that in the year 1902, HC Dowbegin, Assistant Superintendent of Police in Kandy arranged a series of cricket matches between the Police team and a side from the

Kandy Recreation Club and this series was won by Kandy Recreation Club. Football, athletics, hockey, volleyball and tennis also got off the ground.

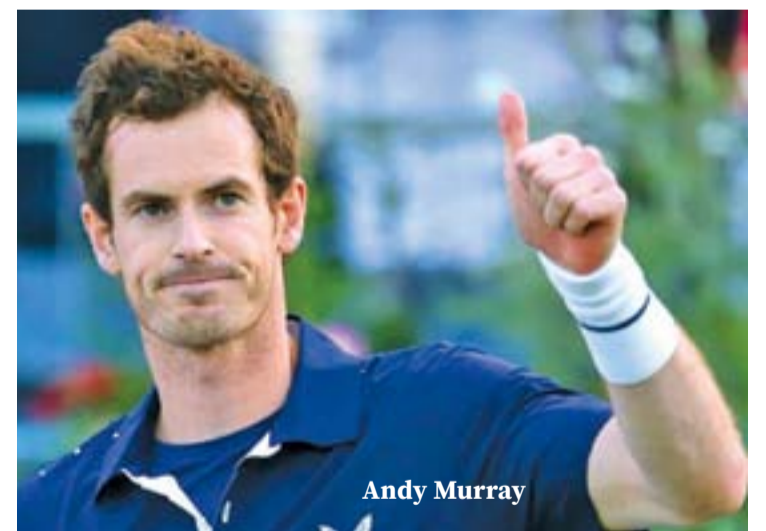
Roshan Fernando served in all ranks from Sub-Inspector to Senior DIG and is one of the longest-serving officers among the senior ranks in the police.

He was a member of the Royal College cricket team and also played rugby and volleyball and boxed as well. He led the Royal College champion athletic team in 1979, the year they won all three major schools championships - the Junior John Tarbet meet, Senior Tarbet meet and Relay Carnival. That was the year he won Public Schools colours in athletics that included anchoring Royal to two Public Schools records in the 4x100m Relay and Medley Relay in the Under-19 age group.

He started his schooling at St. Mary's College, Negombo, where his Under-11 long jump record in athletics for the Marians still remains unbroken for 46 years.

As an Under-16 athlete at the Royal, Fernando had accounted for five records, including the long jump which still remains intact after 41 years.

**"ROSHAN FERNANDO SEES SPORT IN KANDY AS A WORTHY CAUSE AND HAS ALREADY PLEDGED TO ORGANISE WORKSHOPS FOR ALL SPORTS UNDER THE FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFIED COACHES NO SOONER THE CURRENT CORONAVIRUS SITUATION IS OVER**



Andy Murray

## Andy Murray swaps racquet for controller

Andy Murray will swap his racquet for a controller after he signed up to compete in a virtual version of the Madrid Open at the end of the month.

Sixteen men and 16 women will take part in a four-day online tournament from the comfort and safety of their own homes after the real event was postponed because of coronavirus. Prize money of 150,000 euros (£131,700) will be directed to good causes - with the winners able to donate part of it to players currently struggling financially.

Those taking part will compete on the Tennis World Tour video game which does not have Murray, 32, as a playable character. He could choose to play as fellow Briton Kyle Edmund, or maybe step out of his era and play as Andre Agassi or even John McEnroe.

The virtual tournament will take place between 27 and 30 April. All professional tennis has been cancelled until at least 13 July.

(bbc sport)

## Sports

# SRI LANKAN WOMAN EYEING SPANISH DREAM AS OLYMPICS GOES TO BED



Hiruni Wijeratne

BY DHAMMIKA RATNAWEERA

Spain may be a place of death these days with coronavirus taking a heavy toll, but it has become a dream destination for Sri Lankan marathon runner Hiruni Wijeratne who has found some luck come her way thanks to the postponement of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games.

Wijeratne is herself in lockdown in the USA where she is residing and training but with a new Olympic qualification period set between December 1, 2020 and May 31, 2021, she is looking to get back into rhythm at the Spanish meet on December 5.

"My plan is to race at the marathon in Valencia, Spain on December 5. It falls on my birthday and I hope it will be lucky for me," Wijeratne told the Sunday Observer in an interview.

"I've been training almost my whole life to achieve Olympic qualification. I was about eight weeks away from obtaining it. Then without

any notice every chance of doing so was taken away. I was very upset and sad.

"But now I realize that my Olympic dreams are not cancelled, it is just postponed. I waited for 28 years, what's one more for the sake of humanity," she added optimistically.

Wijeratne became the first Sri Lankan woman to win a marathon at the South Asian Games when she achieved the feat at the event held in Nepal last year after being placed 11th at the last Commonwealth Games.

Wijeratne currently trains inside her house in Houston, Texas due to the current restrictions in the USA with an hour's workout in the morning and another 45 minutes in the evening.

"With no competitions there is no need for peak fitness. I run inside the house or very close to the house early mornings. I also do several home workouts to maintain my strength. I am also keen on my diet," she said.

"Indoor training is in a small space. It's also very boring as the mind cannot see beyond the walls in the house. I can't run 21 kms in my house as I usually can outside in one day."

But what can Wijeratne do in the absence of her coach these days. She was right on target. "I speak to my coach over the phone. As there is no immediate competition, not getting to see him is no big deal," she declared.

Having become the first Sri Lankan woman to win the marathon gold at the South Asian Games, Wijeratne is now targeting the first place at the Asian Games.

She did not forget to spare a thought for her fellow Sri Lankan athletes who may be in a worse situation than she is. "I share their anger and frustration. However we all have to do our part so we can resume what we enjoy the most - competition and sports. I encourage athletes to stay fit any way they can and always be keen to keep up their health."



## Ex football chiefs took bribes to favour World Cup hosts Russia, Qatar

Former Fifa executives took bribes in return for voting for Russia and Qatar to host the World Cup, according to US prosecutors.

In what could be a highly significant twist in the FBI's long-running investigation into allegations of football corruption, a new indictment was revealed in the US District Court on Monday.

The documents claim several former Fifa executive committee members "were offered or received bribes in connection with their votes".

The Department of Justice makes allegations against Nicolas Leoz, the former president of South American governing body Conmebol, and ex-Brazil federation supremo Ricardo Teixeira.

Both are accused of taking money "in exchange for their votes in favour of Qatar to host the 2022 World Cup".

Disgraced former Fifa vice-president Jack Warner of Trinidad and Tobago was also allegedly paid £4m through a host of offshore shell companies to back Russia's 2018 bid.

Russia beat England to win the right to host the most recent World Cup in 2018. Warner was president of the North and Central American and Caribbean confederation Concacaf.

Another former Fifa ExCo member - Guatemala football chief Rafael Salguero - was allegedly promised a bribe to vote for Russia.

Leoz died last year under house arrest in his native Paraguay, having fought extradition to the US. Teixeira has been banned from the game for life by Fifa for taking bribes for marketing and media rights for football competitions between 2006 and 2012.

Teixeira and Warner, who is also banned for life, have avoided extradition to the US. Salguero was banned last year, having admitted corruption.

Former executives at US television giant 21st Century Fox have also been charged in the indictment with making payments to South American football officials to secure broadcast rights.

"The profiteering and bribery in international soccer have been deep-seated and commonly known practices for decades," said FBI assistant director-in-charge William Sweeney.

"The FBI... are investigating the illicit handshakes and backroom deals hidden in the infrastructure of soccer events, venues and marketing contracts.

"The first public charges date back to 2015. This should illustrate to everyone still hoping to score millions corruptly, we're going to find you."

Almost 10 years have now passed since Fifa controversially voted for Russia and Qatar to host the sport's showpiece event.

But it was only in 2015, following a dramatic dawn raid at a Zurich hotel close to the governing body's headquarters, that the US Department of Justice announced it was investigating football and TV executives enriching themselves through the game.

The scandal sparked the worst crisis in Fifa's history, with its disgraced president Sepp Blatter eventually standing aside.

A total of 42 people have been indicted, with 26 pleading guilty.

How important could this be?

With Russia staging its World Cup almost two years ago, the focus of the potential impact of these fresh allegations will be on Qatar as it enters the final phase of preparations for the event.

This is not the first time officials have been accused of corruption linked to the Gulf state's bid during the sprawling FBI probe.

In 2017 Alejandro Burzaco, a former TV executive, told a jury in New York that Leoz, Teixeira - and the now former Argentina football chief Julio Grondona - had been paid to vote for Qatar, which beat the US in the vote.

But never before have US prosecutors formally laid out in such detail how the alleged corruption was conducted.

However, the indictment does not specify who was behind the alleged bribery.

Despite years of suspicion over how they won the vote, Qatar and Russia have always denied any wrongdoing, and both were effectively cleared by Fifa's own investigation in 2017.

But Fifa may find itself under renewed pressure to reopen an inquiry into how the votes were won.

The Qatar organising committee and Fifa have been approached for comment. **(bbc sport)**



Roger Federer and wife Mirka

## Federer and wife donate one million

Roger Federer and his wife Mirka have donated 1m Swiss francs (£857,000) "for the most vulnerable families in Switzerland" and have called on others to add their support.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, Switzerland has imposed a ban on all private and public events and has closed all non-essential businesses until at least 19 April.

"These are challenging times for everyone and nobody should be left behind," Federer, 38, wrote on Instagram.

"Our contribution is just a start. We hope that others might join in supporting more families in need. Together we can overcome this crisis! Stay healthy!"

The 20-time Grand Slam champion is the latest in a string of sports stars to pledge money to support those affected by the virus.

Last week, reigning Wimbledon champion Simona Halep announced on Facebook that she would donate money to pay for medical equipment in her home country of Romania.

In football, Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola has donated 1m euros (£920,000) to fight the outbreak in Spain and Barcelona forward Messi has contributed the same amount to hospitals in Barcelona and Argentina.

Juventus and Portugal star Cristiano Ronaldo and his agent Jorge Mendes have donated 1m euros to three intensive care units for patients suffering from coronavirus at hospitals in Lisbon and Porto.

The professional tennis tours are currently suspended until 7 June, with Wimbledon due to take place from 29 June until 12 July.

**(bbc sport)**

## Sanath Jayasuriya joins battle against coronavirus



Former World Cup winning cricket champion and captain Sanath Jayasuriya wearing a face mask hands out foot items as a Decontamination Unit that he gifted is tested during Sri Lanka's island-wide lockdown to prevent the spread of coronavirus in the country. Ten units of the Decontamination device gifted by Jayasuriya are to be installed at markets and other public places in Colombo to combat the spread of the virus that has claimed seven lives and infected over 190 people in the island.

## English county cricketers to take pay cuts

County players have agreed a voluntary "support package" that will set "maximum reductions" to salaries during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Professional Cricketers' Association - together with the ECB and 18 first-class counties - have reached an initial agreement for April and May.

Players will agree to be furloughed if requested, with county champions Essex among clubs to ask theirs to do so.

They will also take pay cuts, with the PCA giving up £1m in 2020 prize money. Following the PCA's announce-

ment, Essex - who also won the T20 Blast last year - confirmed they have placed their players and the majority of non-playing staff on temporary leave until further notice.

"The club will operate with reduced staff throughout April, with regular assessments taking place beyond that," said chief executive Derek Bowden.

"We hope that this will be for as short a period of time as possible and that we can all get back to work and enjoy some cricket in the near future."

Fellow Championship Division One side Kent have put "the majority" of their play-

ers on furlough until at least the start of May, with captain Sam Billings agreeing a pay cut despite remaining on duty to support the club's community work.

Meanwhile, batsman Joe Denly - on a separate England central contract - will also "continue to support the club".

"This outcome has not been reached lightly and I want to thank all of our players who are standing shoulder to shoulder with their colleagues during the pandemic," said Kent director of cricket Paul Downton.

**(bbc sport)**

## An IPL behind closed doors?

Australia bowler Pat Cummins says he would support the Indian Premier League being played behind closed doors if it is not safe for fans to attend matches.

The IPL season was postponed from 29 March until 15 April because of coronavirus, but is expected to be further delayed or cancelled with India's lockdown set to be extended.

Asked whether he would support games without fans, Cummins told the BBC's Stumped podcast: "Of course - whatever it takes to try and get cricket up and play those big events safely."

Cricket in the UK has been postponed until at least 28 May, with England's first game scheduled to start on 4 June.

Cummins, the top-ranked bowler in Test cricket and named one of Wisden's five cricketers of the year this week, has a £1.7m contract with the



Pat Cummins

Kolkata Knight Riders, making him the most expensive overseas player in IPL history.

The 26-year-old said he was "super hopeful" the tournament will go ahead but that he would be "surprised if it happened soon".

"The first priority is safety but the second one is getting back to normality, finding that balance," he said.

If that unfortunately means no crowds for a while, then that is that, but hopefully people can watch at home on TV.

"It would have a totally different feel about it. When people ask about the difference between playing cricket in India the first thing is the crowd.

"They scream every single ball whether it's a six or a wicket - it's the same noise every ball - so that atmosphere is something that we love about playing in India.

"It will be missed in the short term if it can't happen, but I have no doubt it will be a great event even if it has to be played without crowds."

The IPL, which is set to feature 60 20-over matches, was originally scheduled to finish on 24 May.



## MALINGA'S captaincy, Bats and Cricket on the line

Even with the coronavirus taking a toll, it's hard to get the cricketing scene out of our minds. A sense of humour cannot be allowed to the 'slips' and get dropped. So it was a tension reliever when we caught this post on Facebook by former Sri Lanka Cricket Media Manager, Samantha Al-gama who argued that it was 'good that the Chinese did not play cricket. Had they done so they would have eaten up the BATS'.

This is the season of the year when world hopes rise and fans eagerly look forward to many a sporting event. And it's most likely that a season or two may have to pass when normalcy returns be it in school, club or national cricket.

After the savage hitting by the West Indies in the T20 games played which lit up not only Palle-kele but the country at large, the Sri Lankan cricketers had their cricketing bubble in T20 cricket pricked. The balloon exploded with a big bang and had our think tanks and their hopes of bringing home the T20 World Cup scheduled for October in Australia crash-landing with a big bang.

But all was not lost and Sri Lanka cricket could have learnt lessons from the Windies debacle and still had time to put the game back on rails. But the coronavirus played the part of spoil sport and what the future holds is unpredictable.

In the local cricket scene, had everything been normal, the selectors, the coaching staff and the cricketers would have been training feverishly aiming to bring back the T20 World Cup which they won in Bangladesh some years back under the captaincy of super star slinger Lasith Malinga.

Malinga was not the original captain of that team, but circumstances beyond the control of regular captain Dinesh Chandimal made him present the captaincy to Malinga. Never allowing an opportunity to go past him, Malinga grabbed it with both hands, especially with his magic weaving right hand which delivers the explosive toe crushing Yorkers to win the trophy.

The Lankans were up against a formidable Indian team. No one gave the Lankans a chance to carry home the trophy.

The former great Australian captain the leg spin/googly bowling big hitting Richie Benaud who is sadly no more in the land of the living is on record saying that a winning captain must have 90 per cent luck and 10 per cent skill. Benaud knew what he was talking about.

And the Lankan stop gap captain Malinga had both these attributes in full and he rode on luck and the skill to win a World Cup trophy after the success of the World Cup winning team in 1995/96 beating Australia in the final in Lahore, Pakistan.

But now with no cricket being played and with the T20 World Cup to be postponed and hopefully to be held next year, Malinga's captaincy hangs in the balance.

After the T20 success in Bangladesh, Malinga's captaincy hit turbulence when a string of T20 defeats has left his captaincy open for question with his critics baying for his ouster.

As stated many a time before, when a team wins kudos go to the team. But when a team loses it is the captain who is orphaned! And it is no different with tinted curly haired Malinga.

The more the T20 World Cup is delayed the older does Malinga get and it need not be told that his reflexes and especially his speed in bowling may dip and his venomous Yorkers could lose its sting. But Malinga is as unpredictable as what tint he may wear on his forelocks! You can never say which way he will swing and what surprises he will spring. Count on him to be a man for all seasons, especially when the chips are down.

Malinga it must be said has done wonders for the game locally, internationally and for Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League. His name and achievements are too numerous to mention. They will be written in letters of 24 carat gold and his place in Cricket's Hall of Fame will be inscribed for eternity.

If the prevailing dreaded coronavirus does not allow the T20 World Cup to be played which tournament Malinga was going to make his swan song, it will be sad and a cruel ending to a cricketer who made ripples, like no other if he is deprived of the opportunity to put on show a glorious farewell.

All Sri Lankans and the world will be praying for an end to the dreaded coronavirus so that normal life and sports too which has been hit for six will resume soon.

So while we wait, many a youngster has been content in indulging in the explosion of video-cricket games where teams can be pitted against each other; even the Royal-Thomian which on media will have no risk of contamination with crickets of corona; or their relatives the bats. They have no scare nor care as they fly blind across the turf and into the pavilion, with no respect to the rules of the game. Enjoyment is the name of the game.

This may well be a pass-time worth indulging in to keep our cricketing genes kept active. And if Malinga is in one of the teams, may be he will die to be on his winning side.

erodrigopulle@gmail.com

# JAYASURIYA CONTENDS FITNESS ANY WHICH WAY POSSIBLE

By  
Dinesh  
Weerawansa



Former Sri Lanka captain Sanath Jayasuriya says that it is important for cricketers to maintain their training schedules while being at home due to the coronavirus pandemic while at the same time called on school cricket guardians to take stock of where the youth game is today.

"It is an unfortunate situation and we have to face this calamity with courage and determination. At the same time, cricketers cannot afford to skip or miss their training schedules.

"I am not asking them to go to gymnasiums. But while being at home, our cricketers could train to their schedules. That is very important because once we overcome this unfortunate situation, our cricketers should be in the same physical condition to face their future engagements," the 50-year-old dashing former opening batsman said.

Jayasuriya, who is in the process of donating decontamination units to the Police department said the cricketers should also concentrate on the healthy food available. "You may not get just the food you want. But you must opt for the best available healthy food and regular fitness," he said.

Jayasuriya who won the prestigious Observer Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year (Outstation) award in 1988, in a recent interview said the Sri Lanka Schools Cricket Association (SLSCA) and Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) should make a joint effort to uplift the standard of local school cricket in the future.

"We had only 12 First XI school matches during our time. However, we now see some schools playing over 20 inter-school matches in one season, including their third term matches. It is a tall order. Hence, scoring 1,000 runs in 20 to 24 matches is no big deal, compared to the 10 to 12 matches most schools had in the past," he said.

The master blaster, who was adjudged the Most Valuable Player of the tournament in Sri Lanka's 1996 World Cup victory beating Australia in the final, said the new Under-19 tour-



namment structure of the SLSCA should be reviewed to focus more on producing quality cricketers to the national pool.

"Our focus at Under-19 level should be to produce competitive players for the youth pool and the Sri Lanka pool. We must also give an opportunity to some top school teams in the outstations to play against the leading Colombo schools. But at the same time, we must maintain the competitiveness and improvement of the standard of cricket dished out in those matches," he said.

"But our biggest problem is the volume of cricket that is being played. There is too much of cricket. That's not good. I think the SLSCA is working on streamlining these problems. They have a big responsibility and a lead-

ing role to play to improve Sri Lanka's school cricket," Jayasuriya added.

He said the standard of the country's school cricket has not dropped but not improved as it ought to be. "I don't think that the standard of the game has dropped. It has not improved from the level it was, compared to other teams in the world. It has stagnated, instead of going further up from the point we are at now. We must concentrate on that," Jayasuriya warned.

"When we were playing school cricket, the school cricket structure and the standard was considered to be the best in the world, even India was far below us. But now, several countries have gone beyond us, showing a marked improvement. We need to change our strategies and restructure our tournament structure to meet the future challenges in cricket," said the explosive opening batsman who had made an immense contribution to Sri Lanka cricket.

Going down memory lane with his early days as a schoolboy cricketer at St. Servatius College, Matara, Jayasuriya said winning the Observer Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year title is every cricketer's dream. "Winning the Observer Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year outstation title gave me fresh hope. I believed I would stand a chance of playing for Sri Lanka, if I continue to focus on the game with dedication and devotion. Definitely it was a big hurdle which inspired me to go places," he said.

Jayasuriya paid a rich tribute to the Sunday Observer and Lake House for conducting the country's first-ever school cricket awards show for almost four decades. He said

every schoolboy who wins the prestigious Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year award stands a good chance of representing the country, if they continue the game with devotion and dedication.

"If you win the Observer Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year award, you stand a huge chance of playing for Sri Lanka thereafter. It is not easy to win that award, mostly scoring over 1,000 runs or capturing over 100 wickets. It is no easy task," Jayasuriya said.

"When you look at the star schoolboy cricketers who had won this prestigious award in the past, it is evident that most of them have ended up playing for the national team and underlined their supremacy in the international arena. Once you win the title, you only need dedication to find a place in the Sri Lanka team," he pointed out.

"The Observer-Mobitel Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year title is something unique and a cherished moment that any schoolboy cricketer could dream of," said Jayasuriya, who has aggregated 13,430 runs including 28 centuries and 68 fifties and captured 323 wickets in 445 ODIs.

"It was the ultimate dream of all schoolboy cricketers during my time and even now. Everybody knows that this award would put you one step ahead and inspire you to do well when you step into club cricket from school level and to the national team thereafter," he said.

The dashing opener, who took on the art of pinch hitting during the 1996 World Cup tournament, will celebrate his 51st birthday on June 30.

He underlined his supremacy as one of the best batsmen in world cricket and also proved his class in Test matches as well.

Apart from his grand triple of 13,430 runs, 323 wickets and 123 catches to become probably the best ODI all-rounder ever in world cricket, Jayasuriya had also been a classy batsman in the established game with a career best 340 against India.

He has aggregated 6,973 runs in 110 Tests, scoring 14 centuries and 31 half tons.



Jayasuriya still fit at 50



Ben Stokes (left) with Eoin Morgan at the last World Cup

## Hint of England fielding two teams on same day

Wicketkeeper Jos Buttler says England could field two different teams on the same day to help maximise the amount of cricket played in a shortened summer.

All professional cricket has been suspended until at least May 28 because of the coronavirus crisis. One way for England to maintain their schedule could be for the Test and limited-over teams to play simultaneously.

"If it was logistically possible, you would get the crowds," said Buttler.

"People will want to come because they haven't had any sport. It's a really interesting scenario."

England are due to host West Indies, Pakistan, Australia and Ireland this summer. The first Test against West Indies is due to begin on June 4 so any extension to the current delay is likely to impact the international schedule.

Of the four touring outfits, only Pakistan are due to play both Tests and white-ball cricket, and there is enough difference between the various England teams to make fielding two separate home sides a viable option.

"Is it an option? Could you put two games on the same day? Potentially you could, in different areas," said Buttler. "It's right that it is being considered."

He also supported the idea of matches being played behind closed doors for the benefit of a televised audience.

"Lots of us haven't watched any sport for a long time and I just feel like people would be ready to watch some," he said.

"It would be nice for people who have been in isolation and lockdown for a long time to see their heroes and role models back on the TV."

(bbcspport)

## More coaching bosses take pay cut

England men's manager Gareth Southgate and women's boss Phil Neville are to take a 30% pay cut to their salaries as two of the Football Association's highest earning employees.

Southgate earns £3m a year while Neville reportedly earns up to £300,000 as head coach of the Lionesses.

Chief executive Mark Bullingham said it was "challenging times" and did not "take these decisions lightly."

The government's furlough scheme is being looked at as a contingency plan.

The FA said employees earning £50,000 or more a year will take a temporary pay reduction of 7.5%, while senior management agreed a 15% cut.

Bullingham also said the financial impact of postponements including England international fixtures, FA Cup matches and Wembley events will contribute to

a loss of about £100m, but it could increase to £150m depending on "the government's necessary medical measures."

Bullingham, who earns about £400,000 a year, added: "Along with many other organisations across the country, we are currently reviewing our financial model during this challenging period."

"We want to take prudent and appropriate steps to help protect and support the FA and our employees during this unpredictable time."

Meanwhile, West Ham boss David Moyes has told the Premier League club he is willing to take a pay cut due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Bournemouth's Eddie Howe and Brighton's Graham Potter have already volunteered for a cut in salary as clubs try to find a way of limiting their losses amid games being suspended.

(bbcspport)



Gareth Southgate



Phil Neville

## SPORT

sports.sundayobserver.lk / Tel: +94 11 2 429 226, / +94 11 2 429 228, / Fax: / +94 11 2 429 227

APRIL 12, 2020



Sri Lankan cricketers celebrate an on-field moment in this file photo

# SRI LANKA CRICKETERS BURY THEIR LAPSES BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

BY CALLISTUS DAVY

While the entire world is on one platform for the first time battling a common enemy called the coronavirus, some experts have also taken the syndrome as a means to bury their lapses in what they see as a new beginning ahead.

One of the experts is Sri Lanka's South African cricket coach Mickey Arthur who has told his employer that he was using the period to put his future plans and ideas into some kind of a quarantine as he will need a healthy standard of his team which came tantalizingly close to taking the game to a next level only to see England abort their tour and make a beeline back home.

"This isolation period is giving us as coaching staff a time to reflect as well on the player plans, roles and goals that we have set for ourselves as a group," said Arthur whose players are going through closed-door training sessions.

"We are also looking at trends from around the world and analyzing all the opposition that we are going to play against over the next year. We as a group want to stay ahead of the pack and be the leaders not the followers in terms of coaching trends around the world."

Sri Lanka after a series win in Zimbabwe were hoping to prove something against England in two Test matches that were listed as part of the ICC Test championship rankings.

But now it means Arthur and his band of hopefuls will have to wait un-

til June when South Africa visits Sri Lanka followed by the arrival of the Indians in the same month. Presently some of the players have also used part of their break time to distribute food parcels or donate money for medical equipment to combat the coronavirus although not on the scale that England's players have done by making an opening donation of 500,000 pounds to their country's campaign with a pledge for more. Some high profile professional coaches in England have also made pledges for a pay cut to support the battle against coronavirus and it is not known whether the trend will apply to counterparts in Sri Lanka.

Arthur has already made known his feelings as he remains optimistic of a positive outcome to world sport.

"During this very unfortunate time my thoughts go to all the people and

families affected by this pandemic. Cricket as most sports is in a pause phase and will come out of this stronger," said Arthur.

Although current circumstances don't permit the Sri Lankan team to practice and train collectively, Arthur is monitoring their home workouts while making note of the progress of each and everyone of them from a distance.

"The players all have individual fitness plans tailored to the facilities that each player has at his disposal at home to maintain the expected fitness levels.

"I have been sending out exercises to each player as well, based on the player reflecting and then sharing with me strengths and weaknesses of their games.

"These reflections are mental, physical and technical," said Arthur.



## Ben Stokes is world's best cricketer

Ben Stokes has become the first Englishman since 2005 to be named Wisden's leading cricketer in the world.

Stokes played a key role in England's World Cup victory in July and was named man of the match in the final. The 28-year-old scored a stunning 135 not out to lead England to a thrilling one-wicket victory over Australia in the third Ashes Test at Headingley.

Andrew Flintoff was the last England men's player to receive the award.

India captain Virat Kohli has won it for the past three years. England pace bowler Jofra Archer has been named as one of Wisden's five Cricketers of the Year.

Australians Pat Cummins, Marnus Labuschagne and Ellyse Perry have been named alongside Archer, as well as Essex off-spinner Simon Harmer.

Perry, who is the first non-England women's player to appear as one of the five, has also been named the world's leading women's cricketer.

All-rounder Stokes hit an unbeaten 84 and then batted again in the super over as England dramatically beat New Zealand at Lord's to lift the men's World Cup for the first time.

His last-wicket stand of 76 with Jack Leach helped England level the Ashes series, which they would eventually draw 2-2.

"Without him, this Almanack might have been another English hard-luck story," editor Lawrence Booth wrote.

"Instead, it's a celebration. Stokes is their all-weather cricketer, a giant come rain or shine.

"The next few years should be fun." (bbcspport)



## Jos Buttler auctions World Cup shirt

England wicketkeeper-batsman Jos Buttler has raised 65,000 pounds (\$80,000) from auctioning his World Cup 2019 final shirt online to help fight the Covid-19 pandemic.

Buttler said the funds raised from the auction will be used towards providing life-saving equipment to help those affected during the novel coronavirus outbreak.

Jos Buttler, who was part of the World Cup-winning England team, put his long-sleeve shirt up for sale on eBay. The auction closed on Tuesday after the shirt attracted 82 bids with the winning bid amounting 65,100 pounds.

The proceeds from the auction will go towards spe-

cialist heart and lung centers provided by the Royal Brompton and Harefield hospitals in London.

"It's a very special shirt but I think it takes on extra meaning with it being able to hopefully go to the emergency cause," Buttler said.

Notably, Jos Buttler had said the World Cup shirt will have signatures of all his England teammates from the final that was played at the Lord's last year.

Jos Buttler shone in the final as he hit a crucial half-century and also played his part in the historic Super Over that finished as a tie. Buttler affected the run out of Martin Guptill that sealed England their maiden World Cup title.

## England look to shift Japan tour from June to October

England could move their summer tour of Japan to October, according to RFU chief executive Bill Sweeney.

He also raised the idea of an extra Six Nations tournament if England cannot fulfil their autumn internationals. England are set for two games in Japan in July - a tour "under threat" because of the coronavirus pandemic - and four home Tests in November.

"Maybe we could combine those in some shape or form," said Sweeney.

"We could possibly go there (Japan) in October."

Speaking to BBC Radio 4's Today programme, he added: "That's one option, because obviously they'd rather host, they make more money when they host, and we'd come back and play our autumns (internationals)."

England are scheduled to host New Zealand, Argentina, Tonga and Australia in November.

Sweeney said that "the assumption at the moment is those games go ahead" but the RFU is preparing for what happens "if we weren't able to travel to each other".

"We'd want to do something to fill our gap so we're looking at a range of different contingencies," said Sweeney.

"An obvious one is: Do you stage a Six Nations in the autumn but link it into the Six Nations the next year, and you have a home and away series?"

The 2020 Six Nations was suspended with England having one game to play, away to Italy, which is yet to be rescheduled. Three other matches in the championship have not been played - two for Ireland, against Italy and France, plus the game between Wales and Scotland.

## Former Peterite captain Rajith Abeygunawardena dies of a heart attack

Rajith Abeygunawardena who made an indelible mark as a charismatic leader of St. Peter's College rugby died early this week of a heart attack, a family spokesman said.

Abeygunawardena was credited with turning the 1985 team into a frontline force from almost nothing when the school found it extremely tough to field a competitive outfit.

In that year the Peterites under Abeygunawardena's guidance beat Trinity College after 44 years and also knocked the day lights out of Royal College after 13 years in two shocking results. They also brought down the Thomians after eight years.

"Rajith was a player who did something very special for the team that had players who were playing for the first time and did not know much about the game.

"He went round the school and rallied the boys when we did not have a proper team," said Mangala Dharmapriya the current head of St. Peter's Rugby Foundation and a batch-mate of Abeygunawardena.



Rajith (right) with his former coach Frank Hubert

He was looking forward to celebrating his 54th birthday in May. The team in that year was coached by the legendary Peterite and Sri Lanka flanker Angelo Wickremaratne.

Abeygunawardena played as a Centre and some of his team mates during the period from 1983 to 1986 were Graham Raux who also played for Sri Lanka, the late Rovern Gunasekera, Rohan Paiva, Ramsay Dekker, Roger Shu, Crofton Joseph and Rohan Ekanayake. He captained the Peterite Legends team at this year's old boys fiesta which is an annual event before the new school season. His funeral took place in Galle on Thursday.

## A blessing in disguise for Sri Lankan athletes

BY TB RAHAMAN

Postponement of the Olympic Games by one year and the extension of the qualification period has come as a blessing in disguise for some athletes in Sri Lanka according to the president of the Athletic Association of Sri Lanka Maj. Gen. Palitha Fernando.

This new qualification period for track and field events is June 29 while the date to qualify for the marathon and 59km race walk will be May 31.

Fernando said that the extension of the date will give enough time for some athletes to get back their form and fitness levels to a high degree. For example, Sri Lanka's best women's middle distance runner and medal hopeful Nimali Liyanaarachchi will be the happiest athlete to receive the good news.

She was unfortunate not to proceed to Nepal for the South Asian Games as she met with an unfortunate accident while riding her motor cycle just one day

“ THIS NEW QUALIFICATION PERIOD FOR TRACK AND FIELD EVENTS IS JUNE 29 WHILE THE DATE TO QUALIFY FOR THE MARATHON AND 59KM RACE WALK WILL BE MAY 31

before her scheduled departure to Nepal.

She has about six months to train and reach peak form having recovered from a fractured hand and .

She was training in Nuwara Eliya but went back to Sooriyawe-wa after the imposition of the curfew.

Other athletes who are vying to participate at the Tokyo Olym-

pics like Gayanthike Abeyratne as well as Asian Championship and Asian Games finalist steeple chase runner Nilani Ratnayake are pushing hard to achieve qualification standards with the help of their coach Jayalal.

Qualification standards for some events such as the women's marathon, 800m and steeple chase have been lowered too and the extended time frame will benefit the Sri Lankan athletes.

Some officials are of the opinion that some athletes take a break between seasons which help them to come back afresh that help them to improve in their performances.

Even elite international athletes do this and the extended qualification period will give the athletes ample time to enhance their standards.



Nimali Liyanaarachchi

# BUSINESS

business.suo@lakehouse.lk

APRIL 12, 2020

Meeting challenges of 'Post COVID-19' era

## “TASK FORCE VITAL TO DEVELOP VIBRANT AGRICULTURE SECTOR”

BY LALIN FERNANDOPULLE

A task force comprising experts in multiple sectors should be set up to promote agriculture and develop micro, small and medium enterprises to manufacture agri-based products for the local and the export market, said Senior Professor of Business Economics, University of Colombo and Chairman Institute of Policy Studies, H.D. Karunaratne.

Elaborating on the strategy to develop a vibrant agri sector for the local and the export market to deal with the 'post COVID-19 era' challenges, he said a proper link between agricultural output and industrial input must be created to sustain demand for agri-based products in the country.

“A mechanism must be created for micro, small and medium sector enterprises to make use of agricultural output to manufacture a range of agri-based products such as milk food, rice-flour, biscuits, sweets and all products that are being imported to the country, which will help slash the staggering import expenditure incurred each year,” Prof. Karunaratne said.

He said the home garden expansion project initiated by the govern-



ment is a good move given the availability of waste arable land, sunlight and water in the country.

However, while such an initiative will help meet household needs and provide an income source it could have downside effects on the income of small and medium scale farmers who need to be supported and encouraged to use modern technology to enhance yield and harvesting. “Sri Lanka has a large public sector workforce at village level that could play a pivotal role to develop agriculture at village level. There are at least six to seven government officials in each grama sevaka division who could disseminate information to a database set up at Divi-

sional Secretariat Divisions which could monitor the data which could be used for district level operations,” Prof. Karunaratne said, adding that a well articulated and implemented strategy will help the country not only to boost food production and achieve self sufficiency but also reduce imports to address the balance of payment shortfalls through the export of agri-based products.

The country spends colossal sums each year to import food items such as milk powder, milk based products, wheat flour and sugar among a range of other products.

The trade deficit rose to US\$ 730 million in January this year from US\$

617 million in the corresponding month last year while exports fell by 3.2 percent to US\$ 1,005 million in the same period. He said short term strategies to lift the economy which had been slowing down even before the current crisis are vital, but the country needs to go beyond them with strategies based on indigenous resources, culture, abilities and changing consumption and production patterns.

“There are key sectors such as production, distribution, consumption, prices of goods and services, employment, migration, sources of income, technology and education that need to be developed strategically,” he said.

However, he said that no strategy will be successful if it is not communicated effectively to the masses. The government should identify strategies and communicate them to the people to keep the hopes of people alive that the country has the potential to recover and bounce back.

“If people give up hope then the country will be in a worst state having to start all over again. Unlike the Easter attacks, the current crisis has made people lose hope. It is the role of the policy makers to revive them and keep things going.”

Going beyond 'Home Garden' initiative

## Well crafted strategy vital to boost agri sector

The one million home garden initiative will help achieve household food security to a certain extent and contribute to enhance food production in the country and revive the agriculture sector, but stopping there will not take us far in facing climate and health related crises in the future, said Professor of Weed Science, Department of Crop Science, University of Peradeniya, Buddh Marambe.

He said it is important that we all contribute even in the smallest possible way to the efforts of the government to revive the agriculture sector.

“If we are to perform better and sustain food security in the long run, the country needs well-crafted strategies and action plans. We should think beyond the politically popular home-garden development programs,” Prof. Marambe said.

He said Sri Lanka has shown signs of resilience to global food crisis situations in the past. Even now, the government has instructed relevant institutions to facilitate and encourage agricultural initiatives regardless of the nationwide curfew. Under the government's policy framework 'Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour' an initiative of developing one million home gardens was launched recently to support the food production drive.

“Food security is guaranteeing healthy and nutritious food, freely and in a sustainable manner to everyone. Sri Lanka will have to focus on food productivity enhancement programs infusing new technologies as we will have to expect a limitation in imports and a significant hit on the export sector,” he said, adding that innovations are vital to win in such crisis situations.

He said the contribution of the local food production should not be assessed merely on its cost efficiency against imported food items or by small scale production efforts such as home-gardening. “We should focus on improving the agricultural sector and food production, looking at the big picture, while keeping an eye on future economic progress of the nation.”

The world is waging a war against a common enemy, the Covid-19. No one could forecast how long it will take international trade and tourism to regain its accustomed past status.

“We have been depending on imports for many of our food and agricultural inputs. However, the inevitable negative influence of Covid-19 on global trade including the impact on our export trade, and countries such as India and many other Asian countries that we usually import food from, are closing their borders, which are telltale signs of a food crisis in the months to come.”

“We could isolate ourselves from one another as a measure of defeating Covid19, but we cannot be away from food. This is why we need to have a prudent strategy for food security not only at this time of crisis, but at all times because food security is nothing but national security.”

“With regard to investments we have seen huge investments being made by the organised private sector and those individuals or groups with investment capacity to infuse modern technology to their agricultural production systems, in crops and animals.”

“We have been extremely successful in developing and using new high yielding crop varieties and to a limited extent in animal breeds, to enhance the food production potential of agricultural systems.”

“If we are to leap forward, it is imperative that the entire agricultural sector use available modern technologies to the fullest,” Prof. Marambe said, adding that we need to produce more with less input, hence require production systems with higher input-use efficiency.

However, modern technologies are not cheap. Using such new technologies cannot be promoted if they are subjected to unrealistic import tariffs making them less affordable and accessible to the farming community. Unfortunately, this is the current scenario in Sri Lanka, which requires government immediate intervention.

COVID-19 has plagued the world with little warning. Climate change has been a long term threat, mainly owing to human activities. It will not lockdown itself under human-health crisis situations, but will continue to affect agriculture and food production. Sri Lanka has done well in its research and development over the past decades with foresight, and prepared the country to meet the challenges faced by the food production sector due to climate change. For example, sound breeding programs have resulted in drought-tolerant, salinity tolerant and pest and disease tolerant food crop varieties, while maintaining its high yielding potential. Technological packages and farming systems (crop and animal integrations) with water saving techniques, water conservation mechanisms, have been developed and used.

“However, we need more efforts in value addition, food storage and preservation, and using renewable energy in agricultural operations for a greener agricultural economy,” he said.

## Local biz leaders must take a cue from global corporate personalities

BY LALIN FERNANDOPULLE

Sri Lanka should take a cue from business leaders and celebrities around the world who have volunteered to forgo their salaries, perks and privileges to support the battle against the deadly virus, retired former business personalities said.

“Those who have extended a helping hand as founders and CEOs have set a precedent instead of ramming ‘make sacrifices’ down the throat of the employees,” a retired corporate personality said, adding that sacrifices should be made at a time when the world is going through a rough patch, but asking your subordinates who do not have the same luxury to bear the brunt is not fair.

The management of certain top conglomerates in the country announced a series of cost cutting measures including pay cuts between 5 to 60 percent for executive cadre and board members last week.

According to sources some of the executive cadre salaries are in the range of Rs. 50,000 leaving a take-home salary of around Rs. 40,000 after all deductions have been made.

“The management of companies should look at ways and means of cost saving rather than opting for easy ways outs such as pay cuts and lay-offs which should be the last resort,” a former CEO of an export entity said.

Some of the biggest names in the business world such as Jack Ma, the co-founder of Alibaba Group, Jack Dorsey, co-founder of Twitter and Bill Gates, the co-founder and co-chairman of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have pledged contributions.

Organisations that conduct business based on the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) principle focus on social and environmental concerns just as they do on profits. The TBL posits that instead of one bottom line, there should be three: profit, people, and the planet.

Jack Ma pledged \$14 million through his Ma Foundation to help develop a coronavirus vaccine. He's also donated 1.1 million testing kits, six million masks, and 60,000 protective suits and face shields to 54 African countries; 500,000 testing kits and one million face masks to the US; one million masks to Japan; and 1.8 million masks and 100,000 testing kits to Europe, including Italy and Spain.

Brooklyn Nets owner and Alibaba co-founder Joe Tsai has teamed up with the Chinese government to donate 1,000 ventilators to New York City.

Jack Dorsey, co-founder of Twitter and founder of Square, is donating more than a quarter of his wealth for Covid-19 relief. Dorsey, on his Twitter feed, said he was moving \$1 billion of his Square shares, or about 28% of his net worth, to Start Small LLC for pandemic relief.

Bill Gates, co-chairman and co-founder of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has contributed \$100 million through his foundation to aid global detection, isolation, and treatment of the virus. Celebrities too have been doing their part to help since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Singer Elton John launched a \$1 million coronavirus fund to protect people with HIV. Donatella Versace and daughter Allegra Versace pledged 200,000 euros to a hospital in Italy.

Justin Timberlake donated to Mid-South Food Bank, located in his hometown of Memphis, Tennessee.

Ryan Reynolds and Blake Lively said they're donating \$1 million to Feeding America and Food Banks Canada.



**Pic: Wimal Karunathillake**  
Access to food and other essential items has been an uphill task for everyone being home-bound. Farmers and those in the supply chain have been left high and dry with no way of selling their produce. Here a mobile greengrocer selects vegetables for a frenzied shopper in Ambalangoda during the curfew break on Thursday.



## Daily and casual workers' plight appalling

BY LALIN FERNANDOPULLE

The extra one-off payment of Rs. 5,000 to low income families last week and the same amount to Samurdhi beneficiaries, pensioners and the differently-abled, has been already disbursed, said Treasury Secretary S.R. Attygalle responding to allegations that the deserving sectors have still not received them.

“We have taken steps through the government mechanism to disburse the funds which will be in the hands of the needy sectors soon,” he said.

Displeasure over the mode of distributing money, through politicians, was expressed in various quarters, that it would lead to politicisation of the situation and mis-handling of funds.

However, daily wage earners and casual employees are in a serious predicament today as most of them have no way to make ends meet due to the prevailing situation which has left them high and dry not knowing when they would see light at the end of the tunnel.



A casual employee is guaranteed work only when it is needed. There is no assurance there will be more work in the future. They are compensated only for the time worked, which means they would not receive paid time-off for holidays.

The earnings of daily wage earners are mainly based on the actual working days and the

number of hours. Casual workers including carpenters, masons, plumbers, electricians, butchers, cobblers and the corner shops have been thrown out of the frying pan into the fire.

One could imagine the plight of these employees and their families who have been left to the confines of homes for almost a month. The current 'no work scenario' has hit

many of these families badly. “I am a father of four living a hand to mouth existence. We had something to eat during the first few days, but now we have been left to starve,” said Saman Jayatissa, a fruit seller in Wattala.

Trishaw and bus operators, barbers, tailors, sweep sellers, greengrocers, hawkers and street vendors in Pettah and elsewhere in the country have been deprived of their daily income that kept the family fires burning.

Neither have the small and micro sector entrepreneurs been spared by the horrendous invisible killer virus. For those in the sector who took a severe hit from the Easter Sunday attacks, the global pandemic is a double whammy.

With economic prospects bleak here and across the globe, the demand for labour in the coming months is expected to slide to its lowest level, dealing a major blow to non-permanent employees such as daily, casual and the self-employed not covered by social protection. A labour survey in 2018 revealed that of the eight million

workers in the country, 4.7 million (or 59%) were informal workers.

The relief measures unfolded by the government last week has provided some respite to the affected sectors of the economy but will the needs of the non-permanent workers be fulfilled is a question that needs to be answered.

Labour experts say to safeguard the work and income of this group, relief and incentives offered to companies should be linked to retaining non-permanent worker jobs.

Concerns of developing countries and the poorer sectors in them have been raised across the world by over 100 global organisations which are calling for debt payment of these countries to be dropped this year.

Major charities including Oxfam and ActionAid International are asking for debt relief which would free more than \$25bn (£20 bn) this year.

The number of coronavirus cases crossed the 1.6 million mark in 209 countries with over 96,000 deaths last week.

## Business

# Employer's primary obligation is to employees in this difficult hour

The world may experience the worst economic impact for the past several decades due to the Covid-19 virus and no one at this point of time can quantify the extent.

The absolute impact can be alarming no matter if your country is an economic power or otherwise. We have never been through anything like this. Nobody knows how long we're going to suffer.

In response to their revenue losses due to the pandemic hundreds of companies across all industries in Sri Lanka have announced, in recent days, drastic cuts to the salaries of their employees as one way to reduce the unprecedented financial blow caused by the corona virus pandemic.

Some senior executives are even graciously foregoing salaries to help their employees. This phenomenon is universal and nothing new in the western world. But for Sri-Lankan employees it's probably the first time. Literally every single business has suffered hugely already with the full impact to be experienced over the next few months.

The airline, restaurant, hospitality, and transportation industries have been the hardest hit. The announcements we have seen so far are by no means comprehensive, but rather provides a glimpse into what emerging impact the corona virus is just now starting to have on decisions around employee compensation.

It's certainly a huge economic challenge which the employers cannot cushion on their own and hence the employee salary bill has to be a consideration for cost management to stay afloat until the economy returns to normalcy.

## Poor employees

You may have already seen various forms of communication such as circulars, letters, memos and emails floating around society that talk about the extent to which pay and perks are being cut. The trend we see is that Chairmen, CEOs, Directors and senior managers,



Wage growth has slowed over the past four years and with the anticipated economic recession hopes of any immediate growth will be a dream.



**BIZ TALK with Kishu Gomes**

taking a bigger percentage cut to set the tone for the lower levels to be content with. Surprisingly most of these are large conglomerates that have been profiteering in the past and banking billions of rupees in the past.

Some heads of organisations are the owners of the business and big shareholders, so they can afford to take a 90% cut or completely forego their monthly salary given that their monthly income will be still in millions.

Employees appear willing to stomach drastic pay cuts if the employer can ward off large-scale layoffs - do the employees have a choice anyway. Only

the employees would know how they feel from inside.

While reports of depression, apathy, fear, poor sleep, physical pain, and weakened immune systems are all common among pay cut victims, these effects can be exacerbated for those in dire financial straits. 70-80% of the employees have no capacity to save from the monthly income so even 5% pay cut can push them into a dire state.

## Pay cut as the last option

For laid-off hospitality and travel workers, who have few options for re-employment due to reduced consumer demand and government mandated closures and thus little control over their immediate financial situations, the consequences of the layoffs may be devastating.

Although employees vary about and object to pay cuts, many see little prospect of improving their compensation packages by switching jobs. Wage growth has slowed over the past four years and with the anticipated economic recession hopes of any immediate growth will be a dream. Most workers will have to accept the reductions because of poor employment prospects in the virus-hit economy.

Employers' priority at this moment of time should be to do their best for the employees - so don't take the easi-

**While reports of depression, apathy, fear, poor sleep, physical pain, and weakened immune systems are all common among pay cut victims, these effects can be exacerbated for those in dire financial straits**

route of cutting pay. Focus on all other options available for cost savings first and keep the pay cut option as the last. After all your employees worked so hard to make the employers achieve their goals in the past and you need the employees best to play strategically and aggressively during the post corona operating environment. Mind you there will be greater competition for all businesses and it is your employees who can make the business more competitive.

A triple bottom line (TBL) organisation (organisations that focuses on the three Ps- People, Planet and Profit) takes steps to ensure that its operations benefit the employees and the community in which it conducts business.

Human resources managers of these entities are concerned, not just with providing sufficient compensation to its employees, but also with creating a safe and pleasant working environment and helping employees find value in their work.

## NCE probes into pros and cons of laying off employees

Sri Lanka as a small economy, where the economic backbone is made up of micro, small and medium sized enterprises and dependent on export revenue for foreign currency generation is facing a vulnerable situation. The country is enduring a challenging period in terms of healthcare and an economic upheaval. It is obvious that businesses are struggling to maintain the normalcy but to no avail, the National Chamber of Exporters (NCE) said in a media release.

"Exporters are experiencing dual supply chain shocks, where some cannot receive raw materials and some cannot secure orders from clients due to the lockdown in other countries. This has resulted in Halt Production, with many businesses reaching a critical junction. Some of the exporters are facing issues with cancelled pre-orders on already manufactured batches of products in terms of the economic slowdown around the world. In this light, many organisations have reported to downsizing the employees to stay afloat.

"However, it should be highlighted with concern that laying off employees at a time like this will have detrimental effects, since redundancy is the last thing one would expect during a calamity.

"On a separate note, an organisation may feel that dismissal of certain number of employees would be a short term solution to address the current business turmoil, yet when the world recovers and recuperates, the business venture will need to grow creating a vacuum of experienced and skillful employees.

"In such a situation recruitment of new workforce and training will come with its own cost, exponentially increasing the operational cost of the organisation.

"While businesses are focusing on scaling down activities to a more realistic and manageable size under the circumstances, they also have a legal as well as a moral obligation towards their long standing employees who have contributed to the success of the organization. Human Capital, the most valuable resource in the organization

ensures that business enterprises sustain its activities profitably in the longer term due to high performing and effective workforce. Hence downscaling such employees may also have a negative impact on the goodwill of the enterprise with a negative public reception and loss of credibility.

"Even as the businesses are struggling to keep their head above water, they also have to resort to any alternative methods in sustaining their business than moving towards drastic measures such as pay cuts and layoffs which impact the Human Capital of an organization. When downsizing is a knee-jerk reaction, it has long-term costs. A best laid HR policy should be in place with the consultation of all other departments of the organization in resolving the issues at hand. "The authorities ought to monitor and control how the concessions are granted in terms of debt moratorium as some corporates may take undue advantage by utilizing the grants given by the government and will not pass the benefit to their employees.

"Businesses can adopt best practices by business process re-engineering, involvement of employees in search for ways to reduce costs, waste and inefficiencies, diversification of business into related or non-related areas and encouraging employees to be innovative.

"Businesses cannot perform employee redundancy in a haphazard manner as there are regulations laid by the Labour Department of Sri Lanka to protect labour rights. Business enterprises must stay apprised of the current legal landscape.

"With every region at risk of natural and man-made disasters and supply chains and markets increasingly globally connected, it is becoming ever more important for businesses to develop robust disaster plans to reduce the potential impact. But to work out disaster plans, the starting point is to understand what that impact could be - and how events far from your core operations could hit your business," the statement added.

# What lies ahead for Sri Lanka?

BY NISHA ARUNATILAKE

Unlike the Easter Sunday attacks, COVID-19 is not only affecting Sri Lanka, but almost all countries. The economic impact of this on Sri Lanka will not only be influenced by what is happening in the country, but also by how the disease is affecting global value chains, markets, and the movement of goods and people across the world.

With the COVID-19 pandemic still unfolding, it is too early to estimate the economic impact of the crisis. This blog compares the economic impact of the Easter Sunday attacks to illustrate the likely impact of COVID-19 on Sri Lanka's economy.

## Manufacturing sector

The pandemic began affecting Sri Lanka's manufacturing sector, even before the number of COVID-19 patients started increasing in the country.

The Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), which takes values between 0 and 100, indicates whether the manufacturing sector is expanding or slowing down, as viewed by business managers. A value above 50 indicates an expansion, while a value below 50 indicates a contraction.

Manufacturing sector activities, which were on an expansionary phase in January (with a PMI value of 54.5) started slowing down in February, with weakening demand, reduced supply of essential raw materials, and longer time taken to receive raw materials from countries such as China, which were affected by the COVID-19 from January onwards.

The government's COVID-19 containment efforts also included closing factories which bring together large numbers of workers. The recent closure of export industrial zones is an example.

The Easter Sunday attacks saw the manufacturing sector slowing down sharply (Figure 1). The PMI moved from a healthy 66.9 points in March to 41.0 in April in 2019. However, the contraction of the sector was short lived. By May, the sector was already picking up.

Even if the COVID-19 situation in Sri Lanka is brought under control, local industries will continue to be affected by raw material shortfalls and reduced demand.

As more countries lockdown and keep citizens at home, aggregate demand will fall, as customers reduce non-essential purchases due to future uncertainties. Further, the cut down in factory work will result in reduced work hours and layoffs, bringing down incomes.

This will also affect the purchasing power of customers, thereby further reducing demand. Small and medium scale firms which have limited reserves will be severely affected by the downturn.

## Services sector

With Sri Lanka under curfew and a ban on international arrivals, the impact of COVID-19 on the services sector is likely to be long and severe. The Services PMI, like the manufacturing PMI, tracks market sentiment as expressed by managers, from month to month, based on sales, employment, inventories, and prices.



**Workers who are not in permanent employment such as daily workers, casual workers, and those who are self-employed in the informal sector are the most affected**

Like the manufacturing sector, Sri Lanka experienced a slowdown in the services sector early on, with the Services PMI falling by almost seven points from January to February 2020.

Sri Lanka's services PMI dropped to an all-time low of 44.7 in May 2019, following the Easter Sunday attacks, mainly due to the contraction in accommodation, food and beverage, and other personal services sectors. But the services PMI started recovering by June 2019.

However, with the ongoing curfew, wholesale and retail trade, and

transportation of goods and people, will be severely limited. With the future uncertain and limited consumer spending, other financial and real estate activities will also slow down. With no visitors coming into the country, the tourism industry will be one of the most severely affected. Comparatively, the bomb attacks mostly affected the big hotels and the impact was short lived. It has been the practice of the tourism industry to lure local tourists when there is a slowdown of international visitors. But, with most of the country on curfew and restrictions placed on leisure travel, the industry is not likely to benefit from increased demand from the local market either.

The tourism industry was already experiencing a slowdown from the beginning of this year with reduced Chinese tourists arriving in the country.

With arrivals completely banned, the number of foreigners coming to the country is near zero. The hotel industry will also not benefit from local tourists due to the ban on internal travel.

## Agriculture sector

The agriculture sector will mainly experience a fall in demand. Due to a drastic slowdown in the hotel sector and in the food and beverages sector, the local demand for agricultural goods will reduce significantly.

At the same time, the export agriculture sector will see a dramatic

decline in demand, due to lockdowns in operations across the globe and severe restrictions imposed on international transport of goods and services. In addition to reduced demand, restrictions in trade could result in shortages of inputs, such as fertiliser, and reduced availability of workers.

## Labour market impact

With economic prospects looking bleak, the demand for labour in the next few months is likely to be poor. The returns from business activities may decline.

Workers who are not in permanent employment such as daily workers, casual workers, and those who are self-employed in the informal sector are the most affected. The incomes of non-permanent workers are expected to decline due to layoffs and reduced work hours. Workers who are not covered by social protection, such as the self-employed and casual and gig-workers, will also be affected by adverse economic shocks. According to the 2018 Labour Force Survey, of the 8 million workers in the country, 4.7 million (or 59%) were informal workers. Of this, the most affected would be the 2.5 million non-agricultural, low skilled workers engaged in elementary occupations, craft and related trade work, and plant and machine operators and assemblers.

## Policy responses

As long as the health threat to Sri Lanka continues, the economy will not be able to recover. Very correctly, the government is giving priority to containing the disease. Even if the disease is contained within the country, as long as COVID-19 is present in the rest of the world, the threat to Sri Lanka from a recurrence of the disease will be large. Hence, existing measures to reduce the disease from being imported to the country should continue as long as the COVID-19 threat is present in the rest of the world.

Unlike the Easter Sunday attacks, COVID-19 affects the demand and supply side of the economy. Hence policy responses should look into both supporting jobs and incomes, as well as providing a stimulus to restart the economy.

Any stimulus package should benefit those in the informal sector as well as formal sector workers and registered companies.

The government has introduced a number of relief measures to help citizens and businesses. The main benefit the poorest would receive is a cash advance given to Samurdhi card

holders, food at concessionary prices from Sathosa co-operative outlets, and the grace period for paying utility bills. In addition, citizens would get a grace period for payment on taxes and leases, delayed deductions on loan payments, and reduced interest payments on credit cards. Small and medium scale businesses of most affected industries will receive a debt moratorium of six months.

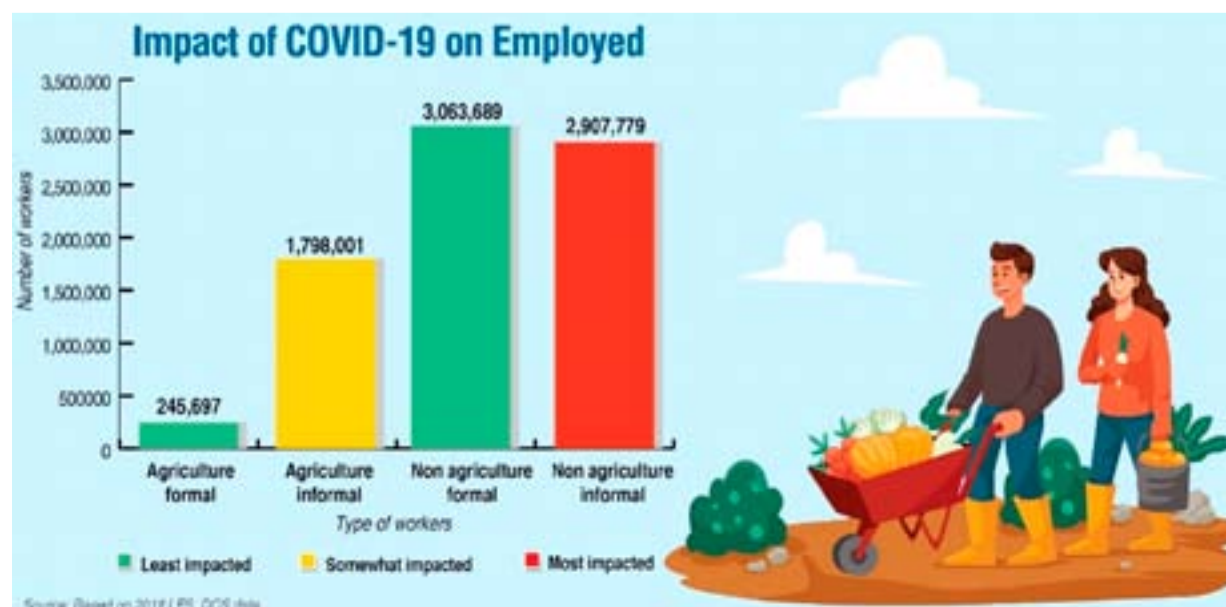
To benefit from the relief measures other than the ones aimed at the poorest, companies or individuals should either receive regular salaries or have access to formal financial markets. But, a large share of the 2.5 million non-agricultural casual and wage workers will not be able to benefit from these measures.

To protect jobs and incomes of these workers, the incentives given to companies should be linked to retaining non-permanent worker jobs. Despite a slowdown in economic activities in most sectors, the COVID-19 containment measures have created some demand for workers, such as in distribution of essential food and other items and the manufacturing of protective gear for health workers. Measures should be put in place for providing employment opportunities for wage workers in these activities.

With COVID-19 still uncontrolled, the curfew and other measures taken to contain the spread of the disease may continue in the near future. The Government has already introduced several measures to provide relief to people and businesses to minimise the economic and social costs of a country-wide lockdown.

However, the near poor non-permanent workers who are not covered by Samurdhi, and unorganised industrial sectors such as the wholesale and retail sector and gig workers are likely to be left out by the current relief efforts.

Linking concessions given to businesses to job protection and job creation will help those who are left behind as well as the economy through pushing aggregate demand.



**Nisha Arunatilake is the Director of Research at the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka.**

# Treasures and travails of telecommuting



STRATEGIC STRIDES  
by  
Prof. Ajantha Dharmasiri

Work from home is often heard yet a partially adhered term these days. With Covid19 pandemic, it became a necessity. Yet, when the number of vehicles on the rise and the roads remain the same, the obvious reality is increasing congestion on the way to work. It is interesting to reflect on telecommuting as a timely topic.

## Meaning of telecommuting

Telecommuting or telework is considered as working outside the conventional workplace and communicating with it by way of telecommunications or computer-based technology. It constitutes an early form of 'virtual' work, which has inspired research disciplines ranging from transportation and urban planning to ethics, law, sociology and organisational studies. Among several forms of 'work-at-home', I would use the term 'telecommuting' to refer to work carried out at home during regular office hours by employees of organisations.

Many employees around the world have replaced their commute to work with electronic links to their workplace. Telecommuting to work is trending upward. Although this is an innovative way to complete work, there are significant risks experienced by both the organization and the employee who is engaged in telecommuting.

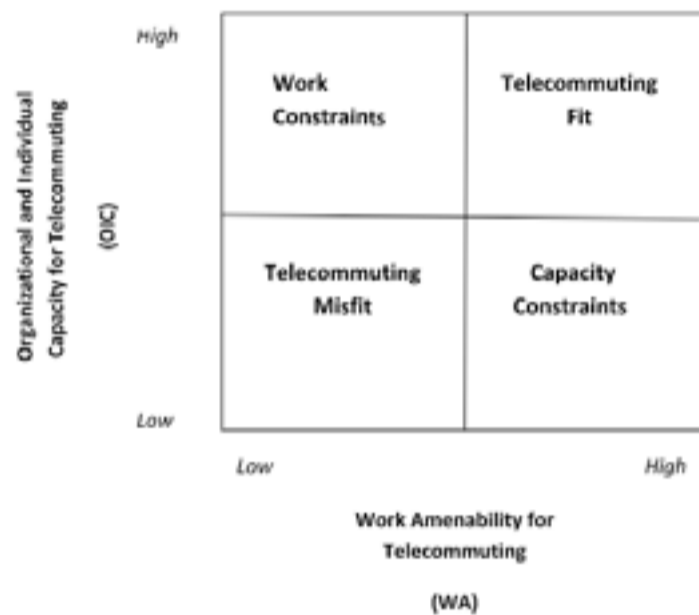
When a telecommuting experience is unsuccessful there may be a tendency to conclude that the situation was not conducive to telecommuting. This type of conclusion would tell only a part of the story. An important issue pertains to the suitability of an individual for a telecommuting experience. Thus, it is the confluence of a number of individual and organizational issues that will contribute to the suitability of the telecommuting experience for both individual and organisation.

## Contributing factors

Certain factors in the past few decades have led toward the reliance on and adoption of telecommunication in the workplace. Many factors contribute to the background, implementa-



Many employees around the world have replaced their commute to work with electronic links to their workplace.



Source: Buckley and Dharmasiri (2010)

tion, and advantages of companies executing telecommunication. One such factor contributing to telecommunication is cost reduction. Organizations can save money by reducing the amount of work space and other work environment enhancers in its offices. Campbell (2007) makes the point that less money is spent on workstations, maintenance, utility bills, common office space, and insurance.

Organisations may also implement telecommunication to retain 'geographical freedom' in the ever-changing work environment. Some companies do not have a static geographical base. Instead they rely solely on telecommunication, and mostly engage in internet-based businesses.

Companies can maintain an employee pool worldwide with employees in many time zones, and each per-

son can work at hours convenient for them.

The younger generation is more inclined to telecommute due to their familiarity with technology as well as their desire for autonomy in the workplace. Such organizations who encourage telecommuting have more potential to succeed in the event of a natural disaster, terrorist attack or epidemic.

As we obviously see now, there may be advantages to telecommuting during the traditional height of flu season, not to mention winter blizzards and weather calamities, some experts are advising that businesses prepare for the worst by planning to allow employees to telecommute. Furthermore, in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the USA, pre-established telework practices at American Express helped ensure that the busi-

ness could continue functioning. By decentralizing the workforce, companies can still maintain operational readiness under almost any situation.

## Individual benefits

The individual employee can also benefit from telecommuting. Organizations who support telecommuting to their employees offer the employees' fiscal savings on the individual employee's work-related costs, such as work clothing, transportation, lunches out, child care, and other various costs associated with working outside of the home. Stress related to travel to and from work can be nearly eliminated with the use of telecommuting thus producing a happier, more efficient worker.

Telecommuting also offers employees greater opportunity to balance work and personal life. With flexible schedules and mobile technology, employees are no longer tied down to one specific location during the work day to accomplish their responsibilities. The increased scheduling flexibility gives the employee the opportunity to provide more care to their family; an absolute necessity for single parents taking care of their children.

Employees also save time by eliminating the commute to and from work. These hours can be used for personal pursuits or as additional hours in the work week, thus creating more efficiency and job satisfaction among employees. With increased trust towards employees, companies can expect to gain a return of trust towards the company from telecommuting employees.

Telecommuting is also offered as an employee benefit for companies wishing to retain employees who are either unsatisfied with their work environment or who are looking for another

job. Hence, the advantages of telecommuting in the workplace, both for the employee and employer, are plenty. Money, moral, efficiency, crisis-reaction, and time are all major factors of implementing telecommuting to the company and individual work-related schedules.

## Success factors

A clear look at an institution and its individuals will provide a gross yardstick for considering the potential for the implementation of telecommuting. Two most important factors can be identified, in this context.

They are: the institutional and individual capacity (OIC) for telecommuting, and the amenability of the work (WA) to telecommuting. Amenability is usually referred to as the flexible nature of work which allows it to be handled by employees in optional ways. Based on the ongoing research work by Professor Michel Buckley of University of Oklahoma and myself, few scenarios can be proposed. Figure 1 shows us four such different scenarios that can occur in this context.

If the OIC and the WA are high, then the situation appears to be a good fit for telecommuting. In a situation where OIC is high and WA is low there appears to be a situation in which there is a poor level of fit between the workforce and the work.

If OIC is low but the WA is high, telecommuting may be possible if an organisation makes an attempt to upgrade both technology and the level of personnel employed by the organization. If WA and OIC are both low, then it can be concluded that Telecommuting is a poor fit in this situation. It must be stated that this is an initial evaluation. There are myriad other factors which influence this decision.

## Industry scenarios

Based on the typology described above, several industry scenarios can be considered. Let's look at a typical western situation first, and then reflect on Sri Lanka.

Scenario 1: Telecommuting Misfit (OIC -low, WA - low)

Mary is front office assistant of a bank in the USA, and her work involves direct contact with customers. She explored the possibility of working from home, but was not an option due to the nature of her work.

This is the case with regard to most banks in Sri Lanka, where physical presence of employees on a daily basis is the norm. It can be extended too many other industries as well.

Scenario 2: Work Constraints (OIC - high, WA - low)

Peter is a creative writer in an advertising firm in France. His company is flexible in allowing him to work from home. However, he has to visit clients and need to attend regular meetings in others' offices. Hence, there is a challenge for him to fully

resort to telecommuting. A similar case may prevail with many advertising firms in Sri Lanka. Also, a variety of jobs in the ICT industry also may witness such situations.

Scenario 3: Capacity Constraints (OIC - low, WA - high)

Alex is an entrepreneurial CEO of a trading organization in the UK. He has a dozen of marketing executives who used to work in a large office. With the dismal performance of last year, he is under pressure from the board of directors for more stringent cost control. However, he has financial issues in dealing with infrastructure requirements such as computer availability with internet connectivity for his employees. Thus, even though the team is very much willing, the support for telecommuting does not exist here.

This is also not very uncommon in Sri Lanka, with its increasing IT literacy rate. Shortcomings in the necessary infrastructure can hinder the cost-effective utilization of available talent.

Scenario 4: Telecommuting Fit (OIC - high, WA - high)

Joel is a systems analyst and enjoys working late night in Germany. He need not go to office, thanks to the flexible arrangement offered by his firm. With the internet connectivity, he shares his programs with the office and is in touch.

He has access to company servers located in different locations and there is no need to be physically present at meetings in the office. He uses web2 tools to be in touch with his clients and colleagues. This position is very much amenable to telecommuting. We can find a variety of such opportunities in Sri Lanka. ICT industry can be stated as the forerunner in this approach. With an able set of software developers and having projects that have components that can be handled in a flexible manner, telecommuting becomes possible. Yet, the effectiveness of such a practice relies on several job and family related factors.

## Relevance to Sri Lanka

Based on the above discussion, there is an opportunity for Sri Lankan organizations to explore the prospects of telecommuting.

As the typology clearly showed us, it is not the panacea for all corporate illnesses. Careful selection of specific tasks that can be handled through telecommuting, as well as ensuring the availability of necessary infrastructure are critical steps in this direction. Comprehensive studies with respect to Sri Lankan industries need to be done to explore further opportunities. Just as the rest of the world is benefiting from the practice of telecommuting, Sri Lanka can also use its strengths, in the process of its ongoing economic expansion.

This could be a versatile tool in the post-Covid19 world.

## Janashakthi Life records double-digit growth in 2019

Janashakthi Insurance PLC recorded a growth of 30% in first-year premiums for the financial year of 2019, with Gross Written Premiums (GWP) of Rs. 3.5 billion. This commendable growth can be attributed to the renewed singular focus on Life Insurance, which the Company embarked on in 2018.

The Company's post-tax profits stood at Rs. 398 million for the period ended 31st December 31, 2019. Janashakthi Life's Investment income was at Rs. 1,643 million at the end of the period under review, recording a growth of 8% year-on-year. Janashakthi Life's Net Claims and Benefits grew by 18% year-on-year, from Rs. 1,510 to Rs. 1,924 million.

"During our 25th milestone year, we truly witnessed the benefits of our strategic shift of returning to our roots with a singular focus on Life Insurance. Steered mainly by innovation and our customer driven approach, the company embarked on a steady path of growth within the year 2019," said Chairman of Janashakthi Insurance, Prakash Schaffter.

"Health and safety of our employees,



customers, and community are of paramount importance especially with this unforeseen global crisis of COVID-19 impacting us all.

We assure you that we are committed to empower and support our communities in these challenging times. With our enhanced digital capabilities implemented in 2019, we have activated several online alternatives to ensure safety and convenience of our customers in this time of need," he said.

## BOC raises awareness on digital banking

All Bank of Ceylon (BOC) branches including the Head office have taken precautions by providing hand gloves and face masks to security officers at the front line of the servicing area. Hand sanitisers and sinks with soap are kept at all main entrances.

The bank requests all customers to make use of this facility to ensure the safety of self and every other person. It is also requested to be conscious about using elevators where passengers tend to get crowded too often.

The Bank's mobile banking methods such as BApp and SmartPay mobile applications seamlessly replace cash usage, enabling bank customers to carry out payments to merchants for the services they have obtained. Similarly, mobile apps such as SmartPassbook enable customers to keep track of their account balances

and transactions. Therefore it may not be necessary for customers to visit a branch for fund transfers, cash deposits or withdrawals, utility bill payments, and similar transactions.

SmartPay app can be downloaded and self-activated by customers followed by a simple registration process. Through the same app, customers who wish to enroll as merchants under this system and activate it by visiting the nearest BOC branch. With BOC SmartPay, customers can enjoy the convenience of cardless and cashless payments for their day to day necessities. SmartPay will facilitate merchants ranging from small to larger scale business ventures to accept transactions and enhance their sales turnover and business growth. The usage of QR code will eliminate high investment and maintenance cost associated with a Point-of-Sale device.

## COSMI welcomes ban on imports

The Government limiting and banning imports of non-essential items is a welcome step for the country's agri-SME sector, said Confederation of Micro, Small and Medium Industries (COSMI) Founder President Nawaz Rajabdeen.

He said the ban on imports of non-essential items will help local enterprises look to get into the production and processing of these items.

"We believe this situation presents the country with a rare opportunity to kick-start the revival of several local SME sectors," Rajabdeen said.

"SMEs in agri-business, aquaculture, poultry and other livestock are some of the priority sectors that can



Nawaz Rajabdeen

make use of the government's support if given. The strong domestic demand for their produce during this COVID crisis shows low market risk for their

supplies with possible immediate profits so that many connected livelihoods too, get a boost.

"We need to understand that SMEs are everywhere - in urban and rural areas. Therefore in a crisis, our consumers first visit the SMEs and micros, rather than big companies - in that MSMEs are not only the economy's lifeline but also of Sri Lankan consumers.

"We appeal to all micro and small sector industries and trade enterprises to take this challenge to get back to business with our support. We faced worst disasters such as the 2004 tsunami with total destruction of small business enterprises in the coastal regions.

"At that time one of the challenges Sri Lanka faced was to revive and resurrect the micro and small sector industries. Let us take this as an opportunity and a challenge and rise back. We at COSMI are confident that we can play a very supportive role in this," Rajabdeen added.

The agri-business sectors that local SMEs deal in are: spices, teas including specialty teas, herbal medicinal and beverage supplements, coconut and oils, short eats, and fruits and vegetables.

Aquaculture sectors which local SMEs deal in are: ornamental fish and ocean fisheries including fishery cooperatives and processing.

## TEA MARKET REPORT

SALE NO.12 - APRIL 7-8, 2020



■ Sale No.12 which was originally scheduled for March 24 -25, 2020 was postponed in view of the curfew imposed to contain the spread of the deadly COVID-19. The sale was not safe to be conducted in the traditional form of an out-cry system of bidding at the weekly Tea Auctions that take place at the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce. The only other alternative appeared to be for the auction to take place on an Electronic Platform, and, for the first time in the history of the Colombo Tea Auctions which goes back to 1883, the already delayed Sale No. 12 took place on an electronic bidding system on April 4-8. Brokers conducted the on-line auctions from their respective offices, while buyers too operated from their own offices following these temporary measures taken by the Colombo Tea Traders' Association.

■ This week's sale comprised a total quantity of 4.5 m/kgs; down by over 0.5 m/kgs over the previously conducted auction. Low Grown Leafy/Tippy/Premium Flowery Grades comprised 1.6 m/kgs, while Main Sale High and Medium category teas totalled approximately 0.6 m/kgs. Teas on offer in the Ex-Estate catalogue amounted to almost 722,852 kgs. Meanwhile, the Monthly National Averages for March appear elsewhere in this report for your urgent attention.

■ The first catalogue to be concluded was the Ex-Estate sale and there was robust demand from a cross section of markets which resulted in prices gaining sharply. One reason for the stronger demand would have been the lack of a sale for over two weeks while another would have been the recent rapid de-valuation of the SLR against the USD. Japan, Hong Kong and some selected Far Eastern markets were active. There was also better demand from Russia for a wider selection of teas suitable for the 'Tea Bag' segment.

■ In keeping with the market trend, all Low Grown teas too met with strong demand. Leafy BOP1's and OP1's as well as the best OP's/OPA's appreciated substantially, often by up to Rs. 100 per kg while others gained to a lesser extent. Pekoe's/Pekoe1 grades also saw sharp price increases. Select best FBOP's/FBOP1's saw improved demand and appreciated up to Rs. 100 per kg. Very Tippy Teas continued to attract useful demand resulting in stronger prices.

## Monthly average - March, 2020

Elevation	Orthodox		CTC		Orth. and CTC Combined	
	Month	To-date	Month	To-date	Month	To-date
Uva High	523.98	499.92	304.41	325.54	522.09	499.23
Western High	591.95	585.24	530.12	536.99	585.88	580.62
Uva Medium	565.72	534.89	-	-	565.72	534.89
Western Medium	528.47	520.71	509.30	488.82	523.37	512.31
Low Grown	647.07	647.46	427.26	442.72	626.77	629.21
<b>Total</b>	<b>613.04</b>	<b>611.92</b>	<b>468.02</b>	<b>469.86</b>	<b>597.70</b>	<b>597.24</b>

Source: Lanka Commodity Brokers Ltd

## Business

# Coronavirus' effect on consumer behaviour

by  
Hemantha  
Kulatunga



The consumer is a person or an organisation that purchases goods or services strictly for consumption in general terms. Consumer behaviour is the decision a person makes to purchase a product, service or idea after a search and selection. Consumer market is the system that influences and permits us to purchase goods, services or ideas. In the consumer market, the consumer makes decisions on how the money will be spent to purchase and use the product the way he or she wants.

Many factors affect the buying behaviour such as attitudes, beliefs and outside motivation, fundamentally influenced by cultural, social, and psychological views. Manipulated by these behavioural aspects, the consumer purchases a product or service usually going through a decision-making process consisting of need recognition, information search and evaluation of the gathered information.

A person or business that sells goods to a person or group for use of consumption needs to analyze the buying behavior of the buyer in order to succeed. Any retailer, irrespective of the size of the business is impulsively aware of this fact. In fact the knowledge levels differ depending on the level of education and other similar factors, but the actions of any retailer is mostly similar.

Considering the high degree of the prevailing uncertainty about the ongoing speed of spread, rate of recovery and still increasing deaths, post crisis consumption or attitudes of the buyers cannot be predicted as yet. However, a few obvious changes can be noticed from what we have already seen in common thinking. Many of the middle and upper middle people I interviewed on the issue are of the view that they have to cut back on non-essential expenses such as local and overseas leisure travel, club membership, additional transport costs and even some outsourced domestic services.

The pandemic will alter consumer behaviour across the entire landscape of retail business throughout the world. Sri Lanka also will undoubtedly feel the pinch as the spread of coronavirus can lead to a substantial consumer behavior shift. Retailers will experience the impact of the crisis long after the quarantine period is over and social distancing rules ends. The crisis is likely to create a permanent behavioral change that retailers need



During the past two weeks, Sri Lankan consumers seemed to be rapidly getting used to ordering consumer goods through home delivery requisitions.

to be prepared and planned immediately to sustain the existing business.

The aim of the Government is to make convenience goods available freely to households throughout the curfew affected country. Not only the effort is highly successful but the act also has paved the way to a new trend. During the past two weeks, Sri Lankan consumers seemed to be rapidly getting used to ordering consumer goods through home delivery requisitions. Although such practices were previously available on a random basis, the consumers were not fully accustomed to use this facility. This will somewhat hinder retailer foot traffic but the leniency towards home delivery services will increase significantly.

There is a high probability that many of those first time grocery buyers will convert to online and other methods of home delivery facilities permanently although a clear prediction cannot be made due to the novelty of the practice. This means that the shift in the anticipated behaviour change will move a lot of volume from brick and mortar to ordering home delivery.

According to some of the small and medium retailers, I spoke to, there are some practical issues in their respective geographical areas. Collection of cash on delivery is the main concern. Unlike large store chains, small and medium retailers do not possess online payment facilities, thus have to stick to cash payments. Although they may not entirely prefer the system, they will have to take the cue from large retail

ers and devise a more practical method to go with the tide.

The prevailing visible shortage of consumer essentials has been created as a consequence of stockpiling due to the popular belief that the item will be scarce. Although Government agencies declare that there is no shortage, consumers seem to be reluctant to accept it. The public presumes that the shut down of businesses and services will continue indefinitely.

Therefore, most of them try to prepare a disaster pantry to the best of their financial capability. This is great news for smart retailers as they can provide customers a service to remember the provider at this crucial time because the Sri Lankans, by nature are keen to return favours, thus will return to the trader for repeat purchases.

Leaders of large retail chains or large individual stores are doing an excellent job in realistically and clearly communicating the message to their customers. As far as I have noticed, they are adequately gearing to cater to the post-epidemic challenge. However, small and medium scale retailers have not yet understood the gravity of the full impact to come. Even for them, the attitude shift of the consumers will make a substantial change in their business volumes. Grocery delivery platforms which are in operation will have a dramatic spike in sales from the newly converted customers many of whom are first timers.

After a disaster of this magnitude to the economy, consumer behaviour can take various forms. While some of

After a disaster of this magnitude to the economy, consumer behaviour can take various forms. While some of these changes may end in the short run, many others will remain indefinitely in society. Now that coronavirus is upending retail business, vendors at large

these changes may end in the short run, many others will remain indefinitely in society.

Now that coronavirus is upending retail business, vendors at large must look at various methods to adapt to the new behavioural changes.

Retailers must concentrate on shifting gear to new methods, how to build rapport, how to use personalization with social distancing (which will continue to exist indefinitely), how to stay ahead of competitors and so forth. I intend to discuss more on these factors in detail at a later date.

Finally, my intention was to discuss the anticipated changes most likely to arise for traders, retailers in particular, in Sri Lanka. To face the challenge head on, vendors can initially concentrate and act swiftly on online selling and home delivery, change showroom to suit new behaviour, use social media and obtain optimum mileage and strategies in expected intense competition.

Battle against COVID-19

## SLI introduces free insurance cover for frontline workers

Sri Lanka Insurance (SLI) has taken many steps to support government initiatives in the prevention of the spread of Covid 19.

One such initiative was the Rs. 50 lakh donation made to the Covid 19 Health and Social Security fund last week.

The company has launched another initiative to motivate all state sector employees on the frontlines of the battle against Covid-19.

Viru Abhiman - a free financial cover for the families of the State sector employees actively involved in combatting Covid-19. The cover is extended in the unfortunate event

of employee's loss of life due to Covid-19 within this year.

The cover covers all healthcare employees in the state sector (eg: Health Ministry officials, doctors, nurses, attendants, drivers, minor workers, Public Health Inspectors and Regional Health Officials), Members of the Armed Forces, Police and Civil Defence Force, staff of the Divisional Secretariats including field officers, District Secretariats and the Postal Department.

This is the first cover in Sri Lanka offered free for those in the front line ensuring the safety of our people.



From left: Chairman SLIC, Jagath Wellawatte with Directors Anil Kumara Meegahage and Ms. Surekha Alles at the media briefing.

## Dankotuwa Porcelain unveils steam inhalers

Dankotuwa Porcelain PLC has introduced a steam inhaler which is ideal for individuals affected by respiratory tract infections.

Designed by Dr. Charith Nanayakkara, this modified steam inhaling device will be made available at hospitals and quarantine centers currently providing medical care for patients affected by the Coronavirus Disease.

The Dankotuwa steam inhaler is easy to use and can be used in homes to prevent multiple respiratory tract related conditions. It is also noteworthy that this product is a modified version of the existing steam apparatus called the Nissen Steamer which is considered outdated but is currently being used by hospitals, a company spokesman said.

Dr. Charith Nanayakkara, a lecturer at the Department of Surgery at the Kotalawela Defence University said, "As a Doctor in the Neuro-surgical field I come across a lot of patients with headaches due to sinusitis.

I have personally used steaming as a treatment method in these patients and have witnessed how powerful it is.

I will soon publish an article with my data and experience with steam in such patients so that the 'scientific community' will receive statistical data to value and appreciate the science behind this technique.

It is a technique that is extremely simple and can be used even in the most underprivileged/non-medical setup."



Dankotuwa steam inhalers

## Microimage unveils MiHCM for Microsoft Team

MiHCM has released MiHCM HR for Microsoft Teams to empower companies to manage their remote workforce.

The company also extended the features of its cloud-based Digital HR platform to enable MiHCM users to manage their day-to-day HR operations more conveniently.

MiHCM HR for Microsoft Teams will allow companies to manage their human resource operations with check-in/out facilities, leave applications, preview payslips, submit timesheets and leave balance checking. Employees will be able to escalate a range of service requests to the HR department, such as requesting letters, documents, infrastructure or reporting work related issues.

The company is offering MiHCM HR for Microsoft Teams app free to its existing SMB clients who use Microsoft Teams applications during the COVID-19 pandemic period while charging a nominal fee for corporate and enterprise clients.

"With the majority of the global workforce, now working remotely there will be increased use of collaborative tools to ensure productivity and employee engagement. Our purpose with MiHCM HR for Microsoft Teams and our new feature enhancements for MiHCM for SMB and Enterprise variants is to support companies to manage their remote workforce seamlessly with all the essential HR tools," said Founder/CEO of MiHCM, Harsha Purasinghe. Country Manager, Microsoft



Sri Lanka and the Maldives, Hasitha Abeywardena said, "The technology transformation occurring in human resources around the world is having a

broad impact on businesses, people, processes and industry."

## Nations Trust Bank deploys mobile ATMs

Nations Trust Bank has deployed mobile ATM services to many areas in the Western Province.

This initiative will help customers to meet their primary banking needs as well as sign up for the Nations Mobile Banking and internet banking services without having to travel too far away from home.

The Nations Mobile ATMs are travelling to central areas covering many populated areas including apartment complexes to provide this essential service between 9.30 a.m. and 6.00 p.m. daily. The Service can be used by customers of Nations Trust Bank and customers of any other local bank whose network is supported by Lanka-Pay or foreign bank ATM cards to withdraw cash up to Rs. 100,000.

A unique feature introduced by Nations Trust enables anyone to obtain a live location update of the Mobile



ATM during its time of operations. This link is published daily on the Nations Trust Bank Facebook page. This is yet another, digitally enhanced facility, which is a first in the market by Nations Trust Bank.

Deputy Chief Executive Officer at

Nations Trust Bank, Hemantha Gunetilleke said, "The well-being of our customers, colleagues and the general public are of utmost importance to us during this global pandemic. Access to cash is important when people are confined to their homes. Owing to

that, we have mobilised the Nations Mobile ATM service enabled with a live link for location updates. This would help our customers to conveniently track and locate the exact location of the vehicle and reduce time spent in waiting."

## Exchange Rates

(Week ended April 9, 2020)  
In the Forex market, the USD/LKR rate on spot contracts appreciated on Friday to a high of Rs.190.00 against its week's low of Rs.199.75.

The daily USD/LKR average traded volume for the first two days of the week stood at US \$ 103.25 million.

### The Government Securities Market

The shortened trading week ending April 9, 2020 saw the weighted average yield on the market favourite 364 day bill declining sharply once again to hit over a four year low of 7.00%, while accumulating a total drop of 148 basis points over the past five weeks.

The primary Treasury bond auctions conducted during the week reflected bullish outcomes as well with maturities of 01.09.23, 15.09.24 & 15.10.27 recording impressive weighted averages of 8.50%, 8.70% and 8.90%.

This intern kept the secondary bond market bullish during the week as the yield curve recorded a parallel shift downward week on week, which was given a further boost by the possible US \$ 1,400 million in SWAP lines from India and China.

The yields on the liquid maturities of 01.05.21, 01.10.22, 2023's (i.e. 15.07.23, 01.09.23 &

15.12.23), 2024's (i.e. 15.03.24 & 15.09.24) and 15.10.27 were seen declining to intraweek lows of 7.85%, 8.55%, 8.90%, 8.85%, 9.00%, 8.98%, 9.00% and 9.35% respectively against its previous weeks closing levels of 8.00/25, 8.80/85, 9.15/20, 9.20/28, 9.30/35, 9.35/40, 9.33/40 and 9.55/70.

The shortened trading week commencing April 15 will see Rs.30 billion on offer at the weekly Treasury bill auction, consisting of Rs.7 billion of the 91 day maturity, Rs.10 billion of the 182 day maturity and further Rs.13 billion of the 364-day maturity. At last week's auction, the weighted average yields plunged on the 182 day and 364-day maturities to 6.80% and 7.00% respectively. All bids received on the 91-day Bill were rejected.

In money markets, overnight call money and repo rates averaged at 6.50% and 6.59% respectively for the week as the DOD (Domestic operations Department) of Central Bank injected liquidity during the week by way of 7 day, 88 day and 89 day reverse repo auctions at weighted average yields ranging from of 6.39% to 6.60%.

References: Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Bloomberg E-Bond trading platform, Money broking companies



# SPECTRUM

features.suo@lakehouse.lk / Tel: 011 2 429 429, 011 2 429 228 / Fax: 011 2 429 227

APRIL 12, 2020

## AVURUDU DURING COVID:



# Recalibrating real fears and vague rituals



BY ARJUNA SENEVIRATNE

As we move deeper into the month of April and must, almost automatically, consider its traditional song and dance, our thoughts are collectively overshadowed by this other consideration. Both, in the minds of many have to do with the unseen, the unknown and the frightening. On the one hand, we want to engage in activities we normally won't be doing like cracking out the crackers, lighting weird shaped lamps, beating drums and engaging with family members and strangers in weird, ritualistic ways wearing new, bright clothes all to ward off the unseen inimical lurking behind Pisces and Aries and invite benevolents waving from behind the sun and the moon. On the other, we are told to engage in activities we normally wouldn't want to like staying indoors, staying away from the fridge, staying close to hot drinks, washing hands, engaging with family members and strangers in weird, ritualistic ways wearing masks or space suits or both, all to ward off some unseen inimical lurking in the throat of one's best friend or watching one with vicious anticipation from one's spouse's car bonnet. As we move deeper into the month of April we must, almost necessarily, consider its traditional song and dance, this time glorified twice over by two entirely different but superbly complimentary and congruent set of unknowns and vagaries.

The key here is unknown and vague. Very few know that Avurudu is a harvest celebration and not a Buddhist or Hindu religious ritual. Most think it is the Sri Lankan version of the bacchanalian. A booze fest disguised as a fashion pageant. Few thought quarantine was a form of voluntary self-denial of bad habits until the authorities literally had to point a gun and say "quar-

antine is not valentine" and put everyone under enforced house arrest.

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

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

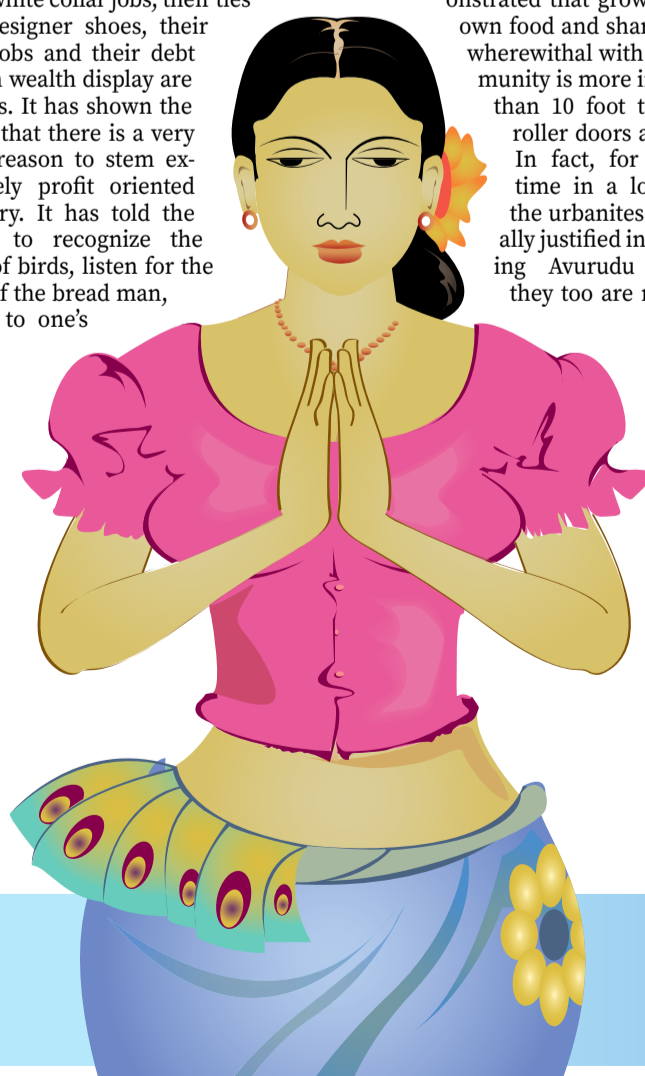
Regardless of how dumb our urban population is, COVID-19 has done something that other world threaten-

ing crises such as the food crisis, the energy crisis, the climate crisis, the environment crisis, the conflict crisis and the religious crisis tried hard to do but never actually got any global traction.

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

It has proven to the urbanites that their white collar jobs, their ties and designer shoes, their desk jobs and their debt ridden wealth display are useless. It has shown the world that there is a very good reason to stem exclusively profit oriented industry. It has told the world to recognize the song of birds, listen for the tune of the bread man, speak to one's

neighbours, engage in family activities. It has actually made people aware that the simpler life removed from the complications of competition, gain, fame and pleasure is actually a great way of being. It has proved to the urbanites the truth of the fact that health is indeed the greatest profit and happiness, the greatest wealth. It has demonstrated that growing one's own food and sharing one's wherewithal with the community is more important than 10 foot tall walls, roller doors and SUVs. In fact, for the first time in a long time, the urbanites are actually justified in celebrating Avurudu because they too are now soci-



“

VERY FEW KNOW THAT THE VENETIANS FORCED SHIPS TO STAY ISOLATED OUTSIDE PORT FOR 40 DAYS (QUARANTINA) DURING THE BLACK DEATH OR BUBONIC PLAGUE OF THE 14TH CENTURY THAT ALSO ORIGINATED IN CHINA AND ATTACKED ITALY FIRST AMONG THE EUROPEANS BEFORE DECIMATING A THIRD OF ITS POPULATION.

etally engaged and agriculturally enabled.

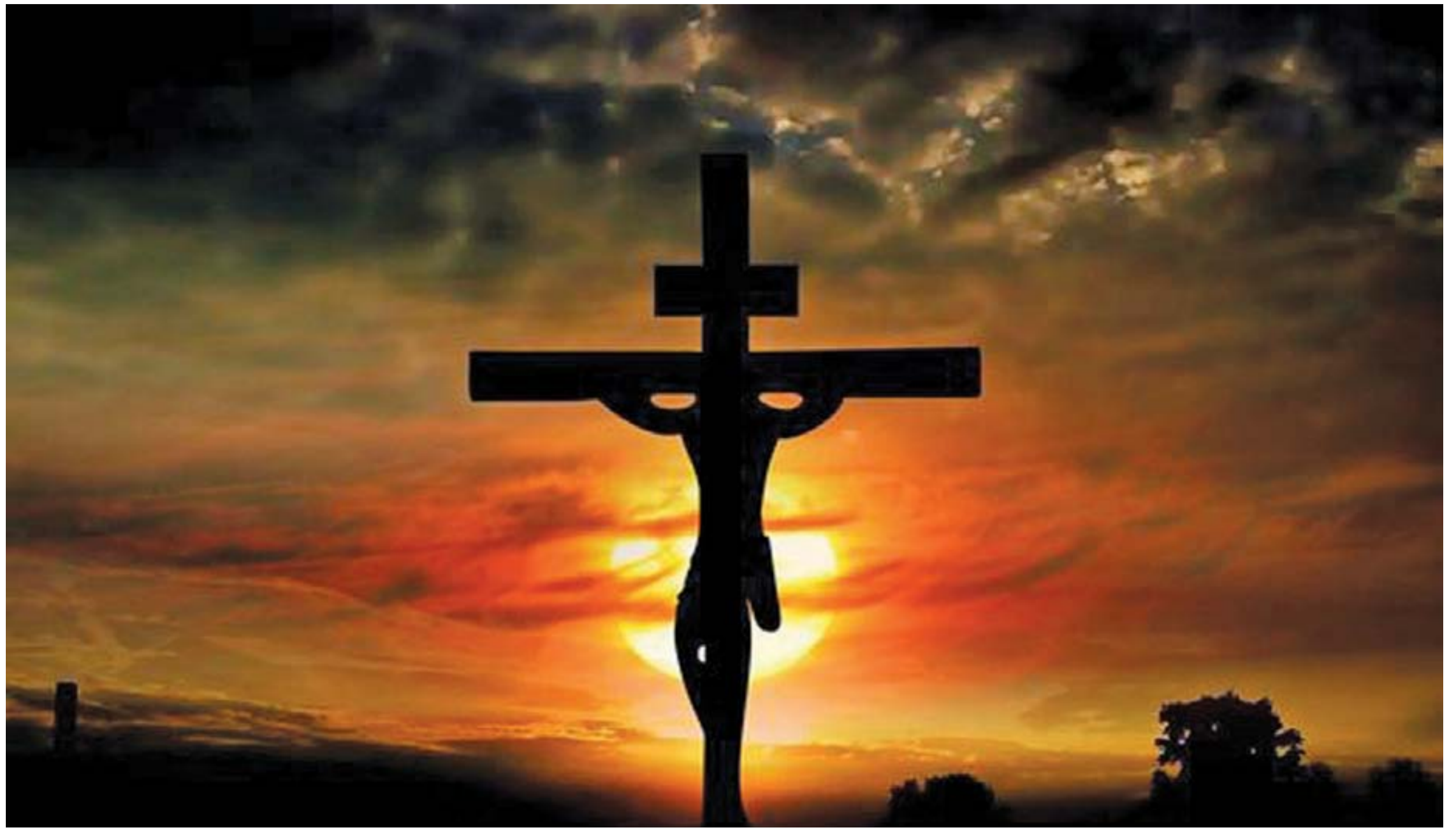
They, in fact, have reason to, "thank whatever determinants, dynamics, deities, defences, deployments, displacements, devices, dogmas and dodges for the fact that we are still alive".

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

astigmatism, let us be thankful that as a collective, either through force or

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

Avurudu is ultimately a celebration of renewal. COVID19 has sloshed a big bucket of deep cleanser over our urban population. We have been washed cleaner if not completely free of social sickness. It is truly a time to celebrate.



## Significance of Easter 2020:

# Christians celebrate Resurrection of Christ in home confines

BY CAROL ALOYSIUS

**A**s Christians throughout the island celebrate the resurrection of Christ in the confines of their homes today, amid fears and anxieties of the COVID-19 that has spread to every district, town and village, many confess their only hope lies in the assurance that the risen Christ will see them through this crisis as He has done to all those who believe in Him, in the past.

The Sunday Observer asked the Superintendent of the Methodist Church, Rev. Ebenezer Joseph to share his views on what it means to celebrate Easter in the confines of their homes instead of in church as they usually do on this joyous day.

Following is Rev. Ebenezer Joseph's message :

### Becoming living symbols of the Easter hope

Two consecutive Easter day celebrations in Sri Lanka have been marred by fear and insecurity. The Bombs that ripped through the churches, disrupting the Easter day services in the year 2019 and the coronavirus that is preventing people from gathering in churches to celebrate Easter this year, both due to fear and insecurity, are two sides of the same coin. The fear of death, anxiety, perplexity, loneliness, isolation, fear and suspicion of the unknown have overshadowed the celebration of the hope that Easter brings in successive years.

The first Easter event, the resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ, took place in similar circumstances. The disciples lived in isolation from society gripped with fear and anxiety in closed rooms, not knowing what to do and what steps to take. They were an isolated bunch of individuals. It is to them that the risen Lord appears with words of comfort and hope, 'Fear Not

and 'peace be unto you'.

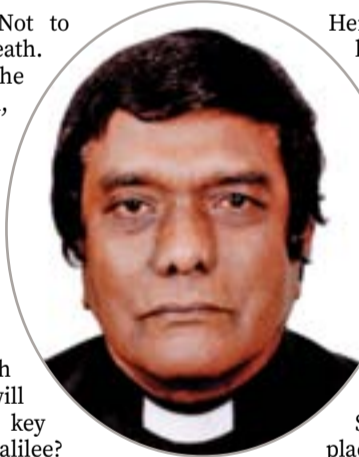
At this crucial moment in our own context, it is important for us to remember that the first Easter event did not take place in a church or in sacred altars. It took place amid concrete social realities of fear, anxiety, loneliness and uncertainty. The Risen Lord met such people in their own social locations of uncertainty. It is there that Hope blooms. It is in concrete social circumstances that hope is proclaimed, revitalizing people to become vehicles of hope.

The Lukan account of the resurrection is very interesting. Two men in dazzling clothes appear to the women who were standing near the tomb, the symbol of death and destruction, and said, "Why do you look for the living among the dead, He is not here, but has risen. Remember how He told you, while He was still in Galilee..." [Lk 24: 6]. The beckoning call was to move beyond the tomb, the symbol of death

and separation. Not to seek life amidst death. Move beyond the symbols of death, recapture the symbols of Life. Secondly and most interestingly, the women are reminded of what Jesus said in Galilee, that He will meet His violent death on the cross but will rise again. The key question is, Why Galilee?

Galilee-symbolically the corona epicentre of Palestine during Jesus's time

Galilee at the time of Jesus was the most poverty-stricken part of Palestine. The people were poor peasants immersed in poverty and at the same time harassed and oppressed by the



Herodian rulers. The people lived in fear and anxiety not knowing what the next day holds for them. Galilee was the place where excommunicated criminals and prostitutes from all over Palestine were sent, including the Holy city of Jerusalem. It was the place where sorcery and demonic manifestation was rampant. Strangely, it was also the place where all lepers were forced to withdraw so that other towns may not be infected or contaminated by the disease. Even religiously, Galilee was a despised and God forsaken place where death and fear ruled the hearts of people. Symbolically, Galilee was the corona epicentre of Palestine, during the time of Jesus.

It was in such a social location that, Jesus predicted His violent death but affirmed that He will rise again, giving hope to a people gripped with fear and death. Now he stands as the risen one, giving that assurance and hope that we will all rise again, and for us to move on holding onto the symbol of life and peace. According to St. Matthew, the disciples are exhorted to move to Galilee in order to encounter the Risen saviour.

The first Easter message is more than relevant to us, amidst the context in which we live today. We are faced with death, agony, suffering, fear of contamination and isolation. We may be having our own 'Galilean' experience within and around us. Easter calls to look beyond the existential realities with hope and hold on to the assurance that life will triumph.

Our celebration of Easter today, confined to our homes and amidst so many uncertainties makes it more rel-

evant and appropriate to the first Easter event. The message of hope, the affirmation of peace, the removal of fear invades our homes, through the risen saviour. We encounter the risen saviour in our own 'Galilees' of life. More than ever we celebrate this great event of hope amidst our families, our neighbours, within the communities where we live and not confined to the walls of church buildings.

It is a rare opportunity not only to recapture the real essence of Easter but to experience the message of hope in a very significant way. It will truly enable us to move beyond the tomb and to seek the abundant life. It is an occasion to celebrate not with outward tamahas but to celebrate by becoming living symbols of hope, removing the pain, suffering and the fears of our people and being vehicles of peace, harmony and welfare of all.

What a glorious opportunity to live out our Easter experience of hope!!

## Avurudu in the time of Covid-19

BY MALINDA SENEVIRATNE

**I**t is a harvest festival, agreed. Source, however, is not the only giver of meaning. 'Avurudu' or rather the 'Aluth Avurudda' has acquired a lot of meaning over centuries of celebration to the point that 'harvest' is rarely referenced. Planetary movement and crop cycles notwithstanding 'Avurudu' is THE national festival to the extent that any such thing can happen in this country. It is celebrated, after all, but almost 90% of the population and across the length and breadth of the island to boot.

Avurudu in a typical year turns Colombo into a desert. Simply, it's the one time of the year when people go home. 'Home' as in 'village'. It's a family matter. Extended family, really. It's the time when people apply for the biggest slice of 'annual leave'. The city stops. Life keeps beating. Elsewhere. It's shopping time in Sri Lanka.

Clothes for the family, gifts for the near and dear, sweetmeats for the neighbors. Well, not this year.

Being sequestered doesn't really make for a grand celebration. No shopping. No avurudu uthsava. No avurudu races, cycles or on foot.

And yet, let me repeat, there's no celebration that can even come close to Avurudu, here in Sri Lanka. In fact as far as culture goes there is probably nothing that can be claimed to have anything close to this in terms of level of ingraining in consciousness. Apart from Buddhism, of course. That however is more ethereal. 'Avurudu' is more corporeal. Felt.

[The Government has laid down rules on account of the Covid-19 threat that makes this years avurudu untenable. We can't celebrate the way we did. Now some well-meaning (or pernicious) set of civil society activists might have found this reason enough to raise a whine if the perceived 'victim' happened to be any community other than Sinhalese or



Buddhists, but that won't happen. Simply, the Sinhala Buddhists are not complaining. Even if they did, it is highly doubtful that civil (sic) society (sic) would be bothered. That's the politics of the rent-a-signature worthies in this island.]

The above was written parenthetically. Contexts should not be footnoted. Duplicity should not go uncom-

mented. The reality is that we can't take the threat of infection lightly. Self-discipline is a must. We have to keep indoors and limit interaction with the rest of the world. Social distancing is the order of the day. For now and until who knows when!

Does this mean that this would be an avurudu-less year? Certainly not.

Let's get to the basics as far as the Sinhala Buddhist community is concerned. We cease all activity at an auspicious moment and spend the time in religious activities. We light the hearth at an auspicious moment, partake of the first meal at another auspicious moment. We are together as a family.

What's beautiful is that in almost every household in the country (yes, almost 90%), someone would strike a match at the exact same moment. There will be milk rice being cooked. Someone, typically the eldest in the household, would feed a bit of Kiribati to each member of the family.

Together. Smiles. Feeling blessed. Socially distanced solidarity, one might call it. That's how it has always been and that we will surely have this year too, regardless of the obvious deprivations.

No kavum, but there could be plantains. Not ganudenu at a bank, but someone somewhere will toss a coin into a well and draw a bucket of water. There will be a give and a take

in return. Water a chillie plant, pluck a green chillie. Leave some food for a squirrel and enjoy the arrival of the creature. Something for the ants and delight in the orderly gathering of that species. Call a friend or an elderly relative; receive a text message. Here's one to share:

Sabbitiyo vivajjantu, sabba-rogo vinassatu; mā te bhavavantarāyo, sukhi digh'āyuko bhava.

(May all distresses be averted, may every disease be destroyed, may there be no dangers for you [and] may you be happy and live long).

And perhaps more pertinent for this particular aluth avuruddha:

Sabba-roga-vinimutto, sabba-santāpa-vajjito, sabba-veram-atikkanto, nibbuto ca tuva bhava.

(May you be freed from all disease, safe from all torment, beyond all animosity and unbound).

Now that would be harvest and thanksgiving too. A complete and wholesome aluth avuruddha, in fact. [malindasenevi@gmail.com](mailto:malindasenevi@gmail.com)

# Traditional Chinese Martial Arts

## The Real Kung Fu Hustle



BY BHANU WIJESINGHE

**T**raditional Chinese Martial arts or as it is more commonly known, Kung Fu, does not refer to any one martial art but to several hundreds of them developed over the course of China's robust history spanning multiple centuries. Though collectively known as Kung Fu, a word meaning a skill learned or practised, they are also known as Wushu, literally martial art and Quanfa, literally fist method or law of the fist. Though these words are used to describe only Chinese martial arts, Japanese and Korean martial arts also tend to fall into this category as they are relatively indistinguishable from

one another in the eyes of the west. While they share origins in self-defence; by choice or by being outdated, the uses for traditional martial arts have since far outgrown that purpose.

With a history as deep and rich as China itself, traditional martial arts are an irreplaceable part of Chinese culture and it perfectly captures the discipline and wisdom cultivated across centuries but while the stereotype that all Chinese know Kung Fu is unequivocally false, that heritage has a unique effect on the lifestyles of every Chinese citizen.

However, as can be expected from such an ancient civilization, its exact history hasn't been reliably documented and what records do exist can reasonably be expected to embellish events. What we can tell however, is that the Chinese developed martial arts out of a necessity to survive the violent hostile environments of ancient China. Predictably, hundreds of martial arts came into being with wildly different styles, beliefs and effectiveness and in a bid to achieve dominance, unbelievable tales of superhuman feats were woven and spread, giving these rivaling schools of fighting a mythic feel.

In modern times, martial arts became optional and in turn what was once a form of self-defence adapted with the times, became a sport or performance art, relying on its centuries old history to attract students and maintain respect. Martial arts became a form of soft power for China much like K-Pop was for South Korea and anime for Japan, granting the nation global influence.

This aspect of Kung Fu has not only been noticed by the Chinese Government, but actively and enthusiastically promoted, even now funding the construction of thousands of new schools all over the country in just the past five years. The most popular of these schools of martial arts include household names such as Shaolin Kung Fu, Tai Chi and Wing Chun.

The explosive popularity Kung Fu movies and Wuxia tales have, simultaneously been both a great boon and bane to Chinese Martial Arts.

Movies starring martial art actors like Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan spread the word of Kung Fu to foreign territories like wildfire and inspired interest in newer generations to come. However, the greatly romanticized representations and depictions of inhuman skill gave false expectations of what they were meant to be. Students would come to learn, expecting to leap hundreds of feet while dismantling hordes of opponents with their bare hands, only to be treated to days of practice and meditation to achieve the most basic of techniques.

In recent times, China has taken a most unusual stance, expressing the indisputable strength and superiority of their traditional martial arts over all else. This has led to a string of matches between martial art masters and more practical combat oriented fighting forms.

These fights have proven to be both highly publicized and humiliating, with MMA fighters beating masters into the ground in a matter of seconds. Fight after fight, the credibility of traditional martial arts as a form of self defence took quite the beating. While for many people globally this trend disillusioned them to the virtues of Kung Fu, China itself doubled down, insisting on its perfection and making ridiculous excuses on why those fights went down the way they did and unjustly punishing the true fighters who brought this truth to light, like MMA fighter Xu Xiaodong who had his social credit score lowered and humiliated by both the nation and its people.

This isn't to say there is no merit for traditional Chinese martial arts. Some martial artists have adapted their respective styles to adopt proven combat effective techniques to create a more practical form of their art, but these forward-thinking practitioners are a rare breed. However, while its use for combat may be questionable, its purpose as a tool for physical and spiritual betterment is unquestioned and its link and contributions to Chinese philosophy is significant. Practising these disciplines is undeniably beneficial to both your body and mind but it will not do to be blind to its faults.



## Challenging the status quo and empowering women in her community

**W**e all have the power to change things. We're all responsible for building a more just and equitable world and in 2020 challenging the stereotypes and being #EachforEqual is what International Women's Day reminds us. Here's a story of someone breaking barriers, changing perceptions, and transforming lives.

Women account for the majority of the global tourism workforce but tend to work in low-paying, informal and low-status positions. But Lathika Lakmali is an impressive woman who challenges the status-quo - while defying cultural boundaries and social norms - to lead and make a name for herself as a Surf Instructor and harnessing tourism as a tool for empowering women in her community.

Traditionally, especially in conservative localities such as Arugambay, women are expected to assume the role of a daughter, sister, wife, mother and care giver. Although Arugambay continues to grow as one of the popular surfing hubs in the East of Sri Lanka, there exist many misguided perceptions with regard to surfing and the tourism industry as a whole. Villagers hold the stereotypical impression that surfers are skimpily clad and party hard bringing disrespect to traditional values. It was acceptable for tourists to indulge in the sport, but it definitely didn't fit with the community's beliefs on what a career was supposed to be and definitely didn't fit with the role of a woman who is traditionally limited to the activities in the domestic sphere.

However, Lakmali and her husband, the President of the Arugambay Surf Club and one of the 28 ISA certified coaches in Arugambay recognize the opportunities for growth in the industry. And what began as a hobby



displayed a possibility of turning into a career, especially with the increase in solo female travellers or women being more comfortable learning how to surf from other women. They believe they can find a balance with their personal life, the professional life and their interest in surfing in Arugambay. They realized how women were often uncomfortable taking lessons from male instructors. Yet, offering services without a formal licence to international

travellers remained a concern as tourists want to be sure they will be safe in the water and be able to really learn how to surf a wave from an expert.

A pathway for informal surfers to be formally recognized by the industry with S4IG support

To address this concern, the Skills for Inclusive Growth (S4IG) program funded by the Australian Government's Aid program in partnership with the Ministry of Skills Develop-



ment, Employment and Labour Relations extended support towards managing visitor expectations by offering tailored programs to strengthen local Surf Clubs to manage and improve their service standards.

It allowed Lakmali to confidently march on and be recognized as an instructor doing something she loves. She can still support her family and support her community and earn an income from her business - surfing. Such initiatives by S4IG encourage more women to enter the tourism industry, seek income opportunities and mentor the next generation of female leaders.

It also created a pathway for informal surfers to become internationally recognized, and for more women in the area to consider not only pursuing surfing as a career but to simply be brave enough to indulge in the joy of

surfing. Since her participation in the program by S4IG and licensing as an instructor, the Arugambay Surf Club has seen an increase in membership and interest by girls. Tourism gives women many opportunities that allow a blending of roles and responsibilities. Enabling women to engage in paid employment in many different ways and pursue the things they enjoy.

### Inspiring generations of surfer girls

For Lakmali, surfing has now become a family affair. She often takes her daughter - aged 6 - with her when she surfs and her husband who is also an ardent surf lover and an S4IG participant as well. He is extremely proud of his wife pursuing her passion and celebrates her success - a truly mod-



ern Sri Lankan family. She proves that women can offer something new and exciting to a traditionally male-dominated industry and experience.

She has inspired an entire generation of girls who dream of riding waves of their own one day in the future in surfing and other pursuits. Lakmali aims to extend personalized and deeper travel experiences via female surf lessons that showcase the potential for a career professionally. She is a fine example that women are more than capable of building a new business ecosystem around women in tourism while defying cultural norms and the traditional labour market.

Along with her supportive husband, she plays a strong role in mentoring the next generation of females, like her own daughter, and in the process, is actually changing the face of tourism in Arugambay for the better.

Feature

# Poetry is mind based not heart based

- ARIYAWANSHA RANAWEERA

BY RAVINDRA WIJEWARDHANE

Veteran Sinhala poet Ariyawansa Ranaweera is now launching three new Sinhala books on Sinhala poetry. They are 'විසිරි මිනි' (Visiri Mini - Collection of Haiku poems translated into Sinhala), 'හදා බස සහ වෙනත් ලිපි' (Hada Basa and Other writings) and 'කවි ලකුණු' (Signs of Poetry). Though the launching ceremony of these books was postponed due to the unexpected coronavirus outbreak, the books published by the Ahasa Books will soon be available for the public. The Sunday Observer spoke to Ariyawansa Ranaweera to discuss about his books and the current issues of Sinhala poetry.

Excerpts:

**Q. How do you introduce these books?**

A. The first book, 'විසිරි මිනි' (Visiri Mini) is a compilation of Japanese Haiku poetry which I translated into Sinhala, and it's a standard edition of all the Haiku poems. The other two books, 'හදා බස සහ වෙනත් ලිපි' (Hada Basa and Other writings) and 'කවි ලකුණු' (Signs of Poetry) are critical writings that deal with various aspects of Sinhala literature. I think these books are useful to the reader as they are relevant to the present day situation in poetry.

**Q. Hada Basa concept of the Sinhala poetry was presented by veteran poet Dr. Gunadasa Amarasekara. How do you see this concept?**

A. Through the Hada Basa concept or theory Amarasekara describes the nature of the Sinhala poetry. He suggests that one must resort to the Sinhala classical poetry when composing poetry. He says one should use the language of classical poetry or its set of words, and not the present colloquial language. Hence, he does not favour the common language. His argument is that poetry should speak to someone's heart, not to his brain. Poetry emanates from the heart, but the language that we use, should correspond to that particular aspect.

There is another matter he brings up in his Hada Basa theory. It is Shaun Paul Sartre's statement where he says poetry is not a committed literature, there is no ulterior usage. In that respect Amarasekara says words of poetry in themselves have no inherent meaning. So, in my book, Hada Basa and Other writings, I'm trying to answer, or rather counter his theory by taking point by point. My opinion is, poetry is mind based, not heart based as he says.

**Q. You say Dr. Gunadasa Amarasekara is against the common language. But he uses the common language in his poetry?**

A. That is the one thing I have highlighted in my book. Indeed, he uses so many colloquial words in his poetry. I have listed out some of the colloquial words he has used.

**Q. In my view, Amarasekara does not reject the present colloquial language when composing poetry. He says there are fixed meanings for some of the words in the classical**

**Sinhala poetry and that we should use them in poetry to speak to the heart of the reader?**

A. No. He says classical poets have indicated the type of words that should be used in composing Sinhala poetry; you must not deviate from them; you must always use those words only in the poetry.

**Q. Is this an acceptable argument?**

A. No. Because without the common language we cannot compose poetry in any language.

**Q. If the Hada Basa theory is so simple as you point out, why did Amarasekara bring it forward in such a serious way?**

A. I cannot understand it either.

Of course, we appreciate his book, Sinhala Kawya Sampradaya (Tradition of Sinhala Poetry) which presents this new Hada Basa theory, because he was bold enough to come forward with such a theory. However, nobody can justify his argument.

**Q. Though Dr. Amarasekara says poetic language is derived from the classical literature or Sandesha Kawya, it is actually an invented language or created language. Isn't it?**

A. Absolutely. Poetic language or Hada Basa is a created language, an invented language. It is derived from the language that we have. Therefore, we have no authority to abolish or reject the particular kinds of words when composing poetry. Every word is important, and depends on what you wish to express. If a colloquial word is proper to express a particular feeling, it is ok. And if some classical literature language is appropriate to express

inspiration, that is ok. You cannot discriminate words saying these are suitable and these are not.

**Q. In your other book - Signs of Poetry - there is a long article called 'පැස්ටර්නැක්ගේ 'ඩොක්ටර් ෂිවගෝ' ('Pasternak's Doctor Shivago)?**

A. Yes. I have called that article 'කවියකුගේ නවකතාව' (Novel of a poet). I consider 'Doctor Shivago' by Pasternak as one of the best novels in the 20th century. After the Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Maxim Gorky novels I don't think there is an epic novel



**ABSOLUTELY. POETIC LANGUAGE OR HADA BASA IS A CREATED LANGUAGE, AN INVENTED LANGUAGE. IT IS DERIVED FROM THE LANGUAGE THAT WE HAVE. THEREFORE, WE HAVE NO AUTHORITY TO ABOLISH OR REJECT THE PARTICULAR KINDS OF WORDS WHEN COMPOSING POETRY. EVERY WORD IS IMPORTANT, AND DEPENDS ON WHAT YOU WISH TO EXPRESS.**

like 'Doctor Shivago' in any language. It is the only novel that Pasternak has written. Anyhow, in my article I present poetic elements that have been used in this novel, which is why I call it 'කවියකුගේ නවකතාව' (Novel of a poet).

**Q. There is another article in this book, called 'අසංගත කවි' or Nonsense poetry. What is that poetry? To my knowledge this is the first time that an article about this type of poetry comes into the Sinhala language. What do you mean by Nonsense poetry?**

A. You can call it 'විකාර කවි', but the better word is 'අසංගත කවි'. You shouldn't misinterpret Nonsense poetry as No sense poetry ('විකාර කවි'). Nonsense and No sense are two different things. But here Nonsense means this poetry is something beyond any sensuous appreciation. In other words using the words beyond or above the given sense. There are certain folk poetry similar to Nonsense poetry. I have given those examples in this book. And there is another nonsense type of poem in this book, called 'පාරම' කවි, written by me. Hence, through this article of 'අසංගත කවි' I try to point out some similarities between our folk poetry and Nonsense poetry.

**Q. When we talk about your own poetry, people call them short poems?**

A. I think it's a wrong notion. This 'short' introduction means that what matters in poetry is the number of words you use, which is not correct. And, if you go through my collected volumes of poetry you will encounter a number of long poems. So, it is not correct to introduce me as someone writing short poems.

Generally, a good poem is a combination of three factors. They are brevity, rhythm and thematic depth.

**Q. What do you mean by brevity?**

A. Brevity means සංකීර්ණභාවය or using only appropriate words. When you analyse the word සංකීර්ණභාවය, it is made up of two words as සං and කීර්ණ.

**Q. What is කීර්ණ?**

A. It means to reject. ජර්නිකමිඡන means to completely reject. So සංකීර්ණ or brevity means using only required words to suit your inspiration.

Hence, whether a poem has 100 words or 20 words, it doesn't matter. What matters is using only the required words.

The second factor of a good poem is rhythm. But rhythm is not the meter or ටීස. Meter can be a means to get the rhythm, but it is not always so. If there are correct words in the correct place, you can get the rhythm in a poem. Correct words in the correct place is Wordsworth's word.

Finally a poem throws some light into life. When you read a good poem it reverberates inside you. There is some life's experience in the particular poem. That is what we call thematic depth. In writing poetry I am trying to adhere to these principles.

**Q. After the Mahagama Sekara's poetry movement we see many imitators in Sinhala poetry. But in your poetic movement we don't see such followers or imitators. Why?**

A. It's a difficult question to answer. In my case, I don't have an icon or peer that should be followed or imitated. A psychologist, like Carl Jung - he is Sigmund Freud's friend and his rival - although Jung analyses so many mental status and mental phenomena, he just couldn't say from where the poetry comes. He said it's a mystery for him.

So, if Carl Jung couldn't say about that, how could others say about that? However, If some aspiring poet listens to himself and his inspiration he won't need to imitate anyone. I write my poetry, whenever I get the inspiration. So, naturally there is no way for me to imitate. And also there is some inherent danger in it. There can be inspiration through a long time imitation. So, no aspiring writer or poet imitates anyone.

# MONTAGE

features.suo@lakehouse.lk / Tel: 011 2 429 429, 011 2 429 228 / Fax: 0112 429 227

APRIL 12, 2020



WHAT I DISPLAYED AT KALAPOLA WAS PURELY MY EXPRESSIVE WORK WHICH WAS ALSO EXPERIMENTAL. SOME TREES HAD BEEN CUT DOWN AT A CONSTRUCTION SITE AND I SAW PARTS OF THE TRUNKS LYING AROUND AND I COULD SEE THAT THEY WERE SUITABLE FOR ARTISTIC CREATIONS. SO I COLLECTED THEM AND WAITED FOR A WHILE TO GATHER THE TOOLS REQUIRED FOR WOOD CARVING. ONCE I HAD THE TOOLS I TRIED OUT THESE SCULPTURES WHICH WERE DIRECTLY INSPIRED BY NATURE.



## Carving a niche:

BY ASELA ABEYWARDENA

It was a Facebook post of Kalapola 2020 which drew my attention to the wood carvings. Numerous pictures and posts were being shared by many painters and sculptors but these particular wooden wonders caught my eye because of their uniqueness. There was something primordial about the style: as if the works have emerged from a faraway forest tribe. The sculptures were reminiscent of fairytales and old ways. I was intrigued and decided to contact the artist.

As with most artists, Mahesh Jayawardene too has been artistically inclined even as a child. He says his artistic journey took a crucial turn when he got to learn A/L from Mr. Sarath Weerasinghe.

'I would not be this artist if not for my art teacher. It was he who gave me exposure to sculpting and many other methods in addition to what the school syllabus dictated.' After A/Ls Mahesh had entered the University of Visual and Performance Arts and had specialized in sculpture for his undergraduate studies.

At present he works as a full time artist and says that even though it could be financially difficult at times, he has no regrets and still prefers the vocation he has chosen to any other. 'I get commissions to do a wide variety of work but I do not consider all of them artistic expressions per se'. He says that he gets to do portraits of well known individuals, statues for religious institutions, garden sculpture as well as plaster and styrofoam carvings for film sets. Mahesh says he is not inclined to do wood carvings often due to

the lack of commissions received for them. Instead he opts for model in clay and cast out of concrete and bronze. 'I was commissioned to do the Wayamba war hero monument as well as a series of monuments for the Panagoda military camp gymnasium. I specialize in figurative work so usually the commissions are also along those lines.' Mahesh says and goes on to explain.

'What I displayed at Kalapola was purely my expressive work which was also experimental. Some trees had been cut down at a construction site and I saw parts of the trunks lying around and I could see that they were suitable for artistic creations. So I collected them and waited for a while to gather the tools required for wood carving. Once I had the tools I tried out these sculptures which were directly inspired by nature. The recent forest fires all over the world had deeply affected me, so I carved and burnt the wood to depict climatic changes and natural disasters which we are facing now. Eventually the sculptures began to look as if they had emerged from the fires of the forests.'

I probed more in to the nature of other expressive art work he has done. 'It is difficult to focus when one has to take commissions to make a living. However, together with some other batch mates I decided to form an anonymous group so that we could do something purely artistic which would enable us to take art to the ordinary people.'

This idea was based on the premise that people are capable of understanding and engaging with art if good art is presented to them. We designed a few activities which would demand participation of the chosen communities in addition to the artist group'

Mahesh and his friends had taken their projects to places such as a fish-

ing harbour in Tangalle, a metal recycling workshop in Malwana and a pine forest in Kandy. He says that at the fishing harbour they spent time in understanding the lives and the sentiments of that particular fishing community and when they did the art project at that location, the community also was actively engaged and could understand and appreciate what the artists were trying to do and say

'At the Malwana iron recycling plant, it was during the aftermath of the Easter Sunday bombings and the community was mainly Muslim so it was not very easy to approach them, initially. We used the discarded and used materials at the plant to create our work and slowly the community gathered to watch what we were doing. There too they joined in after a while and enjoyed the activity with us.'

Another profound experience we had was in Kandy at a pine plantation. The natural forest had been cut down for the pine trees to be planted, and whoever did it had not gauged the adverse environmental impact which the community would be eventually com-

pelled to face. It was a Tamil community and they had no drinking water. The pine trees had absorbed all the ground water and the streams and waterfalls that existed earlier had dried up.

People would go to the kovil to do pooja and perform rituals asking their gods to grant them water. A friend had the idea to recreate a waterfall by using white fabric. The fabric was laid over the rocks of a dried up water fall to create an illusion of a waterfall. It was very sentimental for the community to watch that scene.'

The artistic endeavours had allowed Mahesh and his team of fellow artists to engage and converse with communities which was a rare opportunity which would not have materialised if not for the art project. It is Mahesh's intention to do more work such as this in the future. He says he plans to open up a sculpture studio, academy and an open gallery one day.

Love for nature and oneness with nature runs through Mahesh, his friends and art. As Marc Chagall said Mahesh has proved that 'Great art picks up where nature ends'.

### MAHESH JAYAWARDENE



## David Lynch Predicts a 'More Spiritual, Much Kinder' World After Quarantine Ends

The director is spending his days quarantined in Los Angeles making lamps in his woodshop.



BY ZACK SHARF

David Lynch is choosing to remain hopeful in these dark times. The "Mulholland Drive" and "Twin Peaks" director is quarantining at his home in Los Angeles and told in a new interview he's spending a lot of time working on projects in his woodshop and, not surprisingly, drinking coffee. "My routine is pretty much the same now as it was before," Lynch said. "I get up, and I get a coffee. ... After that, I meditate and then I go to work."

Work for Lynch right now does not relate to film or television projects. The director said he's in the middle of building "two wall sconces—two little lamps."

It involves light bulbs, electricity, polyester resin plastic, and those kinds of things." Electricity is a prevalent motif in Lynch's films, and he's seeing its value more than ever in keeping people connected across the world during their quarantines.

"For some reason, we were going down the wrong path and Mother Nature just said, 'Enough already, we've

got to stop everything,'" Lynch said about the coronavirus outbreak. "This is going to last long enough to lead to some kind of new way of thinking."

Lynch said he is hopeful people around the world will emerge from their quarantines "more spiritual" and "much kinder."

The director continued, "It's going to be a different world on the other side and it's going to be a much more intelligent world. Solutions to these problems are going to come and life's going to be very good. The movies will come back. Everything will spring back and

in a much better way probably."

When asked for advice on what people can do in the meantime as they wait to return to the outside world, Lynch responded, "They can draw, they can paint, they can build small things, they can write lyrics, they can write poems, they can write stories that can later be filmed, they can play games, they can invent games. So many things can happen in a small space, they can invent new recipes and cooking things. It's an opportunity for a bunch of different experiments."

Courtesy: IndieWire

## Features

## ART in CURFEW

**ART in CURFEW** is a series of works created in quarantine by the Saskia Fernando Gallery artists. As Sri Lanka enters day 11 of enforced curfew SFG continues to receive images from inside artist's studios. These works are being created in an enforced quietude and many are a response to the pandemic. SFG will continue to publish these works via their website and social media as artists continue to share them. View them via website : [www.saskiafernandogallery.com](http://www.saskiafernandogallery.com)

Due to the developments of Covid-19 Saskia Fernando Gallery will be continuing scheduled exhibitions online via social media, website and mailing list. The online exhibitions will be installed and on view depending on developments locally.



The sketches titled 'Mythopoetic' are an amalgamation of the movies I rewatched, the albums I play in the background, the beats I make between intervals and my chronic socializing via interwebs due to quarantine and curfews. I would play the anime Akira on mute, crank up some Rei Ami tunes, one eye reading Bukowski quotes and the other looking through my Instagram news feed. All these things are happening while I'm sketching, colouring and cut-pasting magazines.

Muvindu Binoy



The world is full of panic, distress, inequality and hopelessness. I think this is a horrible situation and, for some people, this state-of-being forces them to relive old memories; memories their minds would like to forget. The situation we are all living in now - the constant state of fear, the confinement at home, the long queues to get basic goods - is daily life for many humans all around the world; it's only now that it is affecting everybody. Now when we have enough time to think while safe in our homes we become aware of this. This is the time to understand the pain of those people who suffered and still suffer all around the world before, during and after COVID-19. This pain is inestimable so instead we should all focus on the hope for a better future, not only one without a virus but a future without the social viruses of war, racism, lack of empathy or the disrespect of nature.

Pakkiarajah Pushpakanthan

“

The pieces in the series Cacti 2020 feature abstract renditions of cactus plants that metaphorically represent the two sides of every human being, our tough exterior that protects our soft interior. Just like human beings, each cactus is different and as such bears different characteristics, colours and patterns that are also represented within the artwork.

Hashan Cooray



“

'Fundamenta' means foundation or base in architectural language, through these works I link it to the lack of landmarks/bases today. Drawing disembodied parts of bodies going blind and silently looking for anchorage. A walk along the edges. After I completed this series I broke my ankle.

Fabienne Francotte



## YEN | KINGSLEY GUNATILLAKE | ONLINE EXHIBITION



Until 23.04.20  
Visit : [www.saskiafernandogallery.com/viewing-room/](http://www.saskiafernandogallery.com/viewing-room/)

These paintings mark a return to a subject that sits at the core of Kingsley Gunatillake's oeuvre. Using forms and lines from his live nude studies juxtaposed by the artist's textural, abstract painting technique; these works are homage to his prolific practice. The title hints at the ever present influence of Japanese art and culture on Gunatillake's work and the intimate nature of this comparatively hidden series that the artist chose not to publish to-date. Works feature from as early as 2009 highlighting the importance of the nude study in relation to the artist's widely published abstract painting and book art. The series also observes his influencers: as a student of life drawing under the renowned H.A. Karunaratne and his exposure to the work of Justin Peiris Deriniyagala and George Keyt during this same period.

## The Indelible

Making a sincere attempt to bring an unimagined and unexplored treasure trove of modern Sinhala literature to the English reading community, *Montage* is bringing Mahinda Prasad Masimbula's award winning novel 'Senkottan' translated by Malinda Seneviratne, veteran journalist, writer and poet. 'Senkottan' (The Indelible), a remarkable creation of literature by Mahinda Prasad Masimbula was his debut effort in his literary career for which he won the State Literary Award in 2013 and short-listed in Swarna Pusthaka Literary Awards and many other Literary Award Festivals in the same year. The book has been published by Santhawa Publishers and 'Senkottan' has blazed the trail in the self-publishing industry as one of the best-selling books in Sinhala literature.



## CHAPTER 3, PART 1

Heen Ridee was duly bathed about a week later at an auspicious moment that Santhosahami Gurunnanse had calculated. Although it was decided that a celebration of any kind was unwarranted, a few sweets were prepared just to make the little girl happy. Malma Ridee also gave notice of the date to some of her closest relatives who lived in Bungiriya.

It was Guna Ralahamy who was invited to partake of the food laid out on the small table. This he did and placed three one rupee notes on Teen Ridee's hand. Thereafter, he delivered a very useful speech to those present. The relatives who had come were mesmerized by the speech because it included all manner of information about the land and the times. Tall and well-built, this remarkable man who was attired in a white sarong and shirt and a black coat as well, spoke about the world from memory. It was revealed in his speech that he read the 'Silumina' newspaper. What really caught the attention of the audience was his exposition of a vile man named Hitler in a large country called Germany located beyond the seas. He informed them that Hitler was acquiring power by systematically suppressing innocent peoples who he likened to the humble folk belonging to Veerappuli Henaya's caste. During the course of that arresting speech, Guna Ralahamy pointed out that everyone born on this earth is equal. Even the relatives from Bungiriya went on their knees and worshipped him when he was ready to leave.

Malma Ridee made use of a short interval in the proceedings following lunch to talk about Guna Ralahamy upon the request of her Bungiriya relatives.

"You know, I can't even begin to talk about the friendship between this Guna Ralahamy and my man. You would have noticed how he ate his fill and drank water from one of our glasses without any qualms whatsoever. Would anyone in our clan ever believe that such people actually exist on this earth? I told our man to ask for a place and glass for his use from that house. Do you know what he had to hear when the request was made?"

"Veerappuliyo, now just don't make me angry...it's not as though I will decay and perish if I ate or drank from one of your plates or glasses!"

"The two of them can't last a week without seeing each other. We would get a message asking our man to drop by. And our man, for his part, would respond immediately. There's always buffalo curd there. They won't let him leave until he has lunch and buffalo curd as well. You know, he gets our man to sit on the cushioned seat in the middle of the living room. And then they talk about this and that. He will preach the word of the Buddha much better than any hamuduruwo. Apparently, he has visited the country called Colombo seven times and is not averse to tell off the great D.S. Senanayake right to his face. He has also met Anagarika Dharmapala. This Guna Ralahamy is supposed to be related to a very important and close associate of the great Dharmapala. These are not people we can even approach, leave alone talk with. What is most amazing is that whenever visiting Godakawela, he goes right through our garden. He is a highly learned man who knows the secret of letters. He can even speak the language of the white man. Now it is such a man who partook of milk-rice served on one of our plates and left after giving the girl three rupee notes...!"

Malma Ridee was demonstrating to her relatives what great fortune she had been blessed with. The relatives, for their part, regretted that they did not have the honor of associating such people.

.....  
After the festivities of Heen Ridee's puberty were done Veerappuli Henaya's thoughts returned to the pilgrimage to Anuradhapura. When he had intimated his intention to Guna Ralahamy, he had been duly urged to go ahead with the meritorious journey without any hesitation whatsoever. The enthusiasm of Veerappuli Henaya and Malma Ridee was further enhanced when he described the renovation work on the Ruwanweliseya proceeding under the leadership of the Veda Mahaththaya of Avariwatte.

Once everything was ready for the journey Veerappuli Henaya took Malma Ridee to meet Guna Ralahamy. Having blessed and wished them well, Guna Ralahamy slipped a five rupee note into Veerappuli Henaya's hand and folded his fingers around it. He declined adamantly since Guna Ralahamy had given three rupees at the ceremony to mark Heen Ridee attaining age.

"Just take this Weerappuliyo...is it that you are displeased about some merit accruing to me?"  
That forced them to accept it.

"It's human being you meet, wherever you go. You need doubt or fear nothing. You will meet groups of devotees along the way. Get friendly with a decent group among them. After all, everyone is on a journey to acquire merit. The closest route would be through Kegalle. There are temples everywhere. You can always spend the night in the sermon-hall in one of these temples. You know, I am really proud of you both. Everyone in these villages are like animals in the jungle. They use the castes they have acquired on account of merit accumulated as though it is a sword. Buduhaamuduruwo has never recommended anything like that. According to the word of the Enlightened One all people are equal. Everyone gets hungry. Everyone has to go to the toilet. They feel drowsy. If it's a woman, she needs a man; a man likewise would desire a woman. They have children and grandchildren who they grow to love and who will also annoy them. Envy, anger, greed, duplicity, saintliness...these things are common to all. I can't find any fault with you. You are an exemplary group. Veerappuliyo... although you wash the clothes of other people you are a clean and independent man. In countries across the sea, on the other hand, this independence would be applauded. This woman suits you ideally. This decision of yours is no small matter. This is what I have to say about your boy too. He seems impudent but that's his independence. There's a word in English for such fellows...."radical..!"

There was no way that either Veerappuli Henaya nor Malma Ridee could remember that word. It was indeed a strange word.

Then Guna Ralahamy gave Veerappuli Henaya a piece of paper on which he had scrawled something.

"I have written on this in my own handwriting. This is what I wrote:

"The man and woman who bear this letter are on a journey from Rideevita in Sabaragamuwa to Anuradhapura with the intention of accumulating merit. I who request you to help them in whatever way possible is Don Francis Batuwatudawe alias Guna Ralahamy."

"Veerappuliyo...keep this safe and whenever necessary give it to someone who understands letters or to a hamuduruwo. However, if everything goes well, you wouldn't need to avail yourself of it."

The couple accepted this valuable gift with both hands, worshipped that great and honorable man and left for home.

About six or seven days later, on a Tuesday, Veerappuli Henaya and Malma Ridee left home on their noble journey around four a.m. with four large packets of rice and some extra clothes.

The light of huluaththa, the coconut-leaf torch, played hide and seek among the trees and gave that particular dawn a gloom more intense than ever before. Podina, Nambu Henaya, Heen Ridee and Baba Henaya like four statues watched after them from the end of their midula. A cool breath of wind encircled them and proceeded towards the Aracanugrove. The torch-light could no longer be seen.

It was the moment when the entire world stood still and contemplated an answer to some riddle. In the hearts of all was etched but one singular thought: 'no harm whatsoever should befall these two!'

Veerappuli Henaya had stroked the heads of all four before they left. Malma Ridee had wiped her tears so much that the cloth on her shoulder was damp.

"What merit we acquire is not for us, but for you, dear children," Veerappuli Henaya had said.

Malma Ridee had got Rambaree, her sister in Bungiriya, to attend to the puberty rites she had undertaken to perform. She instructed the children to treat their aunt well and send her for these matters.

"May you be protected not only from rogues and brigands, and creatures from the forest but even from the tiniest leaf," Podina wept as she murmured. The eyes of everyone were washed once more by these few words.

Podina saw Veerappuli Henaya's wasted body in the light of the huluaththa. On account of the monumental task of carrying mountains of soiled clothes, scrubbing and drying them in the wellava, he had become extremely weak.

"Oh please...all that merit...it should not be for us, but for this dearest mother and father," she thought to herself.

The three of them remained in the midula long after the light of the torch had disappeared. Now they could only hear the bats quarrelling among themselves in the mee grove. There were as many mees as the stars in the sky. Podina wondered why the bats had to quarrel.

"Let's go inside...there's still time to sleep," realizing that she was best suited to lead the group, Podina suggested.

# MINIMISE

## home injuries and health risks from COVID 19 with proper precautions -NHSL

BY CAROL ALOYSIUS

**A**s the New Year dawns many people have voiced fears of how they could deal with an emergency situation at home due to injuries that may occur at a time when they are unable to easily access medical care. *The Sunday Observer* spoke to National Coordinator Training Programs, and Specialist in Accident and Emergency, Crisis Management and Disaster Management, Ms Pushpa Ramya Zoysa on how they should deal with such situations while avoiding exposing themselves to the COVID 19 virus.

Excerpts...

**Q. The New Year falls this year amid fears of the COVID-19 virus now spreading throughout the country. As a specialist in Accident and Emergency, Crisis Management, and Disaster Management what kind of home accidents and emergency situations could arise from families getting together despite curfews to celebrate the event?**

**A.** Falling objects - When children start to move around on their own, there is an increased danger of them pulling objects down on top of themselves. Being conscious of your kids' health means making sure any trailing electrical leads, tablecloth edges and dish towels are out of reach, to help prevent accidents.

**Tripping and Falls** A fall can affect people of all ages, but they are most common among the very young and the very old. Often, falling over as a child would only hurt their pride and a few soothing words is all that's needed. However, if the person who has fallen subsequently becomes drowsy, vomits or loses consciousness, it is important to seek medical advice.

### Bruises

Even a fall that isn't serious can lead to nasty bruising which can be quite painful. Applying a cold pack to the area can reduce swelling. Sometimes severe bruising can hide more serious issues such as broken bones, so if there is continuous pain or movement of a limb is restricted or impossible, professional help should be sought.

### Sprains

A sprain is when a ligament, which connects parts of a joint, is stretched, twisted or torn. Knees, ankles and wrists are the most common parts of the body affected. If this occurs, apply an ice pack, rest the affected area and give it time to heal.

### Cuts

Any cut means there will be some blood, and this can be one of the most difficult things involved in first aid for children. Apply pressure to stop the bleeding and apply an antiseptic to the area. Assessing the situation is important, but if the blood stops following pressure, it is likely a minor cut that will not need stitches.

### Burns

Hot drinks cause most burns and scalds to children under the age of five and, of course, children should be kept a safe distance away from open fires, cookers, irons, hair straighteners and matches. Any burn should be held under normal running water for 15 minutes and then assessed. Adults - 20 minutes.

### Choking

Children can often have a fascination with putting objects in their mouth and swallowing them, meaning that choking is a common hazard. If you cannot dislodge the object promptly, call 1990 immediately.

### Poisoning

Most poisoning incidents involve medicines, household products and cosmetics around the house. It is important to keep anything that might be dangerous if swallowed well out of reach of children as an essential part of first aid in the home.

### Glass-related injuries

Broken glass can cause serious cuts and use of the material around the home in furniture or fittings should be carefully considered if you have a young family. Make sure doors, tables and shelving conform to safety standards.

### Drowning

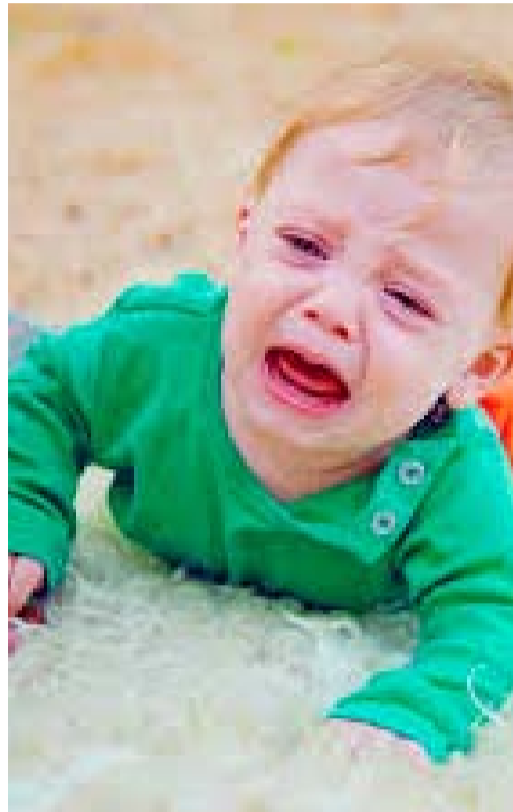
Young children can drown in very shallow water, and should be supervised at all times when near it. This includes ornamental garden ponds, water features and even baths.

**Q. Who are those most at risk of such sudden accidents caused by excessive celebrations? The Elderly? Children? Why? Is there a gender difference?**

**A.** Majority of the victims 68% were male and 32% were females (Sours - Accident Service /NHSL) Age 20 to 60 reported 70% of the victims

**Q. How do you prevent these home injuries during a crisis period as now?**

**A.** No matter how much we strive to make our



Ms Pushpa Ramya Zoysa

domestic environment safe, accidents at home could still happen - even in the most conscientious of households. When it comes to the health of our families, especially for those with young children, it makes sense to know exactly what to do if these common scenarios do occur.

**Q. Many people are stressed being cooped inside the house and young people especially, long to get outside, even at the risk of exposing themselves to the COVID virus. What is your advice to them?**

**A.** My advice is, they should behave in a responsible manner. Practise "social distancing" to blunt the spread of the virus. Let's NOT be social - the virus doesn't spread itself... people spread it! Now is the time to stay home to "flatten that curve".

**Q. What should the family as a whole do to minimise the risk of infecting each other when stuck inside the house?**

**A.** Practice good hand hygiene, wash your hands frequently, especially before you eat, after you use the restroom, blow your nose or cough or before you touch your face. Good hand hygiene includes washing your hands for more than 20 seconds, including in between your fingers and under your nails, using plenty of soap and warm water. If you can't wash your hands, use an alcohol-based sanitizer with more than 60% alcohol. Cover your cough or sneeze so that the droplets don't spread to others. The best way to cough or sneeze is into your elbow and not your hands.

**Q. For housewives afraid their groceries will run out and experience anxiety due to this?**

**A.** Buy a 4-week supply of food, household products and cleaning products in case we are in a situation where social isolation or quarantine is necessary. Don't forget to wear a cloth covering on your face at all times when you are not at home.

**Q. What about those suffering from non communicable diseases like diabetes, hypertension, cholesterol, heart problems? If they run out of their drugs they are likely to go to the nearest pharmacy to buy them, thus exposing themselves to the virus and compromising their already lowered immune systems. What is your advice to them?**

**A.** I would tell them to buy a 60-90 day supply of drugs. Some state pharmacies are already doing this. The purpose of this is not because we are going to "run out" of things, but because we want to avoid going to a crowded public place. Also do help out an elderly neighbor who may be in need, is elderly, or has chronic medical problems and can't go out to stock up.

**Q. If someone has a toothache or requires a dental filling is it advisable to go to a dentist at this time?**

**A.** Cancel elective dental, medical, recreational and non-essential appointments as these can interfere with social distancing.

**Q. If called to treat an injured person during New Year and the patient shows symptoms of COVID what precautions do you take to pro-**

**tect those living with him/her, yourself, and the health staff as well as those living in the vicinity?**

**A.** Call ahead to the doctor/emergency room before you head there if you think you may have symptoms of COVID-19. You should also wear a facemask to protect others.

**Q. Advice to someone caring for a COVID patient?**

**A.** Wear a face mask and gloves if you are caring for someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.

Wash your hands before you wear your mask. Only touch the ear loops. Wipe down all surfaces you come into contact with. Any regular bleach-containing household products is likely to be effective. You can also make a cleaning solution with 5 tablespoons bleach mixed with one gallon of water. (Or any other anti-septic solution)

**Q. Have you any more Dos and Don'ts for the public during the COVID outbreak?**

**A. 1.** Do wear a cloth covering on your face at all times when you are not at home.

**2.** Do work from home. Leave your home only for essential reasons, such as buying food or medications. If you have to go out, protect yourself and your family members from close contact (stay more than 1 Meter away).

**3.** Do move away from others who cough or sneeze

**4.** Do be mindful of what surfaces you touch and how frequently you touch your face

**Q. How do you protect small children from the virus in a domestic setting?**

**A.** For kids, wipe down their toys or wash them in soap and water. The same is true for packages. To be safe, wash your hands after you handle a package. Virus particles can survive for days on hard (non-porous) surfaces so it is important to keep these clean. Wipe down doorknobs, countertops, stairway railings and light switches in your home once every 2-3 days

**Q.. What about phones? Credit cards?**

**A.** Wipe your phone with disinfectant wipes or 70% isopropyl alcohol as it touches your hands and your face often. Wash your hands thoroughly after handling cash or credit cards before touching your face.

**Q. Any health tips to increase immunity to the disease?**

**A.** Do protect your immune system by getting your vaccinations, eating a balanced diet, avoiding too much alcohol, getting enough sleep and maintaining a healthy weight. If you are vitamin deficient, you can consider supplementation of Vitamin C at normal daily doses. High dose IV doses have not been established to be safe or effective. Eat home cooked food as far as possible. Do regular exercise in home. Stay informed of the situation and advisories are rapidly evolving.

**Q. If you suspect you have COVID what should you do?**

**A.** If you have shortness of breath, or are in a high-risk group or have progressive symptoms, call your doctor's office right away. If your symptoms are mild and can be managed at home, you are unlikely to get a COVID-19 test based on current guidelines in Colorado and it reduces your risk if you avoid going to the doctor

Do look for red flags, like shortness of breath, fever >102F and worsening symptoms. Do seek medical care if you develop any of these symptoms at any time.

Do self-quarantine yourself for 14 days if you come into contact with someone who tests positive for coronavirus.

DON'Ts?

**1.** Don't just tie a scarf around your face as that can be loose fitting and need more adjustment. Use a cloth covering that is more tight-fitting.

**2.** Don't panic - It is not a 'panic-demic' but don't take this lightly either, especially if you are healthy! Emotional contagion is the spread of fear or panic and is more contagious than the virus itself. Yes, this is serious stuff. Yes, this will impact our way of life for some time. Most of us (81%) who get it will get a mild case or mild respiratory illness, just like the flu. However, even young people can have fatal complications of the disease. And, if the 20% who end up in the hospital all get sick at the same time, we will overwhelm the medical system. So, it is time for EVERYONE to take this seriously and participate in "social distancing" together.

**3.** Don't put your shoes on surfaces you may touch. We know that the coronavirus can sustain itself on surfaces, but don't yet know for how long. Since we don't typically sanitize the bottom of our shoes, we should try to avoid contact of shoes with jackets, scarves, purses, pens or other surfaces we commonly touch.

**4.** Don't interact with your pets if you think you may have symptoms of COVID-19.

**5.** Don't treat "social distancing" like a "vacation". This is not the time to run errands or go to the mountains. It is important to stay home and stay away from others. Do talk to your teenage/adolescent kids about it.

**6.** Don't plan "play dates" for your kids if they are not in school. The reason schools are closed is because of "social distancing" and getting a number of kids and parents together defeats that purpose by increasing contact.

**7.** Don't share utensils or drinking glasses with others, including family members.

**8.** Don't shake hands or give hugs as greetings. Use an alternative greeting that maintains 6-8 feet of distance.

**9.** Don't visit your older relatives or community members, as they are the highest risk group.

**10.** Don't call for testing if you don't have symptoms as testing is not recommended if you don't have symptoms.

## Medi snips

COMPILED BY CAROL ALOYSIUS

## Hiding contacts, suspicious symptoms, raises COVID-19 risks

- Chief MOH, CMC

"Contracting COVID 19 is not a sin. What is sinful is deliberately hiding contacts with a history of having the disease. This will cause it to spread to the rest of the society inflicting unnecessary worry and suffering to all who have been in contact with the patient", Chief Medical Officer of Health, Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) Dr Ruwan Wijayamuni told the Sunday Observer in an exclusive telephone interview.

He said, "Sri Lanka's efforts to control the virus spread has been lauded by the World Health Organisation and the number of positive cases so far, over 185 at the time of going to press was low in comparison to many European countries such as Italy, Spain, US with more advanced equipment, etc. The number of recoveries too and low number of deaths (6) has been encouraging. This is because we have adopted very stringent measures", he pointed out.

Asked at what stage of the disease curve the CMC area was, he said, "According to the WHO classification we are in the 3rd stage where we see clustering of cases within the families of the confirmed cases; there were eighteen from the city of Colombo area - where six were from one family, four from one house, two from another house, which means twelve cases clustering in three families. We were able to take immediate steps to prevent it from spilling into the nearby community." He said there were six other separate cases under house quarantine observation which were being followed up carefully. "When we get information about a case the Public Health Department of the CMC takes it very seriously," he said. "The moment we are notified of such a case by either the National Hospital or the Epidemiology Unit of the Ministry of Health or the Infectious Diseases Hospital (IDH) we send a team comprising a doctor and two PHIs to investigate the case. For this purpose we have established a COVID-19 Operations Room where a Medical Officer of Health and four Public Health Inspectors are on duty round the clock. We are on call 24 hours a day", he said.

### Procedure

Asked about the procedure followed in the investigation process, he said, "They start collecting information about the occupants, their medical history, their recent movements, details of families, contacts, if they had travelled abroad and where. We then get in touch with all these contacts and get them to house quarantine. Thereafter we give this information to the Epidemiology Unit and the National Intelligence Unit." Why the National Intelligence Unit, we asked. "Because they have the capacity to go deeper into the issue. They also provide us with their information. It is because of this well established infrastructure and sharing of information that we have succeeded where countries like Italy and Spain have failed," he said.

The infrastructure in Colombo includes six Chief Officers of Health from areas which come under the Chief Medical Officer, for all 46 municipal wards, Dr Wijayamuni explained. They list out the information of contacts of COVID 19 and place them in quarantine. They also paste notices on their doors with all the phone numbers of who to contact by those living in the vicinity, if those in self quarantine step out of their homes. These notices also stipulate penalties for those violating the quarantine, besides protecting those in the vicinity, and minimising COVID risks. "If the number of contacts are too many they will be sent to a quarantine centre at Punai. The infected area will be locked down while close contacts of people tested positive will be evacuated and their homes disinfected. This is what we did during the outbreak in Maradana last week," he said.

He said the duties of the CMC Health Department do not end once patients have been sent to hospital and their contacts quarantined in their homes. "We keep a vigilant eye on all those in quarantine for 14 days and look out for any suspicious symptoms in them. If they show any symptoms even after that period, they must contact us."

"Don't be afraid to inform us if you have a cold, cough or fever. Ring 1990. Our team is ready to help you. If you have tested positive they will transport you to the National Hospital or IDH for treatment. As our recovery rate is very good you will be able to recover completely as most of the patients have", he advised. "Don't wait till complications set in", he warned.

In addition to this work, he said ongoing activities to control dengue spread and minimise risk of other communicable diseases will continue as usual along with disinfectant programs, under his purview.

### Health Ministry offers guidelines to protect PHNOs from COVID 19 risks

The Ministry of Health Care and Indigenous Medical Services has issued a set of guidelines for protecting Public Health Nursing Officers (PHNO) during the COVID outbreak. The Directive signed by Director Health Services Dr Anil Jasinghe and addressed to all regional provincial directors of health as well as heads of all institutions, has stated that the Ministry recognises the risks run by the PHNOs when attending to patients with non communicable diseases in home settings during the COVID 19 outbreak.

According to the Directive, PHNOs should postpone routine visits to patients in stable conditions. They are also advised to reduce home visits to patients with chronic illnesses except when their services are absolutely essential such as when changing a catheter, or NG tubes.

Prior to their visit, the Health Ministry has asked them to assess the condition of the patient, whether he/she or a member of the family are suffering from any respiratory symptoms suggesting coronavirus. They should also assess whether the patient or the family members had a recent history of travel in a foreign country and inquire if any of them are in self quarantine already.

All safety precautions should be taken when attending to a patient at home using appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when visiting a patient at home, the Health Ministry has emphasised. It has further stressed that all health care waste material used for the patient be safely and properly disposed of. Remind patients about taking their medications regularly and options of obtaining them at their residences, the statement adds.

# Features



## TOMMY FUNG

Hong Kong artist Tommy Fung has created a series of coronavirus-inspired artworks on his Instagram. From groups chasing face masks to monster colds and altered monuments, they're a reflection of what the artist sees in Hong Kong, "in an exaggerated way and with a bit of humour," he said. "The reaction and behaviour of people to the coronavirus is sometimes much more surrealist than my artworks and it is hard to not point it out." He adds: "People are very frustrated and distrustful of the ineffectiveness and delayed reactions of the Hong Kong government. The elderly and people with low incomes are the most vulnerable in this situation and they have not received a single mask from the local government."



## HE KUN

The Chinese artist has created a new painting called "Save the Child," depicting an elderly man carrying a sick child on his back, as a woman accompanies them. They are all wearing face masks. The artwork is meant to show the impact of the virus on families. On the left side, the artist wrote: "There were happy families, but coronavirus destroyed them."

# Here's how Artists are responding to the coronavirus

BY NADJA SAYEJ

the virus, so there is hope. With thousands of cancelled flights to and from China, part of the country on lockdown and denied entry from China to parts of the world, the coronavirus is a global conversation. But how are artists responding? Visual artists in Hong Kong, China and abroad are speaking about the virus, its censorship and how families are suffering. Here are some of them. (Courtesy: Forbes.com)

The coronavirus has shaken up the world, no doubt. Since January, the respiratory virus, which had its origins in Wuhan late last year, has travelled to over 24 countries, affecting tens of thousands of people, and resulting in over 1,800 deaths. However, over 13,000 have recovered from



## KUANG BIAO

The Chinese political cartoonist responded to the death of the coronavirus whistleblower Dr. Li Wenliang, who warned of the virus via social media, with a political cartoon of the doctor wearing a barbed wire in the shape of a face mask, silencing him. According to Pat Chappatte on Twitter, the drawing has gone viral on Weibo, the Chinese social media platform.

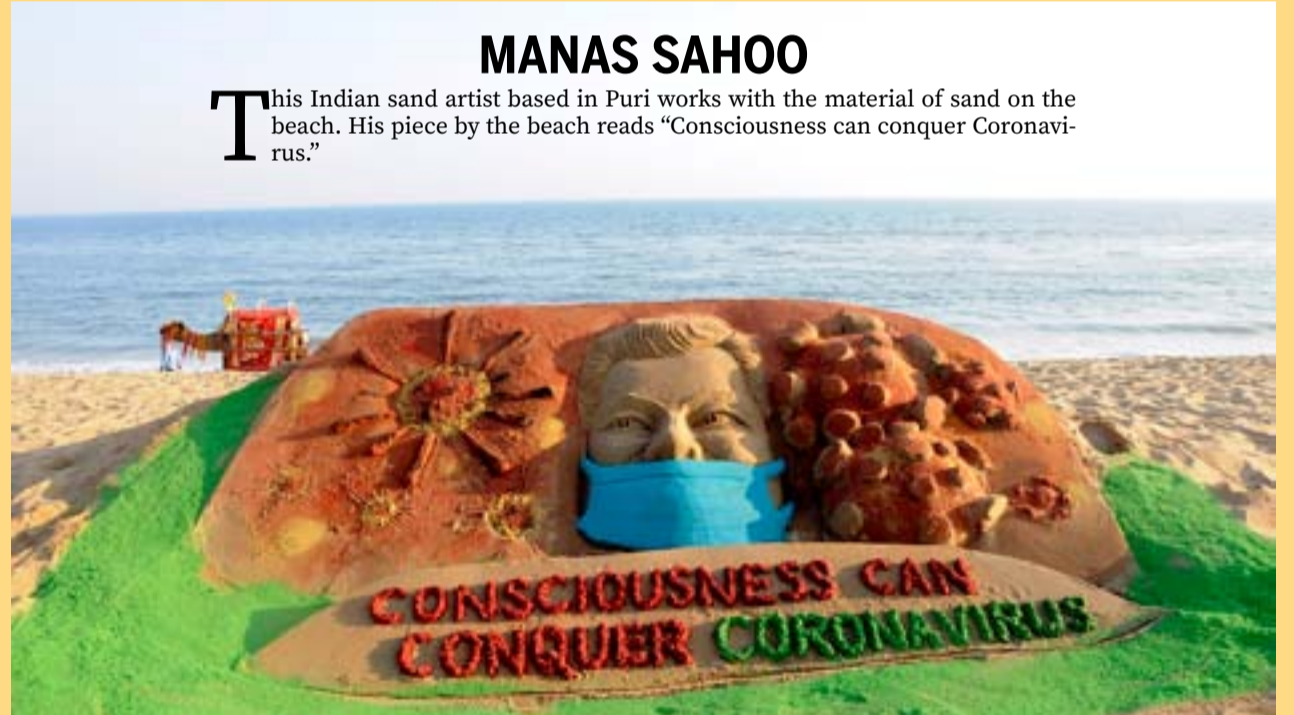
## DUYI HAN

The designer, who divides his time between Shanghai and Los Angeles, created this mural called "The Saints Wear White." It's set inside of a historic chapel in the Hubei province of China, which is where the epidemic started out. This artwork was designed to pay homage to the coronavirus medical workers, who are wearing white decontamination suits and green face masks. Over 1,700 health care workers have been infected by the virus and six have reportedly died.



## MATSUYAMA MIYABI

The artist Matsuyama Miyabi has created an artwork called "We Call It Free Will Pt. 2," which responds to the censorship surrounding the virus. According to the BBC's China correspondent Stephen McDonell on Twitter, the image has a reference to the word "Harmony" over the eyes, a catchphrase used by the former Chinese leader Hu Jintao used to censor people.



## MANAS SAHOO

This Indian sand artist based in Puri works with the material of sand on the beach. His piece by the beach reads "Consciousness can conquer Coronavirus."

## Art in the time of coronavirus:

# Children in Italy turn to art to cope with quarantine

## WHY CHILDREN IN ITALY ARE SHARING "ANDRÀ TUTTO BENE" ACCOMPANIED BY THE [RAINBOW] SYMBOL...

"Andrà tutto bene" means "everything will be fine" in Italian. This is the message children of Italy have adopted as they use art to cope with the quarantine and spread messages of hope and positivity.

The Italian government has imposed a nationwide lockdown in an effort to tackle the world's worst coronavirus outbreak outside of China. Movements in and out of cities are severely restricted. But, this is not stopping Italians from using art and creativity to tackle the situation.

### The scientific link between boredom and creativity

Research suggests that people who want to come up with creative



ideas do well when they let their minds drift. A 2014 study in the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology found that bored people "are more likely to engage in sensation seeking"—that is, to look for activities or sights that engage their minds and stimulate the brain's reward centres. These people are more prone to "divergent thinking styles" or the ability to come up with creative new ideas. So, boredom may encourage people to approach rewards and

spark associative thought." In another study, researchers at the University of Central Lancashire, set out to test the link between boredom and creativity. They asked 80 participants to perform boring tasks like copying and reading numbers from a phone book and then to drum up as many

possible uses for plastic cups as they could. The groups that completed the boring phone book tasks beforehand came up with more creative answers than the control group that had not. Boredom, apparently, inspires "lateral thinking"—a form of engaging your mind to seek a more creative solution to the problem at hand because the obvious one is just not very interesting.





# WORLD

APRIL 12, 2020



Refrigerated trailers are in place as workers build a makeshift morgue to handle an expected surge in coronavirus victims.

## US DEATH TOLL PASSES 2,000 in a single day

**NEW YORK, April 11. (BBC)** - The US has become the first country in the world to record more than 2,000 coronavirus deaths in a single day.

Figures from Johns Hopkins University show 2,108 people died in the past 24 hours while there are now more than half a million confirmed infections.

The US could soon surpass Italy as the country with the most coronavirus deaths worldwide.

But experts on the White House Covid-19 task force say the outbreak is starting to level off across the US.

Dr Deborah Birx said there were good signs the outbreak was stabilising, but cautioned: "As encouraging as they are, we have not reached the peak."

President Donald Trump also said he expects the US to see a lower death toll than the initial predictions of 100,000 fatalities, adding: "We're seeing clear signs that our aggressive strategy is saving countless lives".

What are the latest US figures?

The US now has close to 20,000 deaths and over half million confirmed cases, according to Johns Hopkins, which is tracking the disease globally. About half of the deaths were recorded in the New York area.

Italy has reported over 19,000 deaths while globally more than 103,000 people have died with the virus. Researchers had predicted the US death toll would hit its peak on Friday and then gradually start to decline, falling to around 970 people a day by 1 May - the day members of the Trump administration have floated as a possible date to start reopening the economy.

"I want to get it open as soon as possible," Mr Trump said at a Good Friday briefing at the White House. "I would say without question it's the biggest decision I've ever had to make."

However, no action would be taken until the government knew the "country [was] going to be healthy", he said. "We don't want to go back and start doing it over again."

The coronavirus has changed everything about life, and now it's upending the rituals of death.

New Yorkers have been shocked by the grim scenes: ambulances constantly blaring down eerily deserted streets, body bags being forklifted into refrigerated trucks outside hospitals and now new trenches being dug on Hart's Island for possible mass burials.

The remote cemetery, accessible only by boat, is a place regarded historically with sorrow because of its mass graves with no tombstones, just unclaimed bodies. The city's morgues can only handle so much



US surgeon general shows his inhaler while discussing the impact of coronavirus on people of colour

before temporary burials for Covid-19 victims, once an absolute worst-case scenario, become necessary.

Funeral directors talk openly about how scared and depressed the spiking death toll has left them. Even before this week's record number of deaths, some families have had to wait a week or more to bury and cremate their loved ones.

Why might the outbreak start levelling off soon?

Dr Anthony Fauci, US infectious diseases chief, concurred that the country was "starting to see the levelling off and coming down" of cases and deaths. But despite the "important advance", he added, mitigation efforts such as social distancing should not be pulled back yet. A new projection by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington forecast 60,000 deaths by 4 August assuming that those restrictions remain in place. Last month, Dr Fauci estimated at least 100,000 deaths.

Also at the briefing, Dr Birx noted that the rate of increase appeared to be stabilising in hard-hit regions like New York, New Jersey and the city of Chicago. She added that the US mortality rate was "significantly less than many of the other countries, when you correct them for our population". But she emphasised the nation had yet to see the peak of the outbreak.

"We need to continue to do what we did yesterday, and the week before, and the week before that because that's what, in the end, is going to take us up across the peak and down the other side."

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo said the latest data showed the state was successfully "flattening the curve", but also cautioned that it was too ear-

ly to relax social distancing measures. "Even though it's a grind, even though it's difficult, we have to stay with it."

The danger appears to be highest for America's minority communities, which have been disproportionately affected by Covid-19.

Dr Jerome Adams, the US surgeon general, said the trend was "alarming, but not surprising" given that minorities in the US generally had more chronic health conditions such as asthma, hypertension and diabetes.

"As a matter of fact, I have been carrying an inhaler in my pocket for 40 years out of fear of having a fatal asthma attack," continued Dr Adams, who is African-American. But he caused controversy by urging minorities to stop drinking, smoking and taking drugs to reduce their risk. He was particularly criticised for his use of colloquial language, when he told them to respect social distancing guidelines.

"Do it for your abuela. Do it for your granddaddy. Do it for your Big Mama. Do it for your Pop Pop," Dr Adams said. He later advised all Americans to avoid alcohol, tobacco and drugs.

In Friday's briefing, Mr Trump also said he had seen the drone images of coffins being stacked in a mass grave on New York's Hart Island. Officials there say the island, which has been used to bury people with no next of kin for over 150 years, is now burying bodies at five times the normal rate. Earlier in the day, Dr Fauci told CNN that officials are currently discussing whether to adopt immunity certificates for Americans who have safely survived the coronavirus and have antibodies in their blood to prove it.

## Tripp who revealed Clinton-Monica scandal dies



President Bill Clinton and then White House intern Monica Lewinsky during summer days.



Linda Tripp, a former US civil servant died at the age of 70

leading a broad investigation into the Clinton administration.

Ms Tripp also disclosed that Ms Lewinsky owned a blue dress that had been allegedly soiled by the president's semen - an infamously prurient detail which stuck in the public imagination.

The sex scandal precipitated Mr Clinton's impeachment by the Republican-led House of Representatives in 1998, when he was found to have committed perjury for lying about the relationship.

He was acquitted by the Senate, but the ugly political battle was seen as a harbinger of further division in American politics, which became more bitter and partisan in subsequent years.

Ms Tripp has insisted that she provided the information to the Starr investigation out of patriotism, but critics accused her of betraying Ms Lewinsky's friendship and seeking to undermine the presidency.

She was fired from her job at the Pentagon on the last day of the Clinton administration in 2001, and later opened a shop with her husband in Virginia.

On the news of Ms Tripp's illness before her death, Ms Lewinsky tweeted: "No matter the past, upon hearing that Linda Tripp is very seriously ill, I hope for her recovery. I can't imagine how difficult this is for her family."

Testifying at the Clinton trial in 1998, Ms Lewinsky's concluding remarks had been: "I'm really sorry for everything that's happened, and I hate Linda Tripp."

**WASHINGTON, April 10. (BBC)** - An American civil servant whose disclosure of an affair between Bill Clinton and a White House intern nearly brought down his presidency has died.

Linda Tripp, 70, passed away after suffering from pancreatic cancer, her family told US media.

Recordings Ms Tripp made of her conversations with Monica Lewinsky became central to the 1998 impeachment trial of then President Clinton.

She was variously praised as a whistle-blower and denounced as a partisan.

The former civil servant, who worked at the Pentagon and had a friendship with Ms Lewinsky despite their 24-year age difference, learnt that the younger woman had had a sexual relationship with the president and began secretly recording their conversations in 1997.

Ms Tripp turned the tapes over to Kenneth Starr, the special prosecutor

## Foreign news

# China ZTE executive quits amid sex assault allegations

**BEIJING, April 11. – (BBC)** An executive at Chinese tech giant ZTE has resigned following reports that he is under investigation for sexual assault.

The company announced that Bao Yuming, also known as Robert Y Bao, had stepped down from its board.

The firm, which makes telecoms equipment, said in a stock exchange filing that it was "concerned" by the

media reports. Mr Bao, a lawyer, has not yet commented on the allegations.

He has also been dismissed from positions at an oil company and a university. According to the Chinese newspaper Global Times, police in the city of Yantai, in Shandong province, investigated a complaint against Mr Bao in April 2019 and concluded that his behaviour had not constituted

a crime. However, a fresh complaint was made against him in October and police have launched another investigation, the paper said.

In a filing with the Shenzhen Stock Exchange on Friday, ZTE said that it had received the resignation letter of Mr Bao - a non-executive board member - and that he would no longer hold any position at the company.

In a separate stock exchange filing, the Yantai Jereh Oilfield Services Group said Mr Bao had been fired from his role as vice-president.

Also on Friday, the Southwest University of Political Science and Law, in Chongqing, said Mr Bao had been dismissed from his post

as a part-time researcher. Mr Bao has been at ZTE since mid-2018, according to the Global Times. In its 2018 annual

report, ZTE described Mr Bao as "one of the top 10 chief legal officers in the country"



Amazon says its team is gathering the necessary equipment for a test lab

## Amazon builds its own testing lab for staff

**NEW YORK, April 11. (BBC)** - Retail giant Amazon says it will build its own coronavirus testing lab to monitor the health of its staff.

Cases of Covid-19 have been reported at more than 50 Amazon facilities across the US. Some have involved multiple infected workers.

The company said it had assembled a team to build its own "incremental testing capacity".

Amazon staff have previously criticised the firm over its response to the coronavirus pandemic.

In March, Amazon fired a New York warehouse worker who organised a protest over a lack of safety precautions taken by the company.

In a statement, Amazon said "We did not terminate Mr Smalls' employment for organizing a 15-person protest. We terminated his employment for putting the health and safety of others at risk and violations of his terms of his employment. Mr Smalls received multiple warnings for violating social distancing guidelines."

Later, a memo from a meeting of Amazon executives was leaked. It said: "We should spend the first part of our response strongly laying out the case for why the organiser's conduct was immoral, unacceptable, arguably illegal, in detail, and only then follow with our usual talking points about worker safety."

Amazon blogged it had made

more than 150 "significant process changes" in response to coronavirus.

"Our operations sites and grocery stores are distributing masks to employees and conducting employee temperature checks," the company said.

"A next step might be regular testing of all employees, including those showing no symptoms. Regular testing on a global scale across all industries would both help keep people safe and help get the economy back up and running."

The company acknowledged that testing resources were limited, so it had assembled a team of employees to develop its own facility.

"We have begun assembling the equipment we need to build our first lab and hope to start testing small numbers of our front line employees soon. We are not sure how far we will get in the relevant timeframe, but we think it's worth trying, and we stand ready to share anything we learn with others."

According to news site Bloomberg, at least one Amazon facility is being investigated by the US Occupational Safety and Health Administration over concerns it has not done enough to safeguard employees.

The Pennsylvania warehouse receives products from manufacturer before sending them to smaller Amazon warehouses around the US.

# Why Pakistan's doctors are so angry

**KARACHI, April 11. (BBC)** - It was supposed to be just a picture of Pakistan's president taking precautions during an official meeting.

But instead the image of President Dr Arif Alvi wearing the high-end N-95 medical mask - tweeted out on social media - has further inflamed tensions between Pakistan's government and those on the front line of the fight against coronavirus.

The Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) noted that while "politicians and bureaucrats are often seen wearing N-95 masks during meetings and visits... health professionals are facing a dire shortage of (these masks) and PPE (personal protective equipment)".

Indeed, while many countries around the world regularly take to the streets to applaud their health workers during the crisis, doctors in one city - where almost 25 medical officials have already tested positive - were beaten by the police, for daring to protest over the lack of PPE.

Dr Alvi has since explained that he was given this mask in China during a recent visit and had been re-using it until its straps broke. He is now using a common face mask.

But doctors are still not happy.

PPE shortages have been in the headlines ever since the coronavirus pandemic struck early last month, mainly because it was an unprecedented situation and the magnitude of demand could not have been foreseen. For the 200,000 or so practising doctors in Pakistan, the outbreak came just six months after they were stunned by a controversial government decision to close the country's top health professionals' regulatory body, the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC).

That decision left 15,000 fresh medical graduates without certification, while around 30,000 doctors still await their routine five-year registration renewal which is necessary for them to continue to practise medicine in Pakistan and abroad, a source in the PMDC said. The near absence of protective gear triggered unrest among this already strained community, with doctors all over the country resorting to brief protests and strikes.

But nowhere were these protests



Quetta has been a focal point for doctors' protests

as violent as in Quetta - and there are some good reasons for this.

Balochistan province is already under-resourced, with only two tertiary-care hospitals, both in Quetta, the capital. The region has often been politically neglected. A low-intensity separatist insurgency has been going on for two decades.

The province was also the first recipient of coronavirus, which arrived with the thousands of pilgrims who crossed over from Iran during February and March. Soon after the virus was detected, the government set up a quarantine camp at the Taftan crossing, but the arrangement was "grossly inadequate and unprofessional", says Dr Yasir Khan, president of the Balochistan chapter of the Young Doctors' Association (YDA).

"People were crowded together in tents so that those who had no infection also got infected," he says. Con-

cerns were further raised when 40 out of the 96 people who tested positive in Quetta some two weeks ago were found to have no travel history, indicating community transmission. As doctors demanded protection, supplies were arranged by the federal government, and the hospitals were made to sign receipts for N-95 masks. But they turned out to be K-95 masks, mostly used by barbers and beauticians in hair-cutting salons, Dr Shah says.

At least 17 doctors and five paramedics in Quetta have so far tested positive for Covid-19. Even more worryingly, none of Quetta's infected health workers were involved in directly handling coronavirus patients, Dr Khan said. It is not the only affected province: according to the YDA, 16 medics are infected in KP, and there are reports that two doctors have died in Gilgit-Baltistan region and Kara-

chi. The federal health ministry was repeatedly approached by the BBC to confirm country-wide infections among health professionals, but it did not respond.

By Wednesday, tensions had reached boiling point. Hundreds of doctors and paramedics went on strike, gathering at Quetta's Civil Hospital, from where they started a protest march towards the chief minister's residence.

Police stopped them halfway to the venue, and when they tried to break through the cordon, they were pounced upon and beaten with sticks and fists. Many were injured, and more than two dozen were arrested.

They have since been released and have decided to call off their strike. But their protest continues as PPE supplies, which the government claims to have dispatched, have yet to reach them.

## ON HEZBOLLAH COMMANDER IN IRAQ:

# US offers \$10m for information

**WASHINGTON, April 11. (Al-Jazeera)** - The United States has offered up to US\$10m for information on Hezbollah commander Sheikh Mohammad al-Kawtharani, who was an associate of slain Iranian General Qasem Soleimani.

Kawtharani was branded a "global terrorist" by the US in 2013, accused of funding armed groups in Iraq and helping transport Iraqi fighters to Syria to join President Bashar al-Assad's effort to put down a revolt against his rule.

Announcing the reward, the US State Department said Kawtharani had "taken over some of the political coordination of Iran-aligned paramilitary groups" formerly organised by Soleimani, an Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps commander assassinated in a US drone strike in Baghdad in January.

"In this capacity, he facilitates the actions of groups operating outside the control of the Government of Iraq that have violently suppressed protests, attacked foreign diplomatic missions, and engaged in wide-spread organised criminal activity," it said in a statement.

The State Department said it was offering the sum for information on Kawtharani's activities, networks and



Kawtharani has been touted as a temporary stand-in to direct Iraqi Shia militias until a permanent Iranian successor to Soleimani is chosen

associates as part of an effort to disrupt the "financial mechanisms" of the Lebanon-based Hezbollah.

The US has blamed Iran-backed armed groups for several attacks on its bases in Iraq.

Reuters reported in February that,

according to two Iraqi sources and a senior Iraqi Shia Muslim leader, Kawtharani, for the time being, was seen as the most suitable figure to direct Iraqi militias until a permanent Iranian successor could be chosen, although he did not have Soleimani's

clout.

"Kawtharani has connections with the militia groups," the Shia leader said. "He was trusted by Soleimani, who used to depend and call on him to help him in crises and in meetings in Baghdad."

## Rare Ravi Shankar footage released to mark centenary

**NEW DELHI, April 11. (BBC)** This week would have seen the 100th birthday of the Indian musician Ravi Shankar, one of India's most celebrated artists who famously taught Beatle George Harrison to play the sitar.

Planned celebrations, including concerts at the London South Bank Centre and Carnegie Hall in New York, were postponed because of the coronavirus outbreak. But to mark the occasion the Shankar family have shared material from their private archive with the BBC.

Ravi Shankar's daughter, Anoushakar Shankar, also a renowned musician, spoke to BBC South Asia correspondent Rajini Vaidyanathan.



# Demand for grocery delivery is surging

**New York (CNN Business)** - In late March, Instacart worker Annaliisa Arambula accepted a grocery order that came with a big tip: \$55. The store was just down the street, everything the customer wanted was available, and the order seemed to go off without a hitch.

But an hour later, Arambula checked her earnings on the Instacart app and the entire tip was gone, with a message saying the "customer modified the tip post-delivery." She ended up making just \$8.95 from Instacart on the order. "I was flabbergasted. I couldn't believe it," Arambula told CNN Business.

Demand for grocery delivery is surging amid the Covid-19 pandemic, and many customers are struggling to get the items they want or even a time slot for a delivery. Some people are dealing with that by offering big tips, as high as \$50 or more, to entice Instacart workers to pick up their orders. But some of those people have turned the tactic into a bait-and-switch, offering up the big tip and then taking it away as soon as the person who risked their health to get them their groceries has made the delivery.

Before accepting a "batch" - which can consist of one or a few orders from different customers - workers can see the items requested, the store location, the payment Instacart provides workers for the job, and the tip being offered. Instacart allows customers to change a tip for up to three days. Some workers told CNN Business tips can make up half of their income or more.

"It's very demoralizing," said Arambula, who lives in the Portland, Oregon, area and has worked full-time for Instacart since June 2017. "I don't pretend to be a hero, like a nurse in a hospital ... but I literally am exposing myself [to coronavirus] and when I return home, exposing my own family to the possibility of transmitting this disease. When you know that it's somebody who's just doing it to game the system and to get their order when they want it, it's really frustrating." Arambula's husband is currently unemployed and at high risk for Covid-19 because he has diabetes, so they are relying on her work for Instacart to pay their bills.

Instacart is one of several delivery companies now expanding rapidly due to demand spurred by the pandemic. Last month, the company announced plans to bring on another 300,000 full-service shoppers in North America to service the increased demand.

An Instacart spokesperson told CNN Business the vast majority of people in March adjusted their tip upward or did not adjust their tip after delivery. Moreover, the spokesperson said, the company recently removed the "none" tip option for people, so users who want to tip nothing must manually change a tip to \$0. The spokesperson said this could deter users from doing so. People can also leave feedback and rate a worker in the app, something Instacart claims typically happens if and when a person removes a tip.

"It's a crapshoot"

Jenifer G., who became a "full



Demand for grocery delivery is surging amid the Covid-19 pandemic

service shopper" for Instacart about a month ago and asked to be identified by her first name and last initial for fear of retribution, said she has already experienced a handful of bait-and-switch tipsters in Pennsylvania. She said one person originally put a \$32.94 tip on a 27-item order from Sam's Club, only to replace it with a \$0 tip after delivery. Another person changed a \$13.31 tip on a 38-item order from a different store to nothing after delivery.

"It's a crapshoot," said Jenifer G., who noted half her earnings come from tips, either in cash or through the app. "These are affluent communities that I'm delivering to. There's almost no need to not tip, especially because not only is this a convenience for you but we're in a pandemic right now."

An Instacart spokesperson said that tips are always left up to a customer's discretion and would not comment on specific instances of tip baiting occurring. In an email to Instacart customers provided to CNN Business, the company encourages people to "please consider tipping above and beyond to reflect the extra effort of your shopper." Being able to change a tip is not uncommon for on-demand delivery platforms. But other services such as Uber (UBER) Eats and Postmates, which offer on-demand meal deliveries, allow customers to change tips for shorter windows of time, between one and 10 hours.

Bryant Greening, an attorney and co-founder of Chicago-based law firm LegalRideshare, told CNN Business that a few dozen Instacart shoppers and drivers have reached out to his firm to voice concerns over the practice. His law firm has discussed the possibility of litigation against Insta-

cart, or even individual customers.

"It's truly evil to bait and switch in this type of environment," said Greening. "Their livelihood and well-being are on the line. When these shoppers and drivers see a high tip, it's an opportunity for them to put food on the table, so they're more willing to take a risk on their health to achieve that goal."

While Instacart is benefiting from a surge in customer orders in recent weeks, workers have criticized the company for not doing enough to ensure they're adequately protected and paid during the pandemic.

For more than a week, some workers have been on strike until Instacart meets their demands including hazard pay, an expansion of its coronavirus pay to include those with underlying health conditions and a default tip of 10%. One day before the planned strike, Instacart said it would change its default tip setting from 5% to the most recently used percentage a customer chose to tip. Jenifer G., the Instacart worker, said she feels the company should mandate a 10% tip "that sticks no matter what" on all orders until stay-at-home guidance is lifted and only allow people to tip above that should they choose.

"I can't strike, I literally cannot afford to, but I'll [only] shop during 'boost times,'" she said, referring to high-demand times of day when Instacart pays a few dollars more to workers.

## Detached customers

In addition to having their tips slashed at the last minute, some Instacart workers are also the target of seemingly tone-deaf remarks from

customers. Carilyn, who started working for Instacart about one month ago and asked to be identified by first name only for fear of retribution, told CNN Business she also had a recent experience with tip baiting.

When dropping off an order recently, she said the customer told her it was "unethical" that she wasn't able to find toilet paper and updated her tip to \$0.

"I tried my best. A lot of people are detached from the situation going on," said Carilyn, who is based in Florida. "They really don't see what we see. We know things are a no-no, like soap, and toilet paper, you barely find eggs if you're lucky."

(Because workers tend to be tipped a percentage of the total order cost, when high-demand items can't be found in store - in this case, toilet paper - the tip shrinks accordingly. But in other cases, customers enter a custom tip amount and then take it back after the delivery.)

Fortunately for some, like Carilyn and Jenifer G., the majority of recent tips have been authentic. Carilyn said she took home more than \$360 in cash and in-app tips last week alone - a good week for her. Jenifer G. also noted that she's had people leave cash tips in envelopes at their door.

While some workers said they have grown wary of large tips because of tip baiting, others sometimes risk picking up low tip orders in the hopes the person will pay more in cash. It doesn't always work, though. Jenifer G. said she recently picked up a 112-item order from Aldi for a person who put a \$1 tip in the app and there was no cash tip waiting. "We always say: No matter what, never trust a tip," she said.

## WHICH CAN BE FARMED FOR MEAT:

# Chinese government reveals draft list of animals

**Hong Kong, April 11. (CNN)**

The Chinese government has issued a new draft list of livestock that can be farmed for meat in the wake of the coronavirus epidemic, which is suspected to have originated from wild animals in a Wuhan wet market.

Beijing temporarily banned all trade in wild animals for food following the outbreak, which has now spread globally to infect more than 1.6 million people, but the new law has yet to be finalized.

China's Ministry of Agriculture issued a draft list of animals considered fit to be used as livestock on Wednesday night, including dietary staples such as pigs, cows, chickens and sheep, as well as "special livestock" such as a number of species of deer, alpaca and ostriches. Two species of fox, raccoons and minks can be kept as livestock but not for their meat.

There is no mention of the species of animal which are suspected by scientists to have spread the virus to humans, such as pangolins, bats and civet cats. Dogs are also absent from the list of livestock, which, if formally enforced, would lead to China's first nationwide ban on their consumption in a victory for animal rights activists.

"With the progress of human civilization and the public's concern and preference for animal protection, dogs have evolved from traditional livestock to companion animals," said an accompanying explanation of the draft. "They are generally no longer regarded as livestock in the rest of the world. It

is not advisable to list them under livestock or poultry in China."

The draft has still yet to be finalized and the public has until May 8 to provide feedback.

In a statement on Thursday, the Humane Society International said that the draft proposal could be a "game-changer" for animal protection in China.

"We have to await the outcome of the consultation phase but this draft could effectively pave the way for China to officially take dogs and cats off the menu," spokeswoman Wendy Higgins said. The initial outbreak of the novel coronavirus epidemic has been linked to a wet market in Wuhan, capital of Hubei province in Central China, where a wide variety of wild animals were being sold as meat, including snakes, porcupine and raccoon dogs.

Wet market is a widely used term across parts of Asia to describe markets that sell meat, fish and perishable goods. Not all wet markets sell animal products.

The consumption of wild animals is not common in most of China but there is a highly lucrative trade, especially in the country's south. When wild animals are kept in close proximity and unsanitary conditions, experts say there is a high risk of viruses spreading between the animals and then potentially to humans.

Researchers have theorized that it may have been a bat or a pangolin who originally spread the virus to humans, but there has been no conclusive answer yet.



China has made eating wild animals illegal after the coronavirus outbreak. But ending the trade won't be easy

# New York using mass graves amid outbreak

**NEW YORK, April 11. (BBC)** - Images have emerged of coffins being buried in a mass grave in New York City, as the death toll from the coronavirus outbreak continues to rise.

Workers in hazmat outfits were seen using a ladder to descend into a huge pit where the coffins were stacked.

The location is Hart Island, used for New Yorkers with no next of kin or who could not afford a funeral.

New York State now has more coronavirus cases than any single country, according to latest figures.

The state's confirmed caseload of Covid-19 jumped by 10,000 on Thursday to 159,937, of whom 7,000 have died.

Spain has over 160,000 cases and Italy over 145,000, while China, where the virus emerged last year, has reported only over 82,000 cases.

The US as a whole has recorded nearly half a million cases and over 17,000 deaths. Globally there are over 1.7 million cases and 100,000 deaths.

The drone footage comes from Hart Island, off the Bronx in Long Island Sound, which has been used for more than 150 years by city officials as a mass burial site for those with no next-of-kin, or families who cannot afford funerals. It is probable that many



Images have emerged of coffins being buried

of the coffins are for coronavirus victims, but it is not clear whether they fall into the above categories.

Burial operations at the site have ramped up amid the pandemic from one day a week to five days a week, according to the Department of Correc-

tions.

Prisoners from Rikers Island, the city's main jail complex, usually do the job, but the rising workload has recently been taken over by contractors.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio indicated earlier this week that "tem-

porary burials" might be necessary until the crisis had passed.

"Obviously the place we have used historically is Hart Island," he said.

The number of coronavirus deaths in New York state increased to over 900 yesterday, a record high for a fourth

day. But Governor Andrew Cuomo took heart from the fact that the number of Covid-19 patients admitted to New York hospitals dropped for a second day, to 200. He said it was a sign social distancing was working. He called the outbreak a "silent explosion with the same randomness, the same evil that we saw on 9/11".

Another glimmer of hope was heralded on Thursday as official projections for the nationwide death toll were lowered.

Dr Anthony Fauci, a key member of the White House's coronavirus task force, told NBC News' Today show on Thursday the final number of Americans who will die from Covid-19 in the outbreak "looks more like 60,000".

In late March, Dr Fauci estimated "between 100,000 and 200,000" could die.

The 60,000 projection would match the upper estimate for total flu deaths in the US between October 2019 to March 2020, according to government data.

But Vice-President Mike Pence stressed on Thursday that Covid-19 is about three times as contagious as influenza. The White House has previously touted estimates that 2.2 million Americans could die from coronavirus

if nothing was done to stop its spread.

Stay-at-home orders have in the meantime closed non-essential businesses in 42 states, while drastically slowing the US economy.

New data on Thursday showed unemployment claims topped 6 million for the second week in a row, bringing the number of Americans out of work over the last three weeks to 16.8 million.

Chicago meanwhile imposed a curfew on liquor sales from 21:00 local time on Thursday to stop the persistent violation of a ban on large gatherings.

The measure, due to remain in place until 30 April, comes after health officials this week said black Chicagoans account for half of all the Illinois city's coronavirus cases and more than 70% of its deaths, despite making up just 30% of the population.

Figures from Louisiana, Mississippi, Michigan, Wisconsin and New York reflect the same racial disparity in coronavirus infections.

Presumptive Democratic White House nominee Joe Biden joined growing calls on Thursday for the release of comprehensive racial data on the pandemic.

He said it had cast a spotlight on inequity and the impact of "structural racism".

## Foreign news

UNDER EMERGENCY POWERS TO CURB CORONAVIRUS:

# US expels thousands of migrants to Mexico border

**NEW YORK, April 10. (BBC)** - The US has expelled more than 6,300 undocumented migrants on its Mexico border using emergency powers to curb coronavirus spread, officials say.

The 21 March public health measure lets officials override immigration laws, expediting removal processes.

Critics say the order is being used as an extension of strict immigration policies.

Meanwhile, the number of illegal border crossings has fallen amid travel restrictions across the region.

The emergency public health order issued by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) bans the entry of foreigners considered to pose a "serious danger" to the spread of communicable disease.

The measure, initially in place for 30 days, was necessary to limit the spread of the disease in crowded places such as border patrol stations or ports of entry, said CDC Director Dr Robert R Redfield. The US has the world's highest number of confirmed infections - more than 460,000 - and nearly 16,500 deaths.

Since the CDC measure was introduced, apprehensions at the border dropped by 50%, acting CBP commissioner Mark Morgan said. Fewer than 100 people were under the agency's custody, a 97% fall from the average of 3,000.

Nearly 80% of those found at the border were being removed within hours, Mr Morgan added, saying the "overwhelming majority" were caught crossing illegally. Most were sent back to Mexico while some were returned to their home countries.

In recent years, most of the people trying to enter the US have come from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, usually claiming to be fleeing poverty and violence.

Combined, those countries have fewer than 700 confirmed cases of Covid-19 and 32 deaths, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University, which is track-



**US Border guards in action**

ing the disease globally. Mexico has around 3,500 confirmed cases with over 200 deaths.

Those being sent back under the CDC order include children arriving at the border alone who would previously be transferred to the Department of Health and Human Services to be protected from violence and exploitation. "The disease doesn't know age," Mr Morgan said.

However, he rejected criticism that the health measure was being used as an extension of the Trump administration's headline immigration policies. "This is not about immigration. This is about public health," he told reporters.

"This is about putting forth aggressive mitigation and containment measures."

But an internal CBP document published by ProPublica website shows that access to protections such as asylum has been effectively blocked, with exceptions granted only for those able to show a "reasonably believable" fear of being tortured.

On Tuesday, Democrats on the Senate Judiciary Committee wrote a letter to acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf, who oversees border agencies, saying the government's use of the emergency public health measure was not legal.

"Contrary to existing law, individuals, families and children are now unable to sufficiently make claims for asylum, seek other forms of humanitarian protection, and, in some instances, are being expelled

to countries in which they fear prosecution," it said.

The letter also said the administration appeared to have "granted itself sweeping powers to summarily expel large, unknown numbers of individuals arriving at our border". It said: "This amounts to a startling expansion of executive power under the guise of a global pandemic response."

In March, 33,937 people were caught trying to cross the border illegally, a fall of 2,577 from the previous month, according to CBP. Many countries across Latin America have shut their borders in an attempt to stop the disease. Last month, the US closed its borders with Canada and Mexico to all non-essential travel.

**WHILE DETAINED AT US-MEXICO BORDER:**

## Woman gives birth standing with trousers on

**NEW YORK, April 10. (The Independent)** - A woman suffering flu-like symptoms gave birth standing and fully clothed while detained near the Mexican-US border, according to the American Civil Liberties Union.

The Guatemalan woman, 27, was being processed at the Chula Vista Border Patrol Station near San Diego when her complaints of pain and pleas for help were allegedly ignored by agents, according to a complaint filed by the ACLU and Jewish Family Service of San Diego with the US Department of Homeland Security's Office of the Inspector General.

The woman, holding onto a garbage can for support, was repeatedly told to sit and wait to be processed. Her husband, hearing a baby's cries, removed her pants to reveal the newborn's head while their daughters, aged 2 and 12, witnessed the event, according to the ACLU's interviews with the family.

"This horrific case is just the most recent and one of the most egregious examples of this agency's abuse," said ACLU attorney Monika Y. Langarica.

An account of the birth by US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), released a few days after the incident on 16 February, describes a conflicting version of events.

After entering the country illegally, the family was detained but "did not appear to be in distress and did not re-



**A woman suffering gave birth standing and fully clothed while detained near the Mexican-US border**

quest any medical attention", the agency said in a statement.

"Thanks to the medical resources available in our stations, this woman and her child were well cared for and received immediate medical attention," said Chief Patrol Agent Aaron Heitke. "Our agents are well trained to manage the unexpected, and I'm proud of the work they did in caring for this mother."

A CBP spokesman told The Independent that after an internal investigation of the complaint, the agency "strongly disagrees with the unsubstantiated allegations against our agents".

"Based on this available information, CBP supports what appear to be nothing short of heroic actions of medical personnel and agents on scene and welcomes the response of

[Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General]," the spokesman said.

In a letter to Department of Homeland Security Inspector General Joseph Cuffari, Democratic Senator Richard Blumenthal demanded an investigation into the incident, as well as other reported mistreatment of pregnant women in custody.

In the letter, Mr Blumenthal said the woman was not allowed to shower after giving birth and after returning from hospital to the Border Patrol station two days later was refused a blanket for the baby.

"Nobody should be treated this way. But sadly, this woman is not the only one to have experienced inexcusable treatment at CBP's hands," Mr Blumenthal said in the statement.

## 'I'm in lockdown with my long-lost sister'

**AUKLAND, April 11. (BBC)** - "The lockdown has been an absolutely fantastic silver lining for us. It's given us an opportunity to make up for lost time."

Sue Bremner and her husband David, from Shropshire, are stranded in New Zealand due to the coronavirus pandemic.

But it's given Sue the chance to get to know her long-lost sister Margaret Hannay - who she didn't know existed for more than 40 years.

Margaret, 71, was given up for adoption at two weeks old by her mum, who had a short relationship with Sue's dad in 1948. It was only last year that the sisters met for the first time after Margaret - who lives in Auckland - got in touch with Sue in the UK.

Sue, 65, and her husband went out to see her sister again as part of a two-month trip across New Zealand and Australia on 5 March. But two weeks

later, the country went into lockdown and they couldn't get back to the UK. So Sue has been able to spend some extra time with Margaret and her husband, John.

"We've been having a wonderful time here," says Sue, who lives in Ludlow. "We've been spending lots of time together drinking wine and cooking and having fun."

"We haven't killed each other yet," Margaret laughs. "It's been great. It's really hard, as you probably know, to share a kitchen with someone. But we seem to manage, everything works."

Sue found out she had an older sister in 2000 when her dad told her that he'd had a child with another woman before he'd met her mum.

"My dad asked me would I try to find Margaret because he wanted her to know there's never been a day gone past when he hadn't thought about the child that had been adopted. "He was very regretful that somebody had

been brought into the world and he didn't know them and he wanted to apologise for that."

Sue gave her details to the General Register Office - which holds records of births and deaths - and searched on social media and ancestry websites.

She was told she wouldn't be able to find out any information about her sister unless Margaret got in touch saying she wanted to be found.

Margaret, who moved to New Zealand 45 years ago, always knew she was adopted but didn't really have any desire to track down her birth parents. But last year, she told her daughter she had started to wonder whether she had any siblings.

She then got in touch with the General Register Office and within two weeks they got back to her to say she had a sister - giving her Sue's contact details.

"I was sitting there in bed with my first morning cup of tea with John snoring next to me and I opened this email and I was like, 'Oh I've got a sister,'" says Margaret.

"So when he woke up he found me sitting in bed with my cup of tea sobbing. When I told him he was delighted as he has two older brothers. I always wanted to have brothers and sisters but I never did."

Sue says it was "amazing" when she got an email from Margaret introducing herself - but unfortunately their dad had died before they were reunited. "Receiving that email was like winning the pools. I would've loved to have told my dad but I just kind of feel he's inside me and he knew it was happening."

Margaret and Sue also have two brothers - Lawrence and John Connell - and all four siblings met up for the first time in the UK last year.

"It was a great opportunity for all of a sudden meet the rest of family to see how we all got on," says Margaret.



**Sue and Margaret have spent a lot of time cooking together during the lockdown**

## Great apes on lockdown over threat of disease

**DR CONGO, April 10. (BBC)** - Great apes have been put on lockdown against the threat of coronavirus.

Gorilla tourism in Africa has been suspended, while sanctuaries for other apes, such as orangutans, have closed to the public.

It's not known if great apes can contract the virus, but there are growing fears that our closest living relatives might be equally at risk.

This week a tiger at Bronx Zoo tested positive for coronavirus.

New measures have been put in place to protect big cats and their caregivers.

Dr Kirsten Gilardi is chief veterinary officer for Gorilla Doctors, which provides veterinary care to gorillas in the forests of Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

"We don't know if it's infected mountain gorillas; we have not seen any evidence of that," she said. "But because mountain gorillas are susceptible to human pathogens, we know that they can develop respiratory illness."

Mountain gorillas (Gorilla beringei beringei) are an endangered species of great ape found only in the forests of Rwanda, Uganda and the DR Congo. All three countries have seen human cases of coronavirus, with gorilla tourism currently suspended.

**Social distancing**

The work of vets and rangers who care for wild gorillas continues, but with added precautions. "Much of what we're practicing right now, in terms of social distancing, and self-quarantine, are at the heart of the recommendations for protecting great apes as well," said Dr Gilardi, who is also a veterinary professor at the University of California, Davis.

Even before the outbreak, people were asked to stay seven metres away from gorillas at all times. New guidance from the International Union



**Dr Eddy, head veterinarian in DRC, treating an injured gorilla (prior to the outbreak)**

for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) calls for a minimum distance of 10 metres from great apes, with visits by humans reduced to the minimum needed to ensure their safety and health. No person who is ill, or who has been in contact with a sick person in the preceding 14 days, should be allowed near them.

Habitat loss and poaching are big threats to the survival of great apes, but viruses are also a concern. Infectious disease is now listed among the top three threats to some great ape groups.

Past research has shown that chimps can contract the common cold virus, while the Ebola virus is thought to have killed thousands of chimpanzees and gorillas in Africa.

Serge Wich, professor of primate biology at Liverpool John Moores University, UK, said many governments had closed down tourism with great apes, while researchers and sanctuaries were taking extra measures. He said: "We don't know, if they were to

get infected, what the health effects would be, but obviously given the health implications for people it's a risk we do not want to take with great apes so these precautions everyone's taking are an important step to try to reduce that risk."

Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre on the island of Borneo is one of many sanctuaries for great apes that has closed its doors to the public.

Susan Sheward, founder and chairwoman of Orangutan Appeal UK, said in a statement: "This disease could be fatal for the already critically endangered orangutan, it is a risk that we cannot afford take. OAUK will do everything it can to make sure that the orangutans at Sepilok stay healthy and safe."

There are four types of great apes alive today: gorillas (Africa), bonobos (Africa), orangutans (SE Asia), and chimpanzees (Africa). Humans are closely related to great apes, sharing a common ancestor several million years ago.



A scene from the funeral of Palestinian doctor Tahsin Khrisat



Abdel Sattar Airoud was among the first doctors to contract the virus from a patient



Tahsin Khrisat enjoyed telling people stories about his childhood in Jordan



Abdulghani Makki was a caring doctor, husband and father who saw no differences between religions and nationalities



As well as being specialised in modern medicine, Ghvont Mouradian was an expert of alternative therapies

[Courtesy of family]

**SICILY, Italy. April 11.** - The 100th doctor to die on Italy's front lines as the country struggles to contain the coronavirus epidemic was Samar Sinjab, a 62-year-old Syrian woman who was born in Damascus.

Having lived in Italy's northeast Veneto region since 1994, she contracted the virus from a patient in the early stages of the pandemic and died after spending two weeks in an intensive care unit.

She worked until her last days. The last WhatsApp message she sent was to one of her patients, according to the Corriere della Sera newspaper.

More than 18,000 people have died in Italy from COVID-19, a disease that has infected more than 143,000 people in the country.

More than 8,000 healthcare workers have been infected in the country, the majority in northern regions, according to the Italian National Institute of Health, and at least 100 doctors have died.

Family doctors visiting patients at home, without personal protective equipment (PPE), were the first to catch the virus.

According to the Association of Foreign Doctors in Italy, there are about 20,000 doctors with ancestry in other countries.

Of those, 3,700 come from the Middle East. Since the 1960s, young Arabs have studied medicine in Italy.

"It was an unquestioned duty for us to serve our second homeland, considering the unprecedented emergency," Foad Aodi, the president of the association, told Al Jazeera.

"While treating patients, at least 15 Arab doctors have reportedly been hospitalised, three of whom are currently in ICU with severe conditions. We also lost some of our colleagues and friends. But as we mourn, we still feel committed to Italy and our profession."

Here, Al Jazeera profiles four Arab doctors who have lost their lives in this pandemic.

#### ABDEL SATTAR AIROUD

A family doctor who came out of retirement amid the epidemic

Airoud was born in Aleppo, Syria, in 1945.

At 19, he realised his dream and arrived in Italy to study medicine. He specialised in oncology and internal

medicine at the University of Bologna in the country's north.

After four years in a private clinic, he followed his own practice in a town near Piacenza, in the region of Emilia-Romagna, and became a well-known family doctor to the locals.

"He was very generous and kind. He followed me throughout my three pregnancies, and never complained about my numerous phone calls to ease my worries. He will be missed, also as a friend," Anita Santelli, one of his patients, told Al Jazeera.

His eldest daughter, 35-year-old Kinda Airoud, said: "My father never forgot his roots, Syria was part of our upbringing."

He had been retired for five years but returned to work when the epidemic began; he did not want to abandon his former patients at a difficult time.

"We spent every summer of my youth in Syria, until the war began. But he also owed everything to the country that welcomed him, so it was natural for him to help those patients he had kept in contact with."

Airoud was among the first doctors to contract coronavirus from a patient. As he showed mild symptoms, he tested negative at first.

"Then suddenly one night his conditions worsened, so we called an am-

bulance. That's when we last saw him," said Kinda. Airoud died on March 16.

His body was buried in Brescia, a city almost two hours away from Piacenza, because there was no section for Muslims at the local cemetery at the time.

After a second Syrian national passed away, Piacenza's mayor secured a dedicated area for Muslim burials to keep them closer to their loved ones.

#### TAHSIN KHRISAT

A gentle widower with a caring bedside manner

A Palestinian from Jordan, 66-year-old Khrisat worked in Brescia, one of the worst-hit cities in the region of Lombardy.

"He had lost his wife a few years ago, and suffered because of that," Federica Maestri, Khrisat's former colleague, told Al Jazeera.

She said the pain of the epidemic, "instead of closing him in, opened him to a new form of sensibility and empathy towards others."

He was kind, compassionate, funny and, as an ER doctor, loved sharing stories about his childhood in Amman during rare breaks in long night shifts.

He later opened his own private clinic.

"Almost every day, Tahsin would send good morning or encouragement

messages to his friends and patients, to remind them of his presence in case of need. It was his way of saying, 'I'll always be there for you!'" Maestri said.

In the early days of the pandemic, he was infected by a patient.

"We used a Facebook Live feature to give relatives both in Italy and Jordan a sense of normality while grieving in such a painful context," Raisa Labaran, spokesperson of the Islamic Cultural Center of Brescia, told Al Jazeera.

His pre-existing heart conditions made him more vulnerable to the virus. He died on March 22.

Only the imam and employees of a local Muslim funeral home were allowed to attend the burial.

Khrisat's body now rests in the Muslim section of Brescia's public cemetery. However, the situation for Muslim burials remains critical in Italy amid a shortage of space.

"There are now only 20 places left in the cemetery, and with the current lockdown situation, it's been hard to organise burials or repatriate the bodies to their home countries."

"Fears of possible cremation, forbidden in Islam, add to the overall sentiment of anxiety," said Labaran.

#### ABDULGHANI MAKKI

A loving grandfather who loved It-

aly and Syria in equal measure

Born in Aleppo, Syria, in 1941, Makki was not only known as a doctor, but also as a cultural pillar in his local community in Sant'Elpidio a Mare, in Italy's Marche region.

"He was a symbol of cultural integration, his tales will be his legacy," said his friend Corrado Virgili, who last saw him on March 2.

After studying medicine and surgery in Italy, he had planned to return to Syria. But he fell in love with an Italian woman, and had called Italy home since 1961.

Makki specialised in reanimation as well as paediatrics, and later dentistry.

He helped his eldest daughter Leila open and run a family clinic.

"He would work with passion to assist his patients, never forgetting his role of husband, father and grandfather," Leila told Al Jazeera.

When he was not looking after his patients, Makki would tell stories to his granddaughters - talents that saw him author children's books.

In his tales, Makki mixed Arab and Italian traditions to foster intercultural dialogue in his local community.

Leila says her father's love for Syria and Italy was equal.

"In our household, there was no difference between Muslim and Chris-

tian, Italian or Syrian. My sister and I grew up with a broader understanding of humankind, thanks to him," she said.

Makki died on March 24, aged 79. His latest book, illustrated by his friend Virgili, will be published posthumously with the title *Mariam and the Savannah Queen*.

#### GHVONT MOURADIAN -

A 'spiritual guide' who specialised in alternative therapies

Known by his nickname Revont, Mouradian died on March 29, aged 61.

Besides practising modern medicine, he also specialised in acupuncture and hydrotherapy.

Mouradian was born to an Armenian family in Qamishli, northern Syria, where he spent his childhood.

He moved to India to study gynaecology and in 1987, travelled to Italy to specialise in medical hydrology at the University of Pavia.

He became a respected thermal doctor in Salsomaggiore, a city in northern Italy known for its healing thermal baths, where he kept caring for his patients until the lockdown was enforced.

Mouradian's relatives, split between Syria and Lebanon, were deeply saddened by not being able to say a final goodbye due to travel restrictions.

His nephew in Beirut, Sarkis Kerkejian, wrote on Facebook: "He was there for all of us in times of trouble and when we had health issues."

"Grumpy with a unique sense of humour, kind-hearted, loving and caring to all his family and friends. He left a trace with everyone who came to know him with his unique spirit."

His colleague Roberta Bianchi said on her social media page: "When you used to leave for India or China for a few weeks, everybody would miss you. Now that you're gone forever, you will leave an unbridgeable void. He was a colleague, a friend, a spiritual guide to us all."

Mirko Avesani, a neurologist from the Lombardy region who knew Mouradian, told Al Jazeera that these Arab doctors, who have paid the ultimate sacrifice, must be remembered.

"Immigration should not just be associated with problems. The sacrifice of these doctors teaches us an important lesson, for future reference," he said.

## German region eases Baltic coast travel ban

BERLIN, April 10. (BBC) - A regional court in eastern Germany has ruled that locals can go to the popular Baltic coast this Easter weekend, despite the coronavirus lockdown.

The Greifswald higher court said the regional government's travel ban was "disproportionate" in curbing people's local freedom. Germans from other regions remain banned from the coast.

The Mecklenburg-West Pomerania government has accepted the decision.

But the government urged locals to stay 2m (6.6ft) apart to avoid contagion.

Temperatures on Germany's Baltic coast are set to climb above 20C on Sunday and forecasters say it will be a sunny Easter weekend.

Lockdowns are in force across Germany, but the restrictions vary from state to state. The toughest measures have been imposed in Bavaria and the Saarland.

The number of Germans infected with Covid-19 has risen for the fourth day in a row, reaching 113,525, the respected Robert Koch Institute says. There had been four days of decline. Almost half of those infected have recovered, says the RKI.

And the death toll has reached 2,373, with another 266 fatalities reported on Friday - still well below the

death rates in Italy, Spain, France and the UK. Johns Hopkins University in the US puts the number of infections in Germany at over 118,000 with more than 2,600 deaths.

Germany's large-scale testing for infection is believed to have kept the figures down.

Magnet for holidaymakers

The picturesque town of Stralsund on the Baltic coast is Chancellor Angela Merkel's constituency - she has held that seat since 1990.

Nearby lies the island of Rügen, a major holiday destination for Germans.

One of the lawyers who argued against the regional government's travel ban, Jost von Glasenapp, called it "meaningless", broadcaster NDR reported.

Nobody, he said, had been able to explain to him "why the infection risk was higher when people travelled from the overcrowded town to the spacious coast".

In its ruling the court also described as "incomprehensible" the authorities' decision to exclude the regional capital Schwerin and its suburbs from the travel ban.

And the judges argued that there would now be more space in the seaside resorts because foreigners and Germans from outside the region could not go there.

Two cases lodged by Germans living outside Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, who wanted to travel there, were rejected by the court.

Farm workers fly in

In another exception to Germany's lockdown, the federal government is allowing thousands of Romanians and Poles to fly in to help with the spring harvest, especially to pick asparagus and strawberries.

Bus routes took newly arrived Romanians to farms from Düsseldorf airport on Thursday.

There is a shortage of farm labour because of the coronavirus restrictions, so up to 80,000 foreign seasonal workers will be allowed in during April and May, on direct flights.

In normal years some 300,000 labourers travel to Germany for fruit and vegetable picking.

Authorities are doing medical checks on those arriving at farms, keeping them separate from other workers, and obliging them to work only in small groups.

A union spokesperson, Reinhard Steffen, voiced concern about the scheme, in a Reuters interview.

"We fear that hygiene standards will not be met and people's accommodation will not be properly regulated. We are calling for quarantine, with a maximum of two people to one room," he said.



Germany's windswept Baltic coast has popular resorts like Zingst AFP

## Foreign news

# Sweden challenges Trump by refusing to lock down

**STOCKHOLM, Sweden. April 11. (CNN)** - Much of Europe is still on coronavirus lockdown, with severe restrictions on movement and penalties for those who transgress.

But not Sweden. Restaurants and bars are open in the Nordic country, playgrounds and schools too, and the government is relying on voluntary action to stem the spread of Covid-19.

It's a controversial approach, and one that's drawn US President Donald Trump's attention. "Sweden did that, the herd, they call it the herd. Sweden's suffering very, very badly," Trump said.

But the Swedish government is confident its policy can work. Foreign Minister Ann Linde told Swedish TV on Wednesday that Trump was "factually wrong" to suggest that Sweden was following the "herd immunity" theory -- of letting enough people catch the virus while protecting the vulnerable, meaning a country's population builds up immunity against the disease.

Sweden's strategy, she said, was: "No lockdown and we rely very much on people taking responsibility themselves."

The country's state epidemiologist, Anders Tegnell, also pushed back against Trump's criticism that Sweden was doing badly. "I think Sweden is doing okay," he told CNN affiliate Expressen. "It's producing quality results the same way it's always done. So far Swedish health care is handling this pandemic in a fantastic way."

As of April 10, Sweden has little over 10,000 cases of the Covid-19 virus and over 900 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University figures.

Sweden's actions are about encouraging and recommending, not compulsion. Two days after Spain imposed a nationwide lockdown on March 14, Swedish authorities were encouraging people to wash hands and stay at home if sick. On March 24, new rules were introduced to avoid crowding at restaurants. But they very much stayed open. So did many primary and secondary schools. Gatherings of up to 50 people are still permitted.



Swedish restaurants have very much remained open.

Tegnell defended the decision to keep schools open. "We know that closing down schools has a lot of effects on health care because a lot of people can't go to their work anymore. A lot of children are suffering when they can't go to school."

Elisabeth Liden, a journalist in Stockholm, told CNN the city is less crowded now. "The subway went from being completely packed to having only a few passengers per car. I get the sense that a vast majority are taking the recommendations of social distancing seriously."

But she added that while "some Swedes won't even kiss their spouse, others are throwing Easter parties."

Fresh surge  
Much of Sweden's focus has been to protect the elderly. Anyone aged 70 or older has been told to stay at home and limit their social contact as much as possible. One Swedish government official said that on the whole people supported the government's approach, but many were "upset about the fact that no ban on visiting homes for el-

derly was set until recently [April 1], and now the virus is widely spread among these homes, causing the death toll to rise."

The World Health Organization (WHO) is skeptical of Sweden's approach. Noting a fresh surge in the country's infections, the WHO told CNN Wednesday that it's "imperative" that Sweden "increase measures to control spread of the virus, prepare and increase capacity of the health system to cope, ensure physical distancing and communicate the why and how of all measures to the population."

"Only an 'all of society' approach will work to prevent escalation and turn this situation around," said a WHO Europe spokesperson.

Sweden's "curve" -- the rate of infections and deaths caused by coronavirus -- is certainly steeper than that of many other European countries with stricter measures.

A study by Imperial College London estimated that 3.1% of the Swedish population was infected (as of March 28) -- compared to 0.41% in Norway

and 2.5% in the UK. As for deaths, by April 8, coronavirus accounted for 67 fatalities per 1 million Swedish citizens, according to the Swedish Health Ministry. Norway had 19 deaths per million, Finland seven per million. The number of deaths rose 16% on Wednesday.

Some Swedish researchers are demanding the government must be stricter. This week several prominent Swedish clinicians wrote an open letter lamenting that large numbers of people are visiting bars, restaurants and shopping malls, even ski slopes. "This unfortunately is translating into a death toll that continues to climb in Sweden."

Cecilia Söderberg-Nauclér -- a virus immunology researcher at Sweden's Karolinska Institute -- is one of more than 2,000 health professionals and researchers who signed a petition demanding tougher action. She told CNN: "We are not winning this battle. It is horrifying. Where I live people are working from home, but they go to local restaurants, local cafés and they



Swedish authorities have allowed a large amount of personal freedom unlike other European countries.

mix up old people and young people from schools and universities. That is not social distancing."

Söderberg-Nauclér says the situation in Stockholm, where the great majority of the country's infections have occurred, is "lost," but adds: "It is not too late for rest of the country. I wish we would lock down and take control of regions not affected in same way."

Weather the storm

Tom Britton, professor of mathematical statistics at Stockholm University, models how infectious diseases behave in a population.

He believes 40% of the Swedish capital's population will be infected by the end of April. While acknowledging the difficulty of measuring the rate of infection, he told CNN that "my best guess today would be 10% or a bit more" of Swedes currently have the virus nationwide.

Some opponents of the government's policy fear that reliance on voluntary behavior will cause a much faster spike in cases, potentially overwhelming the health care system. Sweden also has one of the lowest ratios of critical care beds per capita in Europe, and the government official who spoke

with CNN said that supplies of protective equipment are only just staying ahead of demand.

In some ways, however, Sweden is better prepared to weather the storm than other countries. Some 40% of the country's workforce worked from home regularly, even before the virus struck and Sweden has a high ratio of people living on their own, whereas in southern Europe it's not uncommon to have three generations under one roof.

Emma Grossmith, a British employment lawyer working in Stockholm, says another factor in Sweden's favor is a generous social welfare net that means people don't feel obligated to turn up for work if their young child is sick.

State support kicks in on day one of absence from work due to a child being sick. "The system here was already well set up to help people to make smarter choices which ultimately benefit the wider population," she told CNN.

But Grossmith notes a big gap between the way Swedes and expatriates view the virus. "There is a native trust in the system amongst those who have grown up with it.

## THE NEW YORK TIMES REPORTS:

### Coronavirus widespread among Saudi Royal family

**RIYADH, April 11. (Al-Jazeera)** - Dozens of members of the ruling Saudi royal family, as many as 150, have been infected with coronavirus in recent weeks, a news report said.

Saudi Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Abdulaziz Al Saud - the governor of the capital Riyadh who is in his 70s - is in intensive care after contracting the virus, according to The New York Times, which cited hospital communications, doctors in the country and sources familiar with the family. King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) have retreated into isolation to avoid the outbreak.

Doctors at an elite hospital that treats royals are preparing 500 more beds for an expected influx of patients.

"Directives are to be ready for VIPs from around the country," the operators of the elite facility, the King Faisal Specialist Hospital, wrote in a "high alert" sent out electronically to senior doctors and later obtained by the Times.

"We don't know how many cases we will get but high alert," said the message, which instructed "all chronic patients to be moved out ASAP" and only "top urgent cases" will be accepted, according to the newspaper.

The alert added any infected staff members will now be treated at a less elite hospital to save room for royals. There are thousands of Saudi princes. Many travel regularly to Europe and some are believed to have contracted the virus abroad and brought it back to Saudi Arabia, the report said.



The New York Times reported that Saudi Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Abdulaziz Al Saud - the governor of the capital Riyadh who is in his 70s - is in intensive care after contracting the virus.

The kingdom of about 33 million people has reported over 4,000 cases and around 50 deaths. The country, home to Islam's holiest sites Mecca and Medina, banned the year-round Umrah pilgrimage and sealed off the areas in early March. Travel in and out of the country, as well as between provinces, has since been largely restricted, and four governorates and five major cities have been placed under 24-hour lockdown.

Authorities have yet to announce whether they will proceed with this year's Hajj, scheduled for the end of July. Last year, about 2.5 million people travelled to Saudi Arabia to take part in the Hajj, which all Muslims must perform at least once in their lives if able.

## HERE ARE THE FACTS:

### Trump is wrong in so many ways

**NEW YORK, April 11. (CNN)** - There are several treatments being studied to prevent or treat coronavirus, but President Trump has been a cheerleader for one in particular: hydroxychloroquine, a drug currently used to treat malaria, lupus and rheumatoid arthritis.

Over the past month, he's made many optimistic statements about hydroxychloroquine. CNN has fact-checked the president multiple times -- such as here, here, and here -- and found that he's being unrealistically enthusiastic. Physicians, including Trump's own advisor, Dr. Anthony Fauci, have emphasized that in order to know if a drug is going to work -- and be safe -- it has to be studied in clinical trials. It might work, but it might not. It might be safe, but it also could hurt patients.

Clinical trials are considered the gold standard in medicine. Boiled down to the essentials, clinical trials take a large group of people, give half of them the drug and half of them a placebo, and see how each group fares. The half that takes the placebo is called the control group. The reason to have a control group is that it allows the doctors to tell if it's the drug itself that is having an effect on the study subjects, and not something else.

If the drug group and the placebo group have the same results, then it's likely the drug did not have an effect.

CNN searched clinicaltrials.gov, the National Institutes of Health database of privately and publicly funded clinical studies around the world, and found there are at least 15 research centers in the United States studying hydroxychloroquine to prevent or treat coronavirus.

Over the past few weeks, Trump has made several erroneous statements relating to hydroxychloroquine studies. Here are basic questions about these studies with answers from the president and then answers from doctors.

#### QUESTION #1:

**How soon until we know if hydroxychloroquine works against coronavirus?**  
Trump says "days."

Doctors say weeks or months.  
On March 29 on Fox News, Trump said "we're going to have a good idea over the next three days" whether hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin work. "I think it might be successful...we're going to know within days."

Azithromycin is an antibiotic better known as Zithromax or a Z-pack.



US President Trump

Of the 15 US research centers, only a few are studying hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin in combination; most are studying just hydroxychloroquine.

CNN reached out to the 15 centers to ask how long it would take them to get results. Seven centers either did not respond or said they didn't know.

Six of the centers that responded said it would take months to get study results: Henry Ford Health System in Michigan; University of Washington; Baylor Scott & White Health in Texas; Vanderbilt University in Tennessee; Bassett Healthcare; and Duke University in North Carolina.

For example, doctors conducting a large clinical trial at Henry Ford are aiming for more than 3,000 participants and say it will take about four months to conduct their study. Researchers running a trial at New York University and the University of Washington say they'll have around 2,000 study subjects and expect to have results in June or July.

Two centers said they could have results within weeks. The University of Minnesota is doing a study to see if hydroxychloroquine can help prevent people from becoming infected with coronavirus. They say they could have results May 7, or possibly even earlier. (Here's a story about a physician who's a study subject in that trial.)

Rutgers University said they could have initial results by late April or early May on their study of whether hydroxychloroquine alone, or in combination with azithromycin, might help treat coronavirus. The reason a clinical trial can't be done in days is because the universities need to recruit study subjects, who then need to take the pills for a period of time. Doctors need to analyze the results.

That all takes time -- even when doctors are moving at lightning speed because of the pandemic.

"We need rigorous science, we need the right science," said Dr. Ruanne Barnabas, the principal investigator at the University of Washington. "This is the most urgent study we've ever worked on and we're moving quickly to get results."

The other seven centers conducting hydroxychloroquine studies for coronavirus are: Columbia University in New York; Intermountain Health Care, Inc. in Utah; the University of Pennsylvania; Washington University in St. Louis; Providence Health in Oregon; Progenabio, a pharmaceutical company.

#### QUESTION #2:

French researchers have already done a clinical study showing hydroxychloroquine works as a treatment for coronavirus. Doesn't that tell us something?

Trump says yes.  
Doctors say the study was terrible, so no.

Trump spoke glowingly about this small French study at an April 5 White House briefing.

"You've seen the same test that I have," he said. "In France, they have a very good test." He also referred to the study in a March 21 tweet and wrote that hydroxychloroquine plus azithromycin "have a real chance to be one of the biggest game changers in the history of medicine."

But the French study has come under so much fire that the journal that published it is reviewing it again and wrote that "a correction to the scientific record may be considered."

There are several concerns about the paper, including that it ignored patients who took the drug and fared poorly.

Experts described the French study to CNN as "a complete failure" and "pathetic."

#### QUESTION #3:

**Have some people tried to delay hydroxychloroquine clinical trials?**

Trump says yes, and he came to the rescue.

Doctors say they have no idea what he's talking about. Trump has said some unnamed force has been trying to keep hydroxychloroquine research in the lab and he's had to swoop in and fight to move it forward into human studies. "But we don't have time to go and say, 'Gee, let's take a couple of years and test it out. And

let's go and test with the test tubes and the laboratories. We don't have time," he said at an April 5 White House briefing.

On March 30 he told Fox News that the drug was being studied in people and, "I think that's better than testing in a laboratory, but you know, the doctors tell me no. Some doctors tell me no," he said. "And I got it done because I said, look, some of these people are very sick and they're not going to make it. Let's do it. Let's get it done."

Trump offered no proof that anyone was encouraging that hydroxychloroquine be tested in a lab, much less for "a couple of years."

The infectious disease experts interviewed for this story, told CNN they don't know of anyone who advocated for hydroxychloroquine research to be slowed down -- in fact, they were planning their hydroxychloroquine trials before Trump ever mentioned the drug.

Trump first mentioned hydroxychloroquine on March 19 at a White House briefing.

Dr. David Boulware, who's running the University of Minnesota trial, says he started planning his study ten days before that, on March 9.

By March 18, the day before Trump first uttered the word "hydroxychloroquine" in public, Boulware had already recruited 61 study subjects, according to his research website.

In days, Boulware accomplished what he says usually takes more than a year to do.

"For clinical trials, this has by far been the fastest of my career," he said. "I think it's broken world records."

#### QUESTION #4:

**Is hydroxychloroquine safe for coronavirus patients?**

Trump says yes.  
Doctors say the drug can have serious side effects. Trump makes it sound like hydroxychloroquine is harmless.

"It doesn't kill you," he said at a briefing on April 1, one of just many times he's repeated that sentiment.

"What do you have to lose? Take it," he said at an April 4 briefing.

The label for Plaquenil, a brand of hydroxychloroquine, says patients taking the drug have reported "life threatening and fatal" cardiac problems and "irreversible" vision problems.

# THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

## could threaten global food supply, UN warns

**HONG KONG, April 11. (CNN)** - As the novel coronavirus pandemic shuts down businesses globally and sends countries into lockdown, the disruptions are threatening to cut off supply chains and increase food insecurity.

"Supermarket shelves remain stocked for now," the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) said in a report released late last month. "But a protracted pandemic crisis could quickly put a strain on the food supply chains, a complex web of interactions involving farmers, agricultural inputs, processing plants, shipping, retailers and more."

The issue, however, is not food scarcity -- at least, not yet. Rather, it's the world's drastic measures in response to the virus.

Border closures, movement restrictions, and disruptions in the shipping and aviation industries have made it harder to continue food production and transport goods internationally -- placing countries with few alternative food sources at high risk.

Airlines have grounded thousands of planes and ports have closed -- stranding containers of food, medicine, and other products on tarmacs and holding areas, said the UN Conference on Trade and Development on March 25.

Heightened instability in global food supply will affect the poorest citizens most, warned the UN's Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in a paper last month.

Even private companies and organizations have called for immediate action to address the looming food catastrophe.

"Governments, businesses, civil society and international agencies need to take urgent, coordinated action to prevent the COVID pandemic turning into a global food and humanitarian crisis," said an open letter to world leaders from scientists, politicians, and companies like Nestle and Unilever.

China's technological advances softened the blow

China was worst-hit by the virus in January and February, when thousands of new cases were being reported each day.

The country imposed lockdowns, suspended inter-provincial travel and ordered residents to stay at home, disrupting business in virtually all sectors.

"In China, logistics constraints and labor crunches have caused losses of fresh vegetables, limited access to animal feed and diminished capacity of slaughterhouses," said the FAO report. China has faced severe food shortages before; historians estimate



A woman wearing a facemask sells vegetables at a community farm in Hong Kong

tens of millions of people starved to death in a famine caused by an economic campaign known as the Great Leap Forward, from 1958 to 1962.

But modern China is an entirely different country, with new technologies and wealth -- and it has been working for years to improve its food security, spending tens of billions of dollars this past decade purchasing major seed businesses.

These efforts appear to have softened the blow to the food industry this time around. The central government distributed \$20 million in subsidies to revive agriculture, and invested in technology including agricultural drones and unmanned vehicles that could keep supply chains moving without human contact, said the FAO report. When people did go into the fields to work, they wore government-provided masks and protective equipment, and were given disinfectant from local authorities, said state-run news agency Xinhua.

Even the country's dominant e-commerce market stepped in; provincial lockdowns and movement restrictions hampered the export and transport of goods, so e-commerce giant Alibaba set up a fund to help farmers find markets for their unsold products, the report said.

Australia is facing export pressure. Australia exports about two thirds of its agricultural products and is a major supplier for the Asia Pacific region -- but this crucial trade is now under threat.

The aviation industry has been hit hard by the pandemic and international flights have been slashed. Fewer flights mean it's now more expensive to export food via air travel, said Richard Shannon, manager of policy and advocacy at Growcom, the representative body for horticulture in Queensland state. "The industry is

rapidly trying to find alternate routes," he said -- but some Australian farmers may try to find new buyers within the country instead of looking internationally.

This threatens the entire country's economy in two ways. About 14.5% of all Australian exports are food products, according to the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC). If farmers aren't able to export their goods, it could cost the country tens of billions of dollars in lost income.

The next best option is for farmers to sell their goods within Australia -- so all these agricultural products that typically are sent out into the world are suddenly entering the domestic market. This influx could put a lot of pressure on the market, and affect the price at which these goods are sold, Shannon said.

The government stepped in with emergency aid, announcing it would spend 110 million Australian dollars (\$67.4 million) to increase the number of flights and help exporters transport their goods to key international markets. But the pandemic has also posed other problems. Winter is arriving in Australia -- which means seasonal workers nationwide are flocking to Queensland, which grows more than 90% of the country's winter vegetables. Suddenly, small rural towns are booming with people arriving from out of state, looking for work on farms.

With such a high volume of people living and working in close quarters, just a handful of infections could spell disaster for farm operations -- but these farms can't just shut down for 14 days, the way businesses in other sectors might.

"We're an essential service," Shannon said. "People need to continue eating." Queensland authorities and growers are now working to create protocol that can both keep workers

safe and prevent farm shutdowns, like staggering lunch shifts to reduce the number of people in close contact.

Hong Kong and Singapore can buy their way out

Hong Kong and Singapore are two of Asia's major financial hubs -- but with limited farmland, they both have tiny agricultural sectors and import more than 90% of their food, according to government websites.

Despite this, they are in little danger of food shortages, experts say. For starters, they both have a main supplier; Hong Kong imports the vast majority of its food from mainland China, and Singapore imports from Malaysia. As long as these major sources stay steady, food staples will be secure, and halted imports from other countries won't make too big an impact.

Even when China was in the depths of its coronavirus crisis, food still flowed across the border into Hong Kong, said Jonathan Wong, director of the Institute of Bioresource and Agriculture at Hong Kong Baptist University.

Some niche products like oysters from France may be cut off for a while -- but these aren't daily necessities, and Hong Kong can replace the supply through other countries, said Wong.

And although Malaysia is currently under a nationwide lockdown, the food industry is one of the essential services exempt.

"Our supply chains are intact and there has been no disruption to Singapore's imports," said the Singapore government in a statement after Malaysia announced the lockdown.

Even if there was any kind of disruption, Singapore has two months' worth of produce stockpiled, and has diversified its sources so it isn't wholly reliant on Malaysia, said Singapore Trade and Industry Minister Chan Chun Sing on Facebook.

The crucial thing that sets places Singapore and Hong Kong apart is that they have the resources to buy their food from alternate sources if any supply lines are compromised. But that isn't true for import-reliant, low-income countries like the Pacific Islands.

"The most at risk are those without solid economic bases, like Kiribati or Micronesia or Tuvalu," said David Dawe, FAO senior economist.

Some developing countries such as Laos or Myanmar produce enough staples including rice that they can survive an import drain -- but these Pacific Islands are so small that they don't grow much of their own food, said Dawe. They are "remote anyway to start with and rely heavily on imports."



US NAVY COMMANDER SAYS:

Vice Adm. Bill Merz

## Virus-struck aircraft carrier crew 'struggling' after captain's firing

**Washington, April 11. (CNN)** - The top Navy admiral overseeing the virus-stricken aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt tells CNN in an exclusive interview that he found some sailors "struggling" and "upset" after their commanding officer was relieved of duty by the ousted acting navy secretary who was forced to resign over the matter.

The commander of the 7th Fleet, Vice Admiral Bill Merz, also told CNN that a better job could have been done communicating with crew members about the virus and how the Navy was handling it.

Merz, who is now in a precautionary 14-day isolation period after spending more than six hours on the Roosevelt earlier this week, offered the first direct view into the concerns of many crew members in a nearly 30-minute interview after visiting the ship in Guam.

He described a crew that felt significant anxiety over what they viewed as a lack of information that had been given to them about the virus.

"There was lots of anxiety about the virus," Merz said. "As you can imagine the morale covers the spectrum, considering what they have been through," he said.

### Stress and anger

Merz was visiting after acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly resigned, following his decision to fire the Roosevelt's commander, Captain Brett Crozier, after a widely distributed message Crozier wrote about his concerns about the impact of the virus on the crew become public.

Merz repeatedly described the crew as capable and performing well, but clearly in an unprecedented state after the virus hit and their commanding officer, or CO, was abruptly relieved of duty.

The carrier crew was "struggling in the wake of losing their CO and their perception of the lack of activity regarding fighting the virus," Merz said.

Merz suggested that the crew did not appear to have been given a comprehensive and clear sense of the various steps the Navy was taking to help the Roosevelt deal with the virus outbreak onboard. That lack of information may have caused some stress, he suggested, feeding the very visible anger many crew members displayed when Modly visited the ship and addressed them about Crozier's dismissal.

"I think we could have told them earlier what we knew" about the virus Merz said. "The degree of accuracy against the virus at any level is a little sketchy, but I think we could have at least bought them in earlier and started having this dialog up front."

"The specific questions clearly indicated we needed to give them more information about the true dangers of the virus" and how the Navy was handling aboard the ship, he said.

"I certainly don't think it was malice by the ship or the leadership" he said. "I think it was just a matter of getting their arm around what they could and could not tell them."

Merz said that once he began to answer the crew's questions in

detail, he saw anxiety ease and questions turn more toward issues such as getting back out to sea.

Many sailors told Merz they were still worried about the fate of their former commanding officer.

Hundreds of crew members had given Crozier a rousing send-off in videos that went viral, clapping and shouting to show their respect and affection for him. Merz says sailors told him they worry Crozier might be punished under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, something that Modly had suggested before he resigned over the crisis.

### An ongoing investigation

"I got very specific questions about whether there would be UCMJ against their captain," Merz said, adding that he told them it is unlikely because Crozier was relieved over his judgment in widely distributing his views, rather than being relieved for a potential crime.

Merz was aware his visit to the ship provided a relief valve for the crew to talk to a senior officer about Crozier and a subsequent visit to the ship by Modly, who told the crew Crozier was either "naive" or "stupid" for distributing his message.

"They were visibly still upset about the secretary's visit so I walked them through what I knew, which really was not much more than what everybody else knew," Merz said, "I think they just needed to tell somebody about how much that hurt them and disappointed them."

Modly was forced to resign over those comments. Audio of his speech also leaked to media in which he used a profanity and some crew members were heard yelling back at him.

Merz was able to verify Crozier's immediate superior did not know he was sending the memo in which Crozier had urgently asked Navy leadership to evacuate sailors from the Roosevelt as the virus spread.

Noting that, "I was not in his shoes," Merz offered his own caveated assessment of Crozier's actions pending the outcome of an ongoing investigation.

"I certainly don't question his motives. I think his motives were pure. He was looking out for his crew," Merz said.

But Merz also noted all commanders have "a lot of tools available to be heard," adding "I am not going to second guess him at this point."

The investigation could be completed as soon as next week. Defense Secretary Mark Esper said he isn't ruling out the possibility that Crozier could be restored to command.

Currently, 447 of the Roosevelt's roughly 4,000 crew members, as well as Crozier, have tested positive for the virus. Nearly all the crew has been tested, but nearly 800 are still awaiting results.

Merz said it is clear from the "heartfelt" departure videos that Crozier meant a lot to the crew. But his own reaction when he saw them was worried about how an event with no social distancing was allowed to happen.

"My immediate reaction was our job just got harder for us," he said.

## Here's how churches observed Good Friday



A nun sits among empty pews at the Good Friday celebration at the Mother Teresa cathedral in Pristina, Kosovo on Good Friday.

**BERLIN, April 11. (CNN)** - Churches across the world are celebrating the Good Friday differently this year.

As the coronavirus pandemic continues to spread around the world, churches are finding alternative ways

to commemorate the day Jesus Christ was crucified.

Worshippers in Germany attended service at a drive-in movie theater, with the actual service playing on the radio. In Indonesia, worshippers cele-

brated by live streaming a service.

In Washington, DC, and London, church leaders held a service via live stream. Pope Francis presided over a Good Friday ceremony at St. Peter's Square in The Vatican despite lock-

down measures in Italy.

A small group met at the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, which went up in flames last year, and held a 40-minute service. Some of the attendees wore hazmat suits and masks.



A family attends a prayer from their home during Good Friday service through live internet streaming in Yogyakarta, Indonesia

## Foreign news

AFRICANS IN GUANGZHOU ARE ON EDGE, AFTER MANY ARE LEFT HOMELESS:

# China fights a second wave of coronavirus amid rising xenophobia

**Hong Kong, April 11. (CNN)** - The African community in Guangzhou is on edge after widespread accounts were shared on social media of people being left homeless this week, as China's warnings against imported coronavirus cases stoke anti-foreigner sentiment.

In the southern Chinese city, Africans have been evicted from their homes by landlords and turned away from hotels, despite many claiming to have no recent travel history or known contact with Covid-19 patients.

CNN interviewed more than two dozen Africans living in Guangzhou many of whom told of the same experiences: being left without a home, being subject to random testing for Covid-19, and being quarantined for 14 days in their homes, despite having no symptoms or contact with known patients.

Health authorities in Guangdong province and the Guangzhou Public Security Bureau did not respond to CNN's request for comment.

The move comes amid heightened media coverage of the so-called second wave of coronavirus cases, emanating from infections outside of China. Earlier this week, Chinese President Xi Jinping urged authorities to carefully watch for imported cases from other countries, state news agency Xinhua reported.

But one aspect of the data has received relatively less public attention: on March 26, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Luo Zhaohui said 90% of China's imported cases held Chinese passports. On Thursday afternoon, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said: "Since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak, China and African countries have always supported each other and have always fought against the virus jointly."

"I would like to emphasize that the Chinese government treats all foreigners in China equally, opposes any differentiated practices targeted at specific groups of people, and has zero tolerance for discriminatory words and actions."

### Cases spark a backlash

Guangzhou has long had the largest African community in China. Because many Africans in the city have short-term business visas, they travel into China several times a year, making it difficult to calculate the size of the African population the city. But in 2017, approximately 320,000 Africans entered or left China through Guangzhou, according to Xinhua.

African residents say local hostility to their presence is nothing new. But when coronavirus cases emerged in the African community this month it served to amplify existing tensions.

An African in Guangzhou is tested for coronavirus at his apartment.

A report on April 4 alleged that a Nigerian national with Covid-19 had attacked a Chinese nurse who tried to stop him leaving an isolation ward at a Guangzhou hospital. The report was shared widely on social media, and local Africans CNN spoke to say a racist backlash against the African commu-

nity followed. Then on April 7, Guangzhou authorities said five Nigerians had tested positive for Covid-19.

Fearing a cluster among the African community, Guangzhou authorities upgraded the risk level of Yuexiu and Baiyun, the areas home to the city's two African enclaves, from low to medium, state-owned Global Times reported. The local government Tuesday reported 111 imported cases of Covid-19 in Guangzhou, with 28 patients from the UK and 18 from the US. In interviews with CNN, Americans and British nationals in Guangzhou said they had not heard reports of forced testing, home evictions and additional quarantine measures being imposed on members of their communities. On Saturday, however, the US Consulate in Guangzhou warned African-Americans to avoid travel to the city.

"In response to an increase in Covid-19 infections, officials in the Guangzhou metropolitan area escalated scrutiny of foreign nationals," the consulate said in a statement. "As part of this campaign, police ordered bars and restaurants not to serve clients who appear to be of African origin. Moreover, local officials launched a round of mandatory tests for Covid-19, followed by mandatory self-quarantine, for anyone with 'African contacts,' regardless of recent travel history or previous quarantine completion." African-Americans have also reported that some businesses and hotels refuse to do business with them.

### Homeless in Guangzhou

On March 21, Nigerian goods trader Chuk, who did not want to use his full name for fear of government reprisals, flew back to Guangzhou, his home since 2009. With China's coronavirus cases seemingly under control, he wanted to resume his trading business, which had been stymied by the pandemic.

The area around Guangzhou is a manufacturing heartland, where many Africans buy cheap goods to sell back home.

Chuk returned seven days before China closed its borders to most foreign nationals, but upon arrival, he says he was told that he needed to enter government quarantine at a hotel for two weeks. As a trader, Chuk travels frequently, and is accustomed to staying in hotels during his time in China.

But on Tuesday, Chuk says that when he was released, along with about 15 other Africans, with a clean bill of health, they effectively became homeless.

"We went to the hotel with the certificate, but we were rejected," he said. The group went to the police station to report that hotels were refusing to let Africans stay, but "they refused to talk to us."

The Guangzhou Public Security Bureau, which oversees the police, did not respond to CNN's request for comment about events described by anyone CNN interviewed.

Chuk says he had no choice but to sleep rough for two nights, before finding a friend's couch to crash on. "Rain fell that day and the next and we



An African restaurant in the San Yuan Li area of Guangzhou, near where five Nigerians tested positive for the virus.



Africans sleeping on the street in Guangzhou, after being unable to find shelter.

were all drenched and our belongings soaked," he said.

His story was echoed by others who spoke to CNN.

Earlier this week, images began circulating online of rows of Africans sleeping on the streets of Guangzhou, beside their luggage, having either been evicted from their apartments or been turned away from hotels.

Other videos showed police harassing Africans on the street. A video of Africans in San Yuan Li, in Guangzhou, shot on

April 9, 2020. The CNN called 12 hotels in Guangzhou, wanting to book a room for an African guest, and was informed by 10 that they would not be "accepting foreign guests anymore."

Meanwhile, multiple Africans CNN spoke to reported being abruptly evicted from their homes. No one had evidence of a government directive asking landlords or hotels to turn away or reject foreigners. Rather, they say, these appeared to be decisions made by private individuals and business

owners. Nigerian trader Nonso, whose name has been changed to protect his identity due to fear of government reprisals, says he and his girlfriend received a message from their landlord at 7 p.m. on WeChat, a Chinese messaging app, saying they needed to vacate their flat by 8 p.m..

"I told him I can't vacate in one hour," said Nonso, who pays 1,500 yuan (\$212) a month for his apartment in the Nanhai, on the outskirts of Guangzhou, and has lived in China for three

years. At 10 p.m. he says his landlord came to the flat and cut off the electricity and water supply. "I asked them, what did I do? I've paid rent until September with two months' deposit. They didn't give me any reason," he said.

Nonso called the police, who let them remain in the apartment for the night. But in the morning, Nonso says the landlord returned with a different officer, who said he had to leave. Nonso says he has struggled to find a new apartment to rent. "We have contacted a lot of agents none of them are leasing to black foreigners," he said.

Volunteers in Guangzhou give out food and supplies to Africans.

Chris Leslie, also from Nigeria, said he was abruptly evicted from his Guangzhou apartment on Thursday, despite not defaulting on his rent and having a valid contract.

He had nowhere to sleep that night. "I will just hang out outside," he said. "It is so pathetic. In a country where people don't accept you and they criticize, this is just a bitter humiliation. The most important thing is having somewhere to sleep."

On Thursday, several volunteer groups emerged on WeChat, mostly populated by scores of other foreigners, rallying around the displaced Africans, organizing food, masks and sanitation products for those left wandering the streets of Guangzhou without a bed. Katie Smith, an American living in Guangzhou with her Moroccan boyfriend, made two deliveries to newly homeless Africans on Thursday. Her name has been changed to protect her identity, as she, too, fears reprisal from local authorities.

## Inside India's busiest Covid-19 hospital

**INDORE, April 11. (BBC)** - In early March, 40-year-old Ravi Dosi, a chest specialist in India, saw a baffling surge in patients with respiratory problems at outpatient clinics.

"There was almost a 50% jump in patients with upper respiratory issues and sore throat. They were not responding to antibiotics. Testing was still low and we didn't really know what was going on," Dr Dosi, who works at Sri Aurobindo Institute of Medical Sciences, a 1,156-bed private medical college in the central city of Indore, told me.

Less than a fortnight later, Dr Dosi began seeing an uptick in admissions of Covid-19 patients. Around the end of March, the hospital was receiving 28 infected patients every day.

They had dry cough, fever, and difficulty breathing. Their blood oxygen levels were low. They were reporting loss of taste and smell.

In the first wave of patients, nearly a dozen came from far-flung districts, more than 150km (93 miles) from Indore, a bustling commercial city in Madhya Pradesh state. The state has now become a hotspot, with nearly 400 confirmed infections out of the more than 6,400 infections and nearly 200 deaths across the country so far.

By the second week of April, Dr Dosi and his team of 100 doctors and nearly an equal number of nursing



The hospital in Indore has more than 140 patients

staff working 24/7 in three shifts, were treating 144 Covid-19 patients. (Thirty-one had been treated and sent home already.)

A total of 38 patients were in intensive care. Twenty-one of them were critical. There had been seven deaths. "We are handling the largest number of Covid-19 patients in India," Vinod Bhandari, a surgeon and chairman of the hospital, told me.

Doctors now believe that the infection was spreading in the community long before the government admitted to it, and testing slowly ramped up.

Until two weeks ago, Indian health authorities had been denying community transmission. Now a new study by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) using surveillance data from 41 labs in the country has hinted at community transmission: 52 districts in 20 states and union territories reported Covid-19 patients.

Some 40% of the cases did not report any history of international travel or contact with a known case. (The survey was based on swabs collected from nearly 6,000 patients between 15 February and 19 March. Of them 104



Dr Dosi hasn't returned home from hospital for three weeks

tested positive for Covid-19) Back in the hospital in Indore, the doctors are battling the surge in infections.

Three isolation wards spread over two floors are stacked with patients. (The hospital has earmarked 525 beds for Covid-19 patients.) Isolation wards have younger patients with mild infection, while elderly patients with more severe symptoms are in intensive care. The oldest patient is a 95-year-old man, and the youngest is a four-month-old boy.

The team of doctors handling patients includes chest specialists, anaesthetists, microbiologists, and dermatologists. There are patients with a lot of underlying medical conditions

- diabetes, hypertension, even cancer - so all the specialists have been called in to help with the treatment.

Dr Dosi wakes up early, puts on protective gear - scrubs, face masks and shields, N95 masks, gowns, double gloves and shoe covers - before going on his rounds of the patients. Doctors say they are not facing a shortage of gear yet.

They are using 22 ventilators to help the critical patients breathe, and also providing oxygen supplies to others using nasal cannulas (nose prongs).

In the isolation wards, patients are given oral medication - antibiotics and hydroxychloroquine (commonly known as HCQ), an anti-malarial drug - and directed to maintain social distancing and wash their hands regularly.

"I have never seen a challenge and crisis like this in my career. I have heard stories about an outbreak of plague in Surat [in 1994]. But this seems to be much bigger. The biggest challenge is to keep hopes alive and be positive," says Dr Dosi.

Keeping hopes up for patients in isolation can be taxing. Three tests, say doctors, are being done for the infection - if the first test comes out positive, the patient remains in isolation for two weeks, and is tested twice on two days after the quarantine period. If the last two tests come back negative, the pa-

tient is discharged. If not, the patient has to stay in isolation for another two weeks. "It is a tough grind, mentally," says one doctor.

For the last three weeks, Dr Dosi has been living in the hospital, away from his wife, two sons and parents. His father is a retired pathologist. They communicate via hurried video calls, between his frantic trips to the isolation wards and intensive care.

I ask him when does he expect this to "get over", so that he can go home.

"In a couple of weeks," he says. "The lockdown should have helped to slow down the infection."

Dr Dosi is alluding to the strict 21-day lockdown India imposed on 24 March to halt the spread of the infection.

Things are getting better, he says. "I am getting 10 patients for admission in isolation wards, and two patients severe enough for intensive care every day now. Earlier this week, it was 50:50."

It is possibly too early to hazard a guess about when admissions will slow down to single digits. As more people are tested, the number of patients can easily rise again.

It's been unrelenting, Dr Dosi says. Early yesterday, I sent him a text to find out what was going on.

"Please. Have an emergency in ICU," he replied.