



GLOCAL | PAGE 03



HUNDREDS MISSING AND AT  
LEAST 69 DEAD IN WESTERN  
EUROPE FLOODING  
HOT TOPICS | PAGE 04



COMMENTARY | PAGE 07



OUR 'HOMBEN YANA'  
CHOICE?

RED CENTENARY | PAGE 08

# Weekend Express

Sri Lanka's **International** Newspaper

Registered in the Department of Posts of Sri Lanka under No: QD/130/News/2021

## Easter bombings

## Sri Lanka probes charges against spy agencies

**COLOMBO** - Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has ordered an investigation into allegations that some members of state intelligence agencies knew and met with people who carried out Easter Sunday bombings in 2019 that killed more than 260 people, a government official said. The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka wrote to the president on Tuesday (13) raising concerns about the government's handling of the suicide bombings and asking it to investigate alleged links between intelligence personnel and the group that carried out the attacks.

Two local Muslim groups that had allegedly declared allegiance to the ISIL (ISIS) group carried out six coordinated attacks on churches and leading tourist hotels, killing 269 people.

Another man did not carry out a planned attack at a fourth tourist hotel but killed himself later by exploding the bomb at a different location. The letter from the National Catholic Committee for Justice to Easter Sunday Attack Victims, a group of bishops and priests led by Archbishop of Colombo Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, called on the president to take legal action against former President Maithripala Sirisena for negligence as recommended by a presidential inquiry commission report. Sirisena's government came under heavy criticism for not acting on near-specific foreign intelligence warnings that an attack was imminent. Media Minister Keliya Rambukwella on Wednesday (14) said all of the findings of the commission have been handed over to proper authorities. "There are so many things flowing in and the best thing the president can do is to refer them to relevant authorities," Rambukwella said. "The president has referred all of them to relevant authorities for further action." The church group also said former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe should be investigated because the report concluded that his soft approach to "Islamic extremism" had led to the attacks. The letter also said authorities have not taken legal action against 11 police officers, two officials from the Attorney General's Department and two Muslim politicians named by the commission.

The presidential commission report has not been released to the public. A single volume was given to legislators and the entire report was provided to the Attorney General's Department for prosecution.

-AP/Al Jazeera

## Lebanon's designated prime minister quits amid swirling crises

**BEIRUT** — Former Prime Minister Saad Hariri of Lebanon said Thursday (15) he had given up on trying to form a new government, opening a new political void as the country sinks further into an acute political and economic crisis.

Hariri had been tapped to form a new Cabinet last October, after Prime Minister Hassan Diab resigned in the wake of a huge explosion in the port of Beirut on Aug. 4. But after nine months of political wrangling over who would head which ministries, Hariri told reporters that he had failed to come to an agreement with President Michel Aoun and was stepping down. "May God help the country," Hariri said.

Lebanon is suffering through a financial contraction that the World Bank has said could be one of the world's worst since the mid-1800s, and Hariri's exit makes it even less likely that the country will receive aid soon. Western powers and the International Monetary Fund have predicated any assistance on the formation of a new government and the enactment of reforms aimed at reducing corruption and getting state spending under control. Hariri had sent a proposed Cabinet line-up to the president Wednesday (14) and met with him Thursday, only to announce after a 20-minute meeting that they had failed to agree and that he was stepping down. Aoun's office said in a statement that Hariri had refused to discuss any suggested changes to his Cabinet proposal and that the president had turned down Hariri's suggestion that Aoun take another day to think about it. "What is the use of one extra day if the door of discussion is closed?" Aoun said, according to the statement. Aoun said he would convene parliament soon to designate a new prime minister. But it was unclear how long that would take and who the new candidate might be.

-NYT

## WHO warns of 'dangerous' variants as COVID cases rise globally

**PARIS** - The World Health Organization (WHO) warned Thursday (15) that "more dangerous" variants of COVID-19 could tear across the world as global infections soared to half a million daily, largely driven by the virulent Delta strain. An AFP tally of official sources found that after an initial dip, cases have been rising again worldwide since the end of June, topping 540,000 on Tuesday (13) and again on Wednesday (14).

"The pandemic is nowhere near finished," the WHO's emergency committee said in a statement. It highlighted "the strong likelihood for the emergence and global spread of new and possibly more dangerous variants of concern that may be even more challenging to control".

The virus has reappeared in places long believed to have dodged the worst of the pandemic, with Australia - lauded for its successful 'COVID zero' strategy - facing a resurgence that has grown to almost 1,000 cases nationwide in a month. The coronavirus continues to wreak havoc from Asia to Africa, killing more than four million people since it first emerged in China in December 2019. Countries where healthcare infrastructure - and vaccine rollout capabilities - remain limited are under particular pressure, with Rwanda set to put the capital Kigali and eight other districts under lockdown from Saturday (17). In Asia, Indonesia Thursday posted a record 56,757 daily infections as the world's fourth-most populous nation overtook India as the region's COVID-19 epicentre. Also facing chronic shortages of medical supplies is Myanmar, where residents across the coup-hit country's biggest city of Yangon defied a military curfew in a desperate search for oxygen to keep their loved ones with COVID breathing.

As the virus shows no sign of easing, the WHO is working towards the second phase of an investigation into where Covid-19 originated, and urged China on Thursday to better cooperate. WHO chief, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, demanded more access to raw data after a report compiled by a team of independent experts in Wuhan earlier this year was widely criticised for lack of transparency and access.

-AFP



-ASANKA BRENDON RATNAYAKE / AFP

A general view of an empty Arcade Plaza in Melbourne on Friday (16), after Australia's second largest city entered a fresh lockdown amid resurgence in coronavirus cases. Melbourne's streets returned to the eerie quiet of lockdown for the fifth time Friday, as Australia battled to contain an outbreak of the Delta variant of COVID-19 in its two largest cities.

More than 12 million Australians are now under stay-at-home orders, joining Sydney-siders already deep into weeks-long restrictions. Locals are only allowed to leave their homes for a handful of reasons, including exercise and to buy essential items, but many are hopeful the restrictions could be brief. Authorities around the country are desperately working

to track, trace and prevent cases from spreading through a largely unvaccinated population. Melbourne recorded six cases of the virus Friday, all linked to known clusters, with the outbreak now at 24 infections. But a growing number of exposure sites -- including a recent Australia versus France rugby match in the city -- were fuelling fears among

authorities that thousands could have been exposed to the virus. In Sydney, the epicentre of the latest outbreak, official numbers showed the virus was still moving undetected in the community as daily cases climbed again to just fewer than 100. Sydney's lockdown is set to continue for at least two more weeks as authorities try to curb the community spread

## Afghan forces fighting to retake Pakistan border crossing

**KANDAHAR** - Afghan forces clashed Friday (16) with Taliban fighters in Spin Boldak after launching an operation to retake the key border crossing with Pakistan, as regional capitals stepped up efforts to get the warring sides talking.

Dozens of wounded Taliban fighters were being treated at a Pakistan hospital near the border after fierce overnight fighting, AFP correspondents at the scene reported.

"We have suffered one death and dozens of our fighters have got injured," Mullah Muhammad Hassan, who identified himself as a Taliban insurgent, told AFP near Chaman in Pakistan, about five kilometres (three miles) from the border.

The fight for the border comes as a war of words heated up between the Kabul government and Islamabad after the Afghan Vice President accused the Pakistani military of providing "close air support to Taliban in certain areas". Pakistan strongly denied the claim, with a foreign

ministry statement saying the country "took necessary measures within its territory to safeguard our own troops and population".

"We acknowledge Afghan government's right to undertake actions on its sovereign territory," it added.

Residents of Spin Boldak, which fell to the Taliban on Wednesday (14), said the Taliban and army were battling in the main bazaar of the border town.

"There is heavy fighting," said Mohammad Zahir.

The border crossing provides direct access to Pakistan's Balochistan province, where the Taliban's top leadership has been based for decades, along with an unknown number of reserve fighters who regularly enter Afghanistan to help bolster their ranks.

As fighting continued, Pakistan said Thursday it would hold a special conference on Afghanistan in Islamabad at the weekend, although Taliban officials had

not been invited. There were signs too that official talks in Doha - which have stalled for months - could stutter back to life. An aide to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani told local media his government had asked for the Islamabad conference to be postponed as negotiators were already heading to Qatar.

The Taliban have capitalized on the last stages of the withdrawal of foreign troops to launch a series of lightning offensives across the country, capturing a swath of districts and border crossings, and encircling provincial capitals.

Foreign troops have been in Afghanistan for nearly two decades following the US-led invasion launched in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks.

They have appeared largely out of the picture in recent months, but fears are growing that government forces will be overwhelmed without the vital air support they provide.

-AFP

## Trending News

**USA/Germany:** Signalling the US-European alliance remained strong after the tension of the Trump era, President Joe Biden and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany stress their shared values, even as both acknowledged differences on a major Russian pipeline and how best to approach China.

**New Zealand:** US President Joe Biden, Russia's Vladimir Putin, China's Xi Jinping and other world leaders meet virtually for the Asia-Pacific trade group APEC, seeking collective actions to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic impacts.

**Brazil:** President Jair Bolsonaro's office says his condition has improved and he is making satisfactory recovery, after he was taken to hospital with an intestinal blockage, complaining of persistent hiccups for 10 days.

**Bangladesh:** Authorities execute Asaduzzaman Ponir, 37, hard-line Islamist

for a 2005, bomb attack in which eight people were killed.

**China:** Hundreds of rescuers battle to reach 14 construction workers trapped in a flooded tunnel in the southern Zhuhai city near Hong Kong, as the search enters its second day.

**Cuba:** The country's single party state leadership blames the July 11, unprecedented anti-government protests on a Twitter campaign orchestrated by the United States.

**Haiti:** Police say the assassination of Jovenel Moise by armed mercenaries was planned in the neighbouring Dominican Republic, as they announce detention of the slain president's chief bodyguard and three other members of his security detail.

**Afghanistan:** White House says about 20,000 Afghans who worked as interpreters for the United States during its war and now fear retribution from Taliban insurgents have applied for evacuation.

## Quote for Today

Hold yourself responsible for a higher standard than anybody expects of you. Never excuse yourself.

-Henry Ward Beecher

## Word for Today

**Velleity** [vuh-lee-i-tee] -*noun* -a mere wish, unaccompanied by an effort to obtain it

## Today in History

**1945** - The world's first atomic bomb is detonated by the USA near Alamogordo, New Mexico.

## Today is...

## World Snake Day

A day to find out more about the slithery creatures and maybe acquire a new understanding about the 35,000 species found around the world



BUSINESS

Sri Lanka allows vaccinated tourists without quarantine after PCR test

**COLOMBO** – Sri Lanka will allow vaccinated tourists to travel around the country without quarantine if a coronavirus test taken after landing is negative, the island’s tourism authority said.

“Once the ‘Day One’ PCR test report is negative, travellers will be able to leave the Level 1 Hotel and enjoy their holiday, they will be required to undergo a PCR test once again on the seventh day during their travels at a Ministry of Health approved laboratory,” Sri Lanka Tourism said.

A vaccinated person can get coronavirus, but usually in a milder form, which however can be deadly to anyone who meets them.

All travellers will also have to produce a PCR test taken 72 hours before boarding to the airline and get an electronic visa from <https://www.srilanka.travel/helloagain/> and purchase a mandatory COVID-19 insurance for US\$ 12, which provides a US\$ 50,000 cover for a 30-day stay. Sri Lanka earlier allowed tourists to travel under a ‘bio-bubble’ with mul-

tiples PCR test for 14-days. “These measures have helped curb the spread of the pandemic while preventing new variants from entering the island,” Kimarli Fernando, Chairperson of Sri Lanka Tourism said.

“With the success of the National vaccination rollout program, we are ready to commence operations as usual for fully-vaccinated arrivals and the tourism industry is well prepared to welcome our international travellers while ensuring the safety and security of our communities.”

All other visitors who are not vaccinated or not fully vaccinated will have to stay in a Level 1 hotel and take the required tests.

Travel restrictions will however still apply to certain countries. Visitors with a 14-day travel history to India, Vietnam, South America, South Africa, Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Namibia, Swaziland and Zambia will not be permitted to disembark in Sri Lanka.

**-economynext.com**

By Isabella Kwai

In England, a call to tax sugar and salt

**LONDON** — With England trapped in what it calls a vicious circle of junk-food consumption, the authors of a government-commissioned review into the nation’s food industry have put sugar and salt in their crosshairs. The independent review, released Thursday (15), calls for a long list of ideas to improve the nation’s eating habits, including a tax on sugar and salt, with the proceeds used to funnel fresh fruits and vegetables to poorer families, along with allowing doctors to prescribe fruits and vegetables and forcing food companies to report the breakdown of their sales by nutrition.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has provided a painful reality check,” wrote the authors of the review, noting that obesity rates had contributed to Britain’s high number of deaths in the pandemic. “There is widespread recognition that we need to change our national diet as a matter of urgency.” The stakes are high: Poor diet contributes to about 64,000 deaths in England each year, the review found, with Type 2 diabetes projected to cost the National Health Service \$20 billion a year by around 2035.

Government officials said they would respond to the review in six months in a formal white paper, although Prime Minister Boris Johnson did not sound enthusiastic when asked about it by reporters Thursday. “I’m not, I must say, attracted to the idea of extra taxes on hardworking people,” he said, although he said there were “doubtless some good ideas in it.”

The review, which consulted 300 food, agricultural and health groups and was written by Henry Dimbleby, founder of the Leon restaurant chain, which serves what it calls healthy and more sustainable fast food, called for a wide variety of changes to tackle food and health inequalities and address climate change.

But it was a proposed tax on sugar (about \$2 per pound) and salt (about double that) used in foods that were processed or provided by restaurants or caterers that drew the most attention and prompted the strongest reactions.

The Food Foundation, which was consulted in the review, called the tax “an exciting proposition,” adding that childhood obesity levels in Britain were at a critical level and had not fallen in recent years, and that the nation has an opportunity “to pivot the food system to protect human and planetary health.”

Britain introduced a levy on sugar-sweetened drinks three years ago, and researchers found that it led drink manufacturers to reduce the sugar contents in their products. A salt tax — a world first — would have a similar impact, incentivizing food manufacturers to reformulate their foods where voluntary attempts had failed, said Graham MacGregor, a professor of cardiovascular medicine at Queen Mary University and chair of the advocacy group Action on Salt. But food-manufacturing groups said consumers would ultimately have to pay the cost of the taxes, an unfair demand on businesses that have struggled to stay afloat during the pandemic.

“A salt and sugar tax will ultimately impact those families who are already struggling to make ends meet by making food and drink more expensive,” said Kate Halliwell, chief scientific officer for the Food and Drink Federation. Conservative groups denounced the proposal as meddling, and said it would raise the price of staples such as jam, cereal and candy. One group, TaxPayers’ Alliance, projected that the changes could cost some households an extra \$238 a year.

The report acknowledged that the tax would most likely increase the prices of some products, but said that the \$4 billion a year that it raised could be used to benefit poorer households. The proceeds could be directed toward expanding eligibility to free meal programs for students, subsidizing the delivery of more fresh foods to lower-income families and programs allowing primary care physicians to prescribe fruits and vegetables.

“It’s not a tax to increase price,” Dimbleby told the BBC. “It’s a tax to make the companies reformulate.” The report also examined the impact of food-farming practices on climate change, calling for financial help for farmers trying to transition to greener agricultural practices. Extreme weather events and catastrophic harvest failures, it said, would lead to “the next big shock to our food supply.”

The review stopped short of calling for a tax on meat, describing the idea as “politically impossible” and too punitive for poorer households, but it encouraged the government to invest in alternative proteins. Other recommendations included mandatory reporting on the breakdown of food sales by nutritional value and better education on cooking and food nutrition in schools.

**-New York Times**

Cuba makes concession to protesters, lets travellers bring in food duty-free

**HAVANA** - Travellers arriving in Cuba can now bring in food, medicine and other essentials without paying customs, the government said Wednesday (14) in a concession to angry and unprecedented street protests.

Prime Minister Manuel Marrero said in a televised address there would be no limit placed on these goods coming in and the change will be in effect until the end of the year.

Cubans took to the streets in droves on Sunday (11) in an explosion of anger over economic hardship marked by shortages of food, electricity and other essentials.

One of the protesters’ demands was for people arriving in Cuba to be able to bring in food, medicine and personal hygiene items from abroad without paying customs duties.

One person has died and more than 100 were arrested, including independent journalists and opposition activists, since the anti-government protests broke out in the communist-ruled island over the worst economic crisis in decades.

President Miguel Diaz-Canel, who appeared in the televised address with Marrero, reiterated his accusations against the

United States, which he blames for the demonstrations. But in his speech, the Cuban president took a more conciliatory tone.

“We must also gain experience from the riots, we also have to make a critical analysis of our problems,” he said.

“Also perhaps it will be necessary to apologize to someone who, in the midst of the confusion that arises in events like this, may have been confused, has been mistreated,” he said, calling for “peace, harmony among Cubans and respect.”

He added that Cubans must “overcome our disagreements between all of us. What we have to promote, even though we have different points of view on certain issues, is between all of us to try to find solutions.”

Under Cuban law, travellers arriving here can bring up to 10 kilograms (22 pounds) of medicine tax-free. They can also bring in limited amounts of food and personal hygiene gear but must pay customs duties.

Starting Monday ( 19) the limits are lifted and so are the duties, Marrero said on TV.

“This is a measure we are adopting until December 31. After that, we will assess things,” he said.

**-AFP**



A farm worker carries a sack filled with vegetables harvested in a field on the outskirts of Bangalore on Thursday (15)

- Marjunath Kiran / AFP

Rupee kerb rates eases, higher rates for some exporter dollars

**COLOMBO** – Sri Lanka’s kerb rate for the US dollar had fallen to around 220 rupees and some exporters have got slightly better rates, forex market participants said.

Kerb rates for physical dollar notes have moved down to around 218/220 with the strong demand seen in recent weeks falling off.

Some buyers who entered the market recently had stayed off following reports of police inquiries, reducing demand.

But Undiyal rates are still around 235 or higher, market sources said.

In the official market some exporters are able to around 204.50 to the US dollar from banks who are giving dollars to non-trade customers, dealer said.

The central bank has asked banks not to trade in the interbank market above 200 and not to sell to importers above 203 to the US dollar or to buy from exporters. Swap rates have also come down with a state bank staying off the market.

Spot/1 months was quoted at a discount of 120/150 cents; Spot/2 months 250/310; Spot/3 months 400/470; Spot/6 months 500/805 and Spot/1 year 1100/1200 cents

Sri Lanka’s rupee has come under pressure amid record liquidity injections over the past year but authorities are trying to maintain convertibility of a peg around 200 to the US dollar.

Banks are started to ration dollars for some customers.

**-economynext.com**

Daily Express

We are now online!

Click on

dailyexpress.lk

And get a peek at what’s going on in the world and in Sri Lanka

Get some reality checks, global perspective, Glocal news, comments and commentary and a whole host more...

Visit us..... stay for a while... and enjoy!

Colombo port container volumes up 19% in May 2021

**COLOMBO** – Container volumes handled at Sri Lanka’s, Colombo Port grew 19% from a year ago to 581,345 containers in May 2021 amid global and domestic trade recovery, with transshipment volumes at Colombo rising 14%, official data show.

Domestic container volumes rose 42% to 100,964 twenty-foot equivalent units, though a little lower than the 109,522 units in 2019 before

a coronavirus pandemic, data released by the central bank shows.

Transshipment containers grew 14% to 464,269 units though down from 483,732 pre-COVID in 2019.

Up to May 2021, total container volumes were up 7.3% to 2.939 million TEUs, with transshipment up 5.2% to 2.358 million. In 2019 pre-COVID Sri Lanka handled 3.591 million units.

**-economynext.com**

Sri Lanka

Import controls shattered by credit, money printing in May

**COLOMBO** – Sri Lanka’s imports grew to US\$ 1.6 billion in May 2021 from US\$ 993 million a year earlier official data showed, as credit partly driven by printed money picked up, shattering mercantilist import controls on ‘usually suspect’ goods such as vehicles, as others took their place.

Sri Lanka’s consumer goods imports in May 2021 were down 4.1% to US\$ 253 million from a year earlier and sharply down from US\$ 332 million in 2020.

Sri Lanka’s hotel sector workers have almost no income and most private sector firms, except import substitution and export companies have cut salaries.

State workers and the elected ruling class however are paid with printed money, keeping their incomes intact.

Non-food consumer goods were down 6.2% to US\$ 132.6 million, and sharply down from US\$ 197.7 million in 2019. Vehicle imports were down to just to US\$ 500,000 from US\$ 47.5 million in 2019 and US\$ 58.7 million in 2018.

Sri Lanka has completely banned vehicle imports as part of a series of mercantilist import controls slapped in 2020.

Fuel imports recovered to US\$ 237 million from US\$ 62.9 million in 2020 and but was down from US\$ 402.8 million in 2019. Sri Lanka credit collapsed after the March

2020 coronavirus lockdowns killing consumption, credit and investment, but import controls were slapped in April.

Investment goods rose to 27% from a year earlier to US\$ 308 million in May 2021, but were down from US\$ 403.7 million in 2019.

Sri Lanka’s interventionists are giving housing loans at 7% and are also engaged in a road construction drive. Up to July 2019, when the central bank started to inject liquidity buying bonds to target an output gap, Sri Lanka was running contractionary or deflationary policy sterilizing inflows. In 2020 authorities ratcheted up printing under so-called Modern Monetary Theory.

In 2020, mercantilists claimed that a fall in imports and the ‘trade deficit’ was down due to import controls, though analysts using classical economic reasoning pointed out that it was due to contraction in private credit and consumption during lockdowns.

In May 2021, the trade deficit was US\$ 716 million slightly down from US\$ 823 million in 2019, when imports were also driven by tourism revenues.

During the five months to May 2021, the trade deficit was US\$ 3.6 billion, up from US\$ 3.1 billion in 2019, when the central bank was following deflationary policy selling down its T-bill stock.

**-economynext.com**



## GLOCAL

## Daily Express

Sri Lanka's International Newspaper

Express Newspapers (Cey) Pvt. Ltd.,  
185, Grandpass Road, Colombo 14, Sri Lanka  
Telephone: 0117 322 705 (Editorial) 0117 322 731 (Advertising)  
0117 322 789 (Circulation)  
Email – editor.dailyexpress@encl.lk/weekendexpress@encl.lk  
Epaper - http://epaper.newsexpress.lk  
Facebook –News Express Sri Lanka

# Sri Lanka receives 1.5 million doses of Moderna vaccines sent by US via Covax

**COLOMBO** – Sri Lanka on Friday (16) received 1.5 million doses of Moderna coronavirus vaccine donated by the US and delivered by the World Health Organization's COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) facility.

The vaccines that arrived via a special flight chartered by Qatar Airways, is the latest shipment in President Joe Biden pledge to share the American stockpile of shots.

Biden's administration has promised to ship at least 80 million doses - a mix of Moderna, Pfizer Inc. and Johnson & Johnson vaccines - out of the country this summer. The US has sent them bit by bit as arrangements and transport

tation logistics fall into place. He had planned to send 80 million by the end of June, but missed that target.

Half of the 1.5 million doses received on Friday is expected to be administered as the first dose, and the remaining half rolled out as the second dose after four weeks. It is not known where the vaccine roll-out will begin.

State Minister, Prof. Channa Jayasumana said the Moderna consignment was the fifth vaccine being added to Sri Lanka's national inoculation drive. The country is currently rolling out Sinopharm, Oxford-AstraZeneca, Sputnik V and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines. Meanwhile, United Nations Resident Coor-

dinator in Sri Lanka, Hanaa Singer-Hamdy said the United Nations was supporting countries to mobilize the largest global immunization effort in history.

"Human innovation and science have succeeded in providing us with safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines for everyone," Singer-Hamdy said in a statement, adding that thanks to the generous support of the United States through the COVAX facility to vaccinate Sri Lankans, the UN in Sri Lanka alongside WHO and UNICEF will continue to work with the government to stem the spread of COVID-19 and recover from the pandemic.

Minister of Health, Pavithra Wanniarachchi, commending the United States for taking the lead in sharing the vaccine doses with the people of Sri Lanka, said the batch received on Friday will add momentum to the country's on-going efforts to protect its people from the pandemic through vaccination.

Friday's shipment of vaccines is the second from COVAX following the delivery in March of the first batch of 264,000 doses of the Oxford AstraZeneca 'Covishield' vaccines.

Japan has also promised 1.4 million AstraZeneca vaccines through the Covax facility.

-ENCL



- J. Sujeewakumar/ENCL

Dr Alaka Singh (2nd L), who assumed responsibilities as WHO Representative to Sri Lanka in May this year, keenly observes army health officials inoculating people with the Sinopharm vaccine at a walk in vaccination camp operated by the army at the Viharamahadevi Open Air Theatre in Colombo on Thursday (15). The camp, which is vaccinating people above the age of 30, will remain open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. every day until further notice

## Alleged Yala clearing

## Wildlife ministry denies opposition leader's claims

**COLOMBO** – Sri Lanka's ministry of wildlife and forest conservation has denied claims by leader of the opposition and the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), Sajith Premadasa, that the government was planning to "take away" 12,000 acres of land in the Yala National Park for an unknown purpose.

Nihal Premasinghe, Co-ordinating Secretary to Minister of Wildlife and Forest Conservation, C. B. Ratnayake, quoting the minister said, "There is no such arrangement or request from anybody. The minister will not release the said land anyway. We don't have information about any such clearing."

On Wednesday (14) evening, Premadasa in a Twitter message, claimed, cit-

ing unnamed sources, that the government was planning to carve out 12,000 acres in the national park.

"There is reliable information that the government is planning to take away 12,000 acres from the Yala National Park, Block 1 for unknown purposes. Reliable sources have also confirmed that illegal roadways are to be constructed through the National Park up to Akasa Chaitya," Premadasa tweeted.

Meanwhile, environmentalists dismissed the minister's denials as "the usual" but said they were unable to get to the bottom of the claims due to the prevailing COVID-19 situation.

-economynext.com

## Sri Lanka, India, Maldives train to combat maritime crime, rescue in Indian Ocean

**COLOMBO** – Senior officials from India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives had participated in a virtual table top exercise (TTX) to improve joint operations and co-operation between the naval forces of the three countries.

"TTX-2021 is aimed at enhancing mutual understanding and exchange of best practices/ procedures for countering common trans-national maritime crime like curbing narcotics and assistance in Maritime Search and Rescue in the region," the Indian High Commission in Colombo said.

In a statement issued on Thursday (15) it said TTX-2021 exemplifies the

deep trilateral engagement between India-Maldives-Sri Lanka which has strengthened immensely in maritime domain over the past years.

"Interaction between the three neighbouring countries in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has also grown significantly in recent years, in consonance with India's policy of 'Neighbourhood First' and vision of 'Security and Growth for all in the Region (SAGAR)'," it added, explaining that a table top exercise involves classroom exercises in dealing with an emergency or similar mission. Rear Admiral Gurcharan Singh CSO (Ops), Western

## 19 new cases of highly infectious Delta variant found from 4 more areas

**COLOMBO** - Another 19 new cases of the Indian 'Delta' variant of SARS-CoV-2, the virus causing COVID-19, have been detected in Sri Lanka, with cases confirmed in Colombo, Piliyandala, Jaffna and Kilonochchi.

Deputy Director-General of Health Services, Dr. Hemantha Herath said most of the cases had been detected in several areas under the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) and in Piliyandala, and identified a navy personnel as being among the infected individuals reported as of Wednesday (14) evening. Sri Lanka's first few cases of the Delta or Indian variant of the vi-

rus were detected in the Dematagoda area in Colombo last month. Later a woman from the Madiwela area in the outskirts of Colombo was also detected with the variant, considered to be highly transmissible.

Dr. Herath said health authorities have taken necessary measures to prevent the further spread of the virus.

The highly virulent strain of the novel corona virus, first detected in India, has led to fresh outbreaks in most parts of the world with South and Southeast Asia bearing the brunt of it.

-ENCL

## Over 1000 COVID victims buried in Oddamavadi

**COLOMBO** - Former Batticaloa District MP Ali Zahir Moulana said 1001 COVID- burials have been completed in Oddamavadi in the Batticaloa District, as of Wednesday (14). Of these 946 were Muslims, 24 Hindus, 16 Christians and 15 Buddhists.

The government, after reversing its decision on mandatory cremation, announced burials would be permitted only on Iranaitivu island in the Gulf of Mannar. However, due to protests by area residents, it was later decided to shift the located to Soodupaththinachennai area in Oddamavadi, Batticaloa, and Irakkamam area in the Ampara District.

Sri Lanka conducted its first burials, of two COVID-19 victims, on March 5, 2021.

In March last year, the government imposed regulations that said the bodies of COVID-19 victims could only be cremated, banning burial, citing possibilities of groundwater contamination. Muslim groups insisted the govern-

ment's decision had no scientific base and wanted the ban lifted as cremating a body went against their Islamic faith. However, the government maintained its policy, forcibly cremating the bodies of a number of Muslim COVID victims, including a 20-day old baby.

The government policy drew widespread international condemnation, with the 57-member Organization of Islamic Cooperation raising the forced cremation policy at the Human Rights Council in Geneva, and the chairperson of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Michelle Bachelet, referring to the issue in a statement in early February, noting, "The policy of forced cremation of COVID-19 victims has caused pain and distress to the minority Muslim and Christian communities."

The World Health Organization and Sri Lankan doctors' groups had said COVID-19 victims can either be buried or cremated.

-CG/ENCL

This Newspaper supports the Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka

**Rights of Readers**

The Editor and the journalists of this newspaper respect the "Rights of Readers" and endeavour to follow the Code of Professional Practice of the Editors' Guild of Sri Lanka, which is implemented by the Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka.

If you have a grievance against us, you are welcome to contact us directly and we will strive to provide redress to you.

If you are not satisfied, you could complain to: The Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka (PCCSL)

For further information contact:

#96, Bernard Soysa Mawatha (Kirita Road), Colombo 5  
Tel: 011 5353 635 Fax: 011 5335 500  
E-mail: srockwood@pccsl.lk  
Web page: www.pccsl.lk

## SL receives \$3.6 million initial compensation from X-Press Pearl owners

**COLOMBO** - X-Press Feeders, operators of the ill-fated container ship 'X-Press Pearl', through P&I insurers, have made an initial payment of US\$ 3.6 million to the Sri Lankan government to help compensate those affected by the consequences of the fire and sinking of the vessel.

Discussions are on-going on the payment of further claims and all legitimate claims will be considered, X-Press Feeders said in a statement, adding that the company was continuing to contribute to the clean-up and pollution mitigation efforts, having flown

in additional oil spill response assets on a chartered flight from Malaysia in response to a request from the UN-EU team in Colombo.

It also said that caretaker salvors remain at the wreck site on a 24-hour watch to deal with any debris and report any form of a spill, and that drones were deployed daily to help with the monitoring activities.

Representatives of ITOPIF and Oil Spill Response continue to monitor updates from the scene and are ready to respond immediately, if required, the statement added.

X-Press Feeders also noted that the crew of X-Press Pearl remain housed at a hotel in Colombo, awaiting permission to travel back to their anxious families and loved ones.

"Having endured the trauma and stress of the fire on board and an evacuation that caused injuries to their ranks, they have now been in lockdown for over six weeks. We are working closely with Sri Lankan authorities through our local lawyers with regard to the crew's repatriation as soon as possible," it said.

-ENCL

## Amnesty International declares detained Sri Lanka lawyer Hejaaz Hizbullah prisoner of conscience

**COLOMBO** – Amnesty International (AI) has declared detained Sri Lankan lawyer Hejaaz Hizbullah a prisoner of conscience.

"He is a prisoner of conscience and must be immediately and unconditionally released and all charges against him dropped," the UK-based international human rights organization said on Wednesday (14).

Hizbullah was arrested by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) on April 14, 2020, and placed under a detention order by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) for allegedly "aiding and abetting" the 2019 Easter Sunday bombers and for engaging in activities deemed "detrimental to religious harmony among communities".

Amnesty International said on its website Wednesday that Hizbullah was detained on "trumped-up charges" under the "draconian" PTA.

"He has been targeted for his work, and his advocacy for the rights of Muslim minorities in the country," the organization said.

Hizbullah, the PTA and detained poet and teacher Ahnaf Jazeem have been the focus of concerns raised recently over Sri Lanka's human rights record.

"We are deeply concerned about the on-going use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the recent intention to introduce a rehabilitation process lacking adequate judicial oversight."

Human rights lawyer Hejaaz Hizbullah, and poet and teacher Ahnaf Jazeem, remain detained without trial and further arrests under this Act have continued, including among minority communities and the political opposition," the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) core group on Sri Lanka said on June 24.

Another instance was the recent resolution on Sri Lanka adopted by the European Parliament on June 10. Calling for the repeal of the PTA, the European Parliament invited the European Union (EU) Commission to consider temporarily withdrawing Sri Lanka's access to the Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) concession.

-economynext.com

## COVID restrictions further relaxed approving indoor concerts, other activities

**COLOMBO** - The coronavirus restrictions have been further relaxed, effective Friday (16), permitting indoor musical shows and concerts and the reopening of wildlife parks. However, outdoor musical shows and carnivals remain prohibited until further notice.

Director-General of Health Services, Dr. Asela Gunawardena, said the restrictions were further relaxed after reviewing the current coronavirus situation in the country.

He said indoor musical shows are now permitted with under a 50% customer capacity or based on the seating arrangement of the area. However, he said all events must be held in strict adherence to the health guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health.

The new guidelines also allows for the reopening of the National Zoological Gardens with a 25% visitor capacity, and children's parks, from Friday, with the public urged to strictly adhere to the health guidelines.

In the case of National Wildlife Parks, operators of safari vehicles are urged to separate the area between the driver's seat and passengers, while the drivers and trackers are mandated to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits during the tour. Dr. Gunawardena said health guidelines must be strictly followed by all parties during the safaris.

Adventure and camping sites have also been reopened under strict health guidelines.

Dr. Gunawardena said all forms of sports, individual and group, except those that require physical contact, are being permitted from Friday, and that hostels and boarding houses have also been permitted to operate.

Places of worship have also been reopened, while religious festivals are allowed under strict health guidelines.

Betting Centres, which were set to reopen from Friday, also must be operated under strict health guidelines, Dr. Gunawardena said, adding that despite the travel restriction being eased, it is not applicable to areas that have been placed under isolation

-CG/ENCL



HOT TOPICS

By Thomas Erdbrink and Claire Moses

Dutch crime reporter dies after being shot outside TV studio

**AMSTERDAM** — A Dutch crime reporter who was shot in the head in a brazen attack in central Amsterdam last week as he was leaving a television studio died of his wounds Thursday (15), his family said in a statement. The reporter, Peter R. de Vries, was 64.

“Peter has fought until the end, but has been unable to win this battle,” the statement, carried by the Dutch broadcast news service RTL Nieuws, said. “We are indescribably proud of him and at the same time inconsolable.”

De Vries, a well-known public figure in the Netherlands, was shot on the evening of July 6, an attack that drew widespread condemnation in a country where drug-related crime and shootings have steadily increased over the past decade. European leaders have condemned the shooting, which also raised questions about safety for journalists.

The police arrested two men last week in connection with the attack after stopping them in a car on a nearby highway. The police identified the suspects as a 35-year-old Polish citizen and a 21-year-old from Rotterdam. The police have said they believe the younger man was the gunman.

Both suspects appeared in court in Amsterdam on Friday and remain in custody.

Ferd Grapperhaus, the Dutch justice minister, called de Vries a “brave man” and said his death was “nothing less than a direct attack on our society.”

De Vries, who had hosted a televised crime show for nearly two decades and has long been known in the Netherlands for solving cold cases, had said he regularly received death threats.

The television show on which de Vries appeared before he was shot last week did not air July 9, after threats from criminals who said they wanted to target the studio using automatic weapons or a rocket launcher, according to Dutch news media. The show has resumed its daily episodes, but will be recorded elsewhere, the network reported.

De Vries began his journalism career in 1978 at De Telegraaf, a popular Dutch newspaper. A decade later, he published a book on the kidnapping of beer magnate Freddy Heineken. He covered many high-profile cases, including the 2005 disappearance of an Alabama teenager, Natalee Holloway, in Aruba, a Caribbean island that is part of the Netherlands; and a decades-long investigation into the rape and murder of an 11-year-old boy, Nicky Verstappen.

His television show, ‘Peter R. de Vries, Crime Reporter’, which began in 1995 and aired for 17 years, was his real breakthrough.

Most recently, de Vries had set up a foundation in the hopes of solving the 1993 disappearance of Tanja Groen, a young woman who vanished on her way home from a party. On Tuesday (13), Dutch public television aired a special program where viewers donated hundreds of thousands of euros to the cause.

De Vries, who was also the director of a law office, had been an adviser over the past year to a key witness in a trial over killings said to have been ordered by a criminal organization. The main defendant in the case, Ridouan Taghi, who is accused of leading the organization, was arrested in Dubai in 2019.

Derk Wiersum, a lawyer for the same key witness in that trial, was killed in Amsterdam in 2019. The witness’s brother was shot dead in 2018.

Amsterdam and other Dutch cities have been the scene of several shootings over the past decade in which criminals have targeted either each other or those interfering in their crimes. The nearby port of Rotterdam is one of the key gateways for importing cocaine into Europe, and the country is a leader in the illegal production of amphetamines and crystal meth.

-New York Times



Germany floods: stranded residents rescued by helicopter from rooftops

By Melissa Eddy

Hundreds missing and at least 69 dead in Western Europe flooding

**BERLIN** — Following a day of frantic rescue efforts and orders to evacuate towns rapidly filling with water unloosed by violent storms, the German authorities said late Thursday (15) that after confirming dozens of deaths, they were unable to account for at least 1,300 other people.

That staggering figure was announced after swift-moving water from swollen rivers surged through cities and villages in two western German states, where the hardest-hit regions said that 58 people were known to have died and other fatalities were expected.

With communication badly hampered, the authorities were hoping that the missing people are safe, if unreachable. But the storms and the floods have already proved deadly.

At least 11 more people were reported to have died in Belgium, according to authorities who also ordered inhabitants of downtown Liège to evacuate as the Meuse River, which flows through its centre, overflowed its banks.

The storms and resulting high water also battered neighboring Switzerland, the Netherlands and Luxembourg as a slow-moving weather system threatened to dump even more rain on the inundated region overnight and into early Friday.

The devastation caused by the severe weather came just days after the European Union announced an ambitious blueprint to pivot away from fossil fuels over the next nine years, as part of plans to make the 27-country bloc carbon-neutral by 2050. And environmental activists and politicians were quick to draw parallels between the flooding and the effects of climate change.

But the immediate focus on Thursday remained the rescue efforts, with hundreds of fire-fighters, emergency responders and soldiers working to save people from the upper floors and rooftops of their homes, fill sandbags to stem the ris-

ing water and carry out searches for the missing. One of the most heavily hit regions was the Ahrweiler district, where flash floods surged through the village of Schuld, washing away six houses and leaving several more on the verge of collapse. The police said 18 people had died in Ahrweiler district.

With so many unaccounted for, the district authority said late Thursday the number of dead was expected to climb. “Given the complexity of the level of damage, it is not possible at this time to make a final assessment of the situation,” it said in a statement.

“We have no exact numbers of dead, but can say that we have many people who have become victims of this flood,” Armin Laschet, the governor of North Rhine-Westphalia, one of the hardest-hit states in Germany, told reporters on Thursday.

“Many people lost everything that they own after the mud flowed into their homes,” said Laschet, who is running to replace Angela Merkel as chancellor in national elections on Sept. 26.

The flooding in North Rhine-Westphalia and Rhineland-Palatinate was some of the worst in decades, after several days of steady rain dumped more water than could be absorbed by the ground and sewage systems.

The police urged people to upload images taken of the floods to help them in their search.

The authorities in the district of Euskirchen, south of Düsseldorf, said that at least 15 people were known to have died in the flooding there. Many others were still being rescued, although some villages remained unreachable. Police in North Rhine-Westphalia reported at least seven other fatalities.

Merkel, who was visiting Washington on Thursday, expressed her condolences to those who had lost loved ones and thanked the thousands of helpers. She pledged the support of the German government for the affected regions.

“Everything that can be done, wherever we can help, we will do that,” she said, adding that Germany had received offers of help from its European partners.

Hundreds of fire-fighters worked through the night to evacuate people who had been left stranded. Two died while trying to rescue people in Altena, in North Rhine-Westphalia, the police said.

Dozens of communities were left without power, while some villages were cut off entirely, the police said. Telephone and cellphone networks were also down, making it more difficult for the authorities to establish who was missing.

Belgium and the Netherlands also experienced significant flooding as the weather system made its way across the region. In Belgium, the flooding was reported to have caused the deaths of at least two people in Liège province, according to the country’s public broadcaster, RTBF.

As the Meuse continued to rise to dangerous levels, the regional authorities urged people in the city to evacuate, and if that was not possible, to shelter in the upper floors of buildings. All stores were ordered shut, and tourists were advised to leave.

The Belgian Defence Force said it had deployed helicopters and personnel to assist with rescue and recovery efforts amid reports that the river was expected to rise several feet, threatening a dam.

In the Netherlands, soldiers were sent to help with evacuations in Limburg province, where at least one nursing home had to be cleared, according to the Dutch news outlet NU.nl.

Intense rain in Switzerland led the country’s weather service to warn on Thursday that flooding would worsen in the coming days. It said there was a high risk of flooding on Lake Biel, Lake Thun and Lake Lucerne, and noted the potential for landslides.

-New York Times

By Liz Alderman and Melissa Eddy

EU’s top court rules

Wearing a headscarf can be grounds for job suspension

**BRUSSELS** - The European Union’s highest court reaffirmed Thursday (15) that companies in Europe can bar women from wearing headscarves on the job, a ruling that holds consequences for the balance between the freedom of religion and the rights of employers to apply policies requiring religious neutrality.

The ruling was based on separate cases filed by two Muslim women in Germany who were suspended from work for wearing a hijab, an Islamic head covering. The court said company policies barring workers from wearing any “visible form of expression of political, philosophical or religious beliefs in the workplace” did not constitute direct discrimination, so long as they apply to religious garb and symbols of all faiths.

But in further defining its 2017 ruling, which had allowed companies to bar headscarves from the workplace, the European Court of Justice said employers must present evidence that such policies are necessary to meet a “genuine need” to conduct business, including presenting “a neutral image toward customers or to prevent social disputes,” the court said.

The wearing of the hijab has fuelled controversy across Europe for years and remains a focal point in the politically explosive issue of Muslim integration. Human rights organizations argued that Muslim women would face pressure and exclusion in the workplace in the wake of the court’s decision.

“Laws, policies and practices prohibiting religious dress are targeted manifestations of Islamophobia that seek to exclude Muslim women from public life or render them invisible,” Maryam H’madoun, a policy officer at the Open Society Justice Initiative, said in a statement. “Discrimination masquerading as ‘neutrality’ is the veil that actually needs to be lifted,” she said.

In the United States, by contrast, federal labour laws require employers “to permit applicants and employees to observe religious dress and grooming practices,” according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

The European court ruling comes at a time when discrimination against Muslims, as well as anti-Semitism and anti-immigrant sentiment, are on the rise across the continent. The Council of Europe warned this month that hate speech toward those groups, particularly online, had become a “growing and dangerous trend” during the pandemic.

Several countries, including France, Belgium, Austria and the Netherlands, have passed laws effectively banning full face-covering veils in public spaces, although the hijab, which covers the head and shoulders, does not fall into that category.

In recent years, however, the European Court of Justice, as well as national courts in EU countries, have backed policies that largely prohibit women from wearing headscarves while on the job in the private sector.

The issue has been a hotly contested one in Germany for years, home to 5 million Muslims, the country’s largest religious minority group. A number of cases have been heard, mainly involving applicants for public school positions and judges. In France, where Muslims make up nearly 1 in 10 residents, the country’s top court upheld the firing of a Muslim day care worker in 2014 who refused to give up wearing a headscarf.

The European Court of Justice, based in Luxembourg, interprets laws for the 27-nation EU.

The case decided Thursday came out of the courts in Germany, where two women — a special-needs caregiver at a nonprofit in Hamburg and a cashier at a drugstore chain — challenged their suspension from their jobs for wearing headscarves, arguing the terminations violated their right to religious freedom.

In both cases, the women got into trouble after returning to work from parental leave. The women had not worn headscarves before taking time off work for the birth of their children, but started wearing them upon their return.

The caregiver’s employer, a social services association, suspended her twice after she refused to remove the headscarf, but the court ruled that she wasn’t treated unfairly because the employer had also required another employee wearing a religious cross to remove it in accordance with its internal rules prohibiting the display of religious symbols.

The cashier’s employer, the Mueller drugstore chain, transferred her to a post less visible to customers after she declined to remove her headscarf, and subsequently sent her home and instructed her to come to work without it. The court said the action wasn’t discriminatory because the company sought to project a neutral image to its customers.

-New York Times

By Susan Njanji and Luca Sola

S.Africa hikes troop deployment against looters as death toll rises to 117

**JOHANNESBURG** - The death toll in South Africa’s unrest rose to 117 on Thursday (15), as the country called up its army reserves in a bid to quell looting that has stoked fears of shortages and dealt a crippling economic blow.

The acting minister in the presidency, Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, told reporters that Johannesburg, South Africa’s economic capital, was now “relatively calm” while the south-eastern province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) - the epicentre of the violence -- “remains volatile.”

Defence, security and police ministers and top army generals were dispatched to KZN to assess the situation and oversee the expanded deployment of security forces.

On Wednesday (14), the government said it would call out around 25,000 troops to tackle the emergency -- 10 times the number that it initially deployed and equivalent to about a third of the country’s active military person-

nel. Army chief Lieutenant-General Lawrence Mbatha ordered all reserve members to report for duty on Thursday, as the unrest entered its sixth day.

Minister Ntshavheni said “by this morning, 10,000 boots were already on the ground”.

Stores and warehouses in Johannesburg and KZN have been ransacked, devastating crucial supply chains for food, fuel and medicines in Africa’s most industrialized economy.

Thousands of businesses are estimated to have been plundered in what the minister described as “economic sabotage” masterminded by 12 suspects.

“Of the 12 alleged instigators, one is in custody and... the (police) tracking team has increased the surveillance of the remaining 11,” she said.

In all 2,203 people have been arrested during the unrest for various offences including theft. Looting continued on Thursday in KZN, but the situation

was quieter in Johannesburg, where volunteers in the city’s townships took part in cleanup operations.

Residents lined up for their turn to buy food and other essentials at a mall in Alexandra township in northern Johannesburg that had been spared looting, as 20 soldiers patrolled the floors.

Volunteers took part in a cleanup operation at the Jabulani shopping centre in Soweto.

Community leader Musa Mbele-Radebe, 30, told AFP: “The use of the army is quite good, because our people are quite scared of the army compared to the police.

“It only took four soldiers to control a situation of a thousand (people) that was gathering in this mall.”

The unrest began a day after former president Jacob Zuma - who commands support from some of the country’s poor - began a 15-month jail term on July 8 for refusing to testify to a

commission probing corruption under his tenure.

Protests quickly turned into looting as crowds pillaged shopping malls, hauling away goods as police stood by, seemingly powerless to act.

As the crisis escalated, the armed forces on Monday (12) said they were sending 2,500 troops to help restore order.

The figure was criticized by many as paltry, given that 70,000 soldiers were deployed last year to enforce a strict coronavirus lockdown.

On Wednesday, Defence Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula told parliament she had requested “plus or minus” 25,000 troops.

The request came after President Cyril Ramaphosa warned that parts of the country “may soon be running short of basic provisions” following disruption to supply chains.

-AFP



# REALITY CHECK

By Vivian Wang and Joy Dong

## We found you, my son

Parents who never stopped searching reunite with son abducted 24 years ago

**F**or nearly 24 years, the father crossed China by motorbike. With banners displaying photos of a 2-year-old boy flying from the back of his bike, he travelled more than 300,000 miles, all in pursuit of one goal: finding his kidnapped son.

This week, Guo Gangtang's search finally ended. He and his wife were reunited with their son, now 26, after police matched their DNA, according to China's public security ministry.

In a scene captured by Chinese state television, the trio clung to each other tearfully at a news conference Sunday (11) in Liaocheng, Guo's hometown in northern Shandong province.

"My darling, my darling, my darling," Guo's wife, Zhang Wenge, sobbed as she embraced the young man. "We found you, my son, my son."

"He's been delivered into your hands, so you need to love him well," Guo said, trying to comfort her even as his own voice shook.

The apparent happy ending captivated China, where Guo has become something of a folk hero. His cross-country odyssey, during which he said he was thrown from his bike at least once and slept outdoors when he could not afford a hotel, inspired the 2015 film 'Lost and Love', starring renowned Hong Kong actor Andy Lau.

After the reunion, Chinese social media filled with congratulatory messages. Hashtags about the Guo family were viewed hundreds of millions of times.

"Today, 'Lost and Love' finally has a real happy ending," the movie's director, Peng Sanyuan, said in a video on Douyin, a social media app.

Child abduction is a long-standing problem in China. There are no official statistics on the number of children kidnapped each year, but officials at the Ministry of Public Security said this month that they had located 2,609 missing or abducted children so far this year. Various reports estimate the number of children abducted annually in China may be as high as 70,000.

Historically, child abduction was linked, at least in part, to China's one-child policy. At the height of the policy's enforcement in the 1980s and 1990s, some couples resorted to buying young boys on the black market to ensure they would have a son, according to research by scholars at Xiamen University in Fujian province. Chinese society has traditionally favored sons.

Guo's son, named Guo Xinzhen at birth, disappeared Sept. 21, 1997. He had been playing at the door of his home while his mother cooked inside, according to interviews the elder Guo has given over the years. A frantic Guo and his wife, along with family, neighbours and friends, fanned out across the region to search for the boy. But after several months, the effort waned. That was when Guo attached large banners printed with his son's photo to the back of a motorcycle and set out to find the boy on his own.

"Son, where are you?" the banners said, alongside an image of the boy in a puffy orange jacket. "Dad is looking for you to come home."

In 2012, Guo founded an organization to help other parents find their missing children, and he said he has helped dozens of other families find their loved ones, even as his own search remained unsuccessful. His story rose to national prominence with the 2015 film. Earlier this year he also began promoting anti-trafficking awareness on the social media app Douyin, where he had gained tens of thousands of followers even before his son was found.

The latest development in Guo's story also seemed like something straight out of a screenwriter's imagination. In June, law enforcement officials in Shandong received notice of a potential match for Guo's son in Henan province, according to the public security ministry. It was not immediately clear how officials had identified him, although they said they had used "the newest comparison and search methods." Further blood work confirmed that the 26-year-old man, who some local news reports said was working as a teacher, was Guo's son.

The authorities later said that they had arrested a woman surnamed Tang and a man surnamed Hu. According to the state news media, Tang snatched the boy and delivered him to Hu, who then sold him. CCTV, the state broadcaster, said the two had confessed.

-New York Times



Abdul Aleem, right, at his watermelon stand in Kunduz, Afghanistan on July 7, 2021. Three young residents of Kunduz were killed near his stand recently by crossfire between the Taliban and Afghan forces

By Adam Nossiter and Najim Rahim

## Fear and misery in an Afghan city where Taliban stalk the streets

**KUNDUZ** — The Afghan way of war in 2021 comes down to this: a watermelon vendor on a sweltering city street, a government Humvee at the front line just 30 feet away and Taliban fighters lurking unseen on the other side of the road.

When the shooting starts, the vendor makes himself scarce, leaving his melons on the table and hoping for the best. When it stops, selling resumes, to customers now all too rare.

"I don't have a choice. I've got to sell the melons," said the vendor, Abdel Alim, speaking to New York Times journalists while he kept an eye on a lane within Kunduz city from which he said Taliban had emerged. "Most people have left. There is fighting all the time."

The Taliban are pressing in on all sides of Kunduz, a provincial capital of roughly 374,000 in Afghanistan's north, and several other provincial capitals as well, as the Afghan government's war with the Taliban enters a new and dangerous phase. For weeks, the insurgents have captured vulnerable districts across the country's north, sometimes without even firing a shot. And Wednesday (14), the Taliban said they had captured an important border crossing with Pakistan, at Spin Boldak — the fourth crossing they have seized in less than a month.

It is all part of a broader strategy to tighten the noose around the Afghan capital, Kabul. The insurgents are sewing up the Afghan countryside, cutting off the road network, and squeezing the increasingly enfeebled central government.

In late June, the Taliban entered Kunduz city, testing their limits against soldiers and police — the ones who have not given up — in the provincial capital's streets. Times journalists went there last week to assess the heavy toll the fighting is taking on a crucial city.

Civilians in the crossfire are paying the price. Dozens have been killed and injured; up to 70 a day are brought to the hospital, said Mohammed Naim Mangal, director of Kunduz Regional Hospital. Monday (12) night, two young residents were killed in the crossfire near Alim's watermelon stand.

The jagged front line of combat is often just a block or two away from wherever you happen to be, down quiet streets lined with dusty sycamore trees and low mud brick dwellings baking in the heat. The Taliban are inside the city and outside of it, keeping bedraggled soldiers and police awake all night. The sound of their mortar fire mingles with the call to prayer as the sun goes down.

As of mid-July, the Taliban are inside four out of this city's nine municipal districts, battling for control with the government forces.

Much of the fighting happens at night when the fierce heat diminishes. During the day, the city centre bustles with vendors, but there are few shoppers. There is risk here for seller and buyer. Closest to the front lines, the shops are shuttered, metal canopies drawn tightly down, glass windows blasted out.

"It's permanent war," said Mustafa Turkmen, a carpet seller. "No one can come here, and no one can leave. Every night when I wake up, I hear gunfire."

He comes to his shop nonetheless. Barely holding the line inside the city are the government's Special Forces, better trained and tougher than the regular troops. These comandos have taken over an abandoned cotton oil factory, once the symbol of this region's stillborn prosperity. Their commander, Lt. Col. Masound Nijrabi, expressed scorn for the regular forces who fail to hold the territory he and his men are forced to claw back from the encroaching Taliban each day.

-New York Times

By P. K. Balachandran

## Challenges before Nepal's new prime minister

**Nepal's** new Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, took charge on Tuesday (13), under unusual circumstances. The 75-year-old leader of the Nepali Congress was appointed on the orders of the Supreme Court which had overturned President Bidya Devi Bhandari's decision to persist with K. P. Sharma Oli as Prime Minister, even after Oli had lost the confidence vote in the House of Representatives.

According to the Nepalese constitution, Deuba has to win a vote of confidence within 30 days of his taking charge. Not an easy task given the frequently shifting political alliances in the country. And even if he wins the vote, his hold on the PM's post would depend on how he tackles the country's COVID-19 outbreak, which has recorded 660,000 confirmed cases and claimed 9400 lives so far. In addition, Deuba will also be expected to end the authoritarian structure and constitutional improprieties that characterized the Oli regime and made it very unpopular.

If Deuba wins the vote of confidence, his regime will last 18 months, with fresh elections due anyway. And if he doesn't he will have to hold fresh polls within six months. Either way, he will have very little time to put the house in order and do well enough to merit another term in office. Currently, he is Prime Minister for the fifth time, and given his doggedness, he would want another term!

Before the dissolution of the House of Representatives on May 21, Deuba claimed he had the support of 149 members of the House with an effective strength of 271. He may now have only 123 with 61 from the Nepali Congress; 49 from the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal alias Prachanda; 12 from the Upendra Yadav faction of the Janata Samajbadi Party; and one from the Rastriya Janamorcha.

The Madhav Nepal faction of the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist) which was with Deuba, is now in with the Oli faction of the Communist Party of Nepal (UML).

Deuba is short of the 136 votes he needs to pass muster. However, as Prime Minister, he can garner the required numbers given the favours he can dole out. But the real test will be in the field of administration. He has to be able to give sustained administration in a country which has been chronically unstable. And Deuba's past record as administrator and political manager does not augur well, given that his stints as Prime Minister were plagued with controversies. Maintaining a fine balance with his coalition partners won't also be easy, because both Pushpa Kamal Dahal alias Prachanda and Upendra Yadav both have prime ministerial ambitions of their own.

Five months after he became Prime Minister for the time in 1995, the Maoists led by Prachanda declared a 'Peoples' War' forcing Deuba to quit in 1996. But he came back to power in 2001, even as the 'People's War' was raging, imposed a State of Emergency to quell it, and subsequently dissolved Parliament in 2002. However, when he tried to postpone the elections, King Gyanendra dismissed him citing "incompetence".

Deuba returned as premier again in 2004, but was again sacked by the King Gyanendra, who acquired absolute power in a 'royal coup' in 2005. In 2015, Deuba struck a deal with his foe and ideological opposite, Prachanda and in August 2016, the two agreed to form a rotational government, with the respective parties ruling for nine months each. Deuba was sworn in as Prime Minister for a fourth stint in June 2017.

But in October the same year, all ministers from Prachanda's party left the cabinet, forming an electoral alliance with the United Marxist Leninists arm of the Communist Party of Nepal led by Oli, in preparation for the 2017 general elections. The Oli-Prachanda united Communist alliance swept the elections and formed a coalition government in early 2018 that was destined to fail.

With the situation in Nepal spinning out of control, China and India jumped into the fray to protect their interests. China tried to keep the Oli-Prachanda Communist alliance going as it had a part in bringing about unity in the first place. But neither Oli nor Prachanda wanted unity. India stepped in got the pro-Indian Deuba to support Oli against Prachanda.

Desperate to break the alliance with Prachanda and go for fresh elections, Oli dissolved parliament twice. But every time the Supreme Court reversed the decision citing a constitutional violation.

But such is the nature of Nepalese politics, that it was not long before Deuba ditched Oli and switched to Prachanda, forming an alliance which claimed 149 out of the 271 members of the House of Representatives and sought permission to form a government. But the pro-Oli Nepalese President, Bidya Devi Bhandari, refused to entertain his request, allowed Oli to dissolve Parliament and installed him as caretaker Prime Minister.

The Supreme Court said that Bhandari's action was unconstitutional and ordered the President to appoint Deuba as Prime Minister and ask him to seek a vote of confidence in 30 days as per the constitution.

### About the Author

**P.K. Balachandran** is a senior Colombo-based journalist who, in the past two decades, has reported for The Hindustan Times, The New Indian Express and Economist



## Desperate search for oxygen in Myanmar as latest COVID wave hits

**YANGON** - Residents across Myanmar's biggest city are defying a military curfew in a desperate search for oxygen to keep their loved ones breathing as a new coronavirus wave crashes over the coup-wracked country.

The spike in cases is the latest blow to Myanmar, already suffering from a February coup and a bloody crack-down on dissent that has killed over 900 people and gutted the economy.

Hundreds queued across Yangon as the sun rose Wednesday (14) in the hope of refilling blue oxygen cylinders to take home to family members stricken with the virus.

Some had brought chairs and prepared for a long wait.

For others, it was too late.

"My sister was suffering from COVID-19 for three days," Than Zaw Win, told AFP as he left one of the queues in the city of some 7 million. "In the first day, she was dizzy with low

(blood) pressure... and she suffered a lot yesterday (13) as she couldn't breathe well."

"But while I was queueing to fill oxygen this morning, my niece called me to go back home as my sister had died."

Authorities logged over 7,000 new cases on Wednesday - compared with fewer than 50 per day in early May.

Millions in Yangon and the second city of Mandalay have been ordered to stay home, but the toll continues to rise and volunteer teams are stepping in to remove the bodies of victims from their neighbourhoods.

Ye Kyaw Moe, a sailor, said he slipped out at 3:00 a.m. - half an hour before the lifting of a military-imposed curfew - to get a place in the oxygen line.

But when he arrived at a refill centre in Yangon there were already 14 others in front of him. "I haven't slept for the whole night" he told AFP.

"I also had to be careful to avoid the soldiers as we are still under martial law."

The State Administration Council - as the junta calls itself - says there is no need for alarm.

"Actually we have enough Oxygen," ran the headline in Tuesday's (13) Global New Light of Myanmar, a State-backed newspaper.

"The people do not need to worry about it so much and should not spread the rumour," it quoted junta leader Min Aung Hlaing as saying.

But Than Zaw Win disagreed.

"She had no other diseases... There is no way my sister would have died if we had enough oxygen," he said.

Swathes of Myanmar were put under partial lockdown last year but enforcement was often lax in the developing nation, where many had to choose between following regulations and feeding their families. The new wave comes with the country reeling

from post-coup violence, and with many medical workers joining a nationwide civil disobedience campaign against the military.

Infections are also seeping across Myanmar's porous borders - last week a cluster in the border city of Ruili helped push China's daily caseload to its highest in six months.

Of the 57 cases reported nationwide, 12 were Myanmar nationals in Ruili, authorities said.

Vaccine rollouts have also been slow - only around 1.75 million people have been vaccinated in the country of 54 million, according to the junta.

"The junta lacks the resources, the capabilities, and the legitimacy to bring this crisis under control," UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar Tom Andrews said Wednesday.

"The crisis... is particularly lethal because of the pervasive mistrust of the military junta."

- Agence France-Presse



# RETHINKING AMERICA

By Giulia Heyward and Rick Rojas

## ‘We can’t get out’ 911 calls capture chaos and fear after condo collapse

**MIAMI** — The line was shaky. The man on the other end asked the 911 dispatcher again and again to repeat herself, her words drowned out by the cacophony of chaos that accompanied the collapse of Champlain Towers South. Some people were crying. Others were screaming.

“There are people yelling, saying they’re stuck,” said the man, who told the dispatcher he was Louis Tinoco, from Unit 505. “They keep yelling.”

The call, lasting nearly 13 minutes as a dispatcher assured him she would stay on the line until he was safe, was one of nearly two dozen 911 calls released Wednesday (14) that document the immediate aftermath of the collapse. The snippets of audio — some calls from inside the building, others from anguished relatives and friends — captured the confusion and fear as more than half the building fell to the ground June 24.

The first calls came shortly after 1 a.m., sending a stream of fire-fighters, police officers and emergency workers to 8777 Collins Ave. Some of the early callers said they thought there was a fire, or that the roof had fallen in. The reality set off an agonizing effort to try to find survivors.

“You’ve got to get us out of here!” one woman pleaded to a dispatcher, saying she was on the balcony of her apartment. The exit stairwell was inaccessible.

“A bunch of us are in the garage and we can’t get out,” another caller said. The garage was filling with water, she said.

“Half of the building is not there anymore,” said another woman, who called to report that her sister was inside. “They’re alive.”

Some calls were hurried, measured in seconds. Others stretched on as dispatchers promised to stay on with those fleeing, listening as they narrated their efforts to escape. In most of the calls, the dispatchers maintained a steady calm while talking to people who were terrified and bewildered. But one dispatcher, asking whether a bridge had collapsed, could not hide a sense of shock when told by the caller that it was not a bridge, but a building.

“A building,” the operator repeated.

The collapse of the 13-story, 135-unit complex, each floor pancaking on top of the other, became one of the deadliest structural collapses in United States history. At least 97 people were killed and eight others remain unaccounted for almost three weeks later.

In the initial aftermath, some residents manoeuvred a perilous obstacle course of falling debris and blocked passageways as the rest of the building teetered.

Tinoco told the dispatcher he was calling from the second floor. He was with his family and they were trying to find a way out.

“We just heard from people that are downstairs — they got out,” he said. “We are going to try the garage now.”

“I’ll stay on the phone with you till I know you’re out,” the dispatcher replied.

Muffled voices filled the line.

“The entire garage is flooding,” Tinoco said.

He returned to the second floor, where he said a number of people had assembled. They were going to try to break through someone’s door to get to a balcony.

“There are people in the rubble yelling, by the way,” he said.

“We have several, several units that are already on the scene,” the dispatcher replied.

A moment later, Tinoco reported back. “OK, we found an exit, I think,” he said.

“Go, go, go!” Tinoco shouted to family members. “We’re going to go to the beach.”

The line went quiet for several moments before Tinoco’s voice returned. He was lagging behind his family, he said, and had stopped to help a woman who was with him now.

“Don’t look for anyone else,” the operator told him. “Go stay with your family.”

But he had reached the beach, he told her. “I’m already safe.”

Later that morning, rescuers pulled a 15-year-old boy from the rubble. Nearly three weeks of searching have ensued, slowed at times by pelting rain, lightning and a pause to bring down the portion of the building still standing so that it would not tumble onto rescue crews.

After that day, no one else was found alive.

-New York Times



-Justin I. Wee/The New York Times

Demonstrators gather in New York’s Chinatown on March 20, 2021, to protest attacks on people of Asian descent. New York Police Department patrols aimed at stopping anti-Asian violence have been cut back even as anxiety lingers

By Ali Watkins and Jonah E. Bromwich

## ‘No vaccine for racism’

### Asian New Yorkers still live in fear of attacks

**NEW YORK** — The surveillance video captures a brutal scene: A woman is thrown down a flight of stairs and smacks into the subway platform violently enough to fracture a bone in her face. It was May 28, and the woman, in her 60s, was among dozens of people attacked during a spate of anti-Asian violence this year.

It may not even have been the first such attack by the suspect, John Chappell, a law enforcement official said. Two months earlier, Chappell, who had dozens of prior arrests, had been suspected of lighting an Asian woman’s backpack on fire, the official said. He was released just days after his arrest in May.

Six months into a series of brutal attacks on people of Asian descent across the city, Chappell’s case underscores the challenges police and prosecutors have faced in both preventing the violence and punishing those responsible.

Many of the attacks are unpredictable and carried out by people in the throes of mental health episodes, seemingly at random. Officials say they doubt many of the hate crime charges related to the attacks will stick in court, and those arrested are often released quickly. And the Police Department appears to have scaled back its efforts to stop them: An undercover unit intended to prevent anti-Asian attacks has not been active since May after officers faced threats of violence themselves.

But the attacks have continued, and anxiety and trauma still grip many pockets of the city’s Asian communities, where the violence feels fresh even as the spotlight on it has dimmed.

“There’s still this fear that permeates throughout the community,” said Chung Seto, a community organizer, said Asian elders have been hesitant to travel to and from its programs.

For many, she said, the fear feels like a continuation of the darkest days of 2020, when city residents were afraid of going outside because of the coronavirus.

Now, shop owners in Seto’s neighbourhood remain concerned about staying open late, and elders — including Seto’s parents — will not venture outside.

“It’s not so much catching COVID,” Seto said. “There’s no vaccine for racism.”

Attacks on Asian Americans have shaken cities around the country: In Los Angeles, hate crimes against Asian Americans more than doubled in the past year, and in Boston, Asian American elders are learning how to defend themselves with canes. For New York, the problem endures as the city forges ahead with its reopening and visitors once again wander the streets of Chinatown — and many living in the neighbourhood say they feel left behind.

But for New York’s police, stopping the attacks before they happen is particularly difficult — even when the person accused has dozens of prior arrests. And even when arrests are made, the defendants are often released pending trial, corrections records show.

Chappell, for example, was released just a few days after his arrest, despite prosecutors seeking high bail.

“It’s nice to know there’s a task force. It’s nice to go on the bus, and there’s this messaging of anti-Asian hate crimes,” said Kevin Nadal, a professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. “But what does that actually do?”

The challenges continue even as anti-Asian violence keeps rising: As of June 27, reported hate crimes against Asian New Yorkers had increased by 400% compared with the same time frame in 2020, from 21 to 105, according to Police Department statistics. The psychological effect of that violence has scarred entire communities.

In South Brooklyn, where a community senior centre just reopened after closing for the pandemic, Don Lee, a community organizer, said Asian elders have been hesitant to travel to and from its programs.

“There are people who are excited to come back but we know many of the seniors don’t feel safe to come out,” Lee said. “The fear’s still very real.”

Lee said he knew firsthand that some victims of harassment and hate crimes were no longer reporting the incidents to police because

they believed nothing meaningful would be done with their case.

“What is the point, right? What is the point?” Lee said. “I don’t think it’s the police. I think it’s the system.”

Law enforcement officials and experts note that it can be difficult to prosecute cases as hate crimes, which require proving the defendant’s intent was based on the victim’s race or ethnicity. In previous years, many suspects might have been arrested on assault or harassment charges, without a hate crime designation.

“The public is seeing this rash of attacks on Asian Americans, and it is possible that there is a trend happening because of racial animus,” said Alissa Heydari, a former assistant district attorney in New York City who now helps direct the Institute for Innovation in Prosecution at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. “But to prove it in court, when the criminal standard is beyond a reasonable doubt, it is really hard to show that a victim was picked in large part because of their ethnicity or gender.”

The attacks, many of which have been recorded on video and shared widely, shocked the conscience of the city. Groups of volunteers now patrol the streets of Chinatown, hoping to deter potential attacks. Many Asian New Yorkers say they no longer leave home without pepper spray, or established buddy systems.

In March, the Police Department cobbled together a volunteer group of Asian American officers who work during their time off hoping to stop attacks if they see them happening — including a pilot program where undercover officers wandered streets where anti-Asian violence had taken place and was thought to likely reoccur.

The plainclothes officers were meant to both lure potential offenders into confrontation, and intervene if they saw anti-Asian harassment occurring. But the undercover strategy left officers in tenuous positions, and some were nearly attacked, according to a law enforcement official familiar with the matter.

-New York Times

By Charles M. Blow

## Welcome to Jim Crow 2.0

**In** the wake of the Civil War, liberals in the North went about establishing Reconstruction, passing the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments, greatly expanding the rights of Black people in America, and putting severe restrictions on Southern states before they could be readmitted to the Union.

But of course, the Northern liberals soon grew impatient with and tired of dealing with Reconstruction and the racial issues in the South. At the same time, racial terror was regaining strength in the region.

After Reconstruction was allowed to fail, the last remaining federal troops — who had helped protect Black people from the terrorists — were withdrawn from the South. Even though there was a large percentage of Black voters in many of these states — and Black voters were the majority in some — the terrorists were able to significantly reduce that voter participation through intimidation and violence.

In Mississippi, where Black voters were the overwhelming majority, this suppression succeeded well enough that in 1890 the state called a constitutional convention to write white supremacy into the DNA of the state and to restrict the Black vote.

Only one Black delegate was invited to the convention.

When Mississippi established its Jim Crow Constitution, it didn’t submit it to the public for a vote. Instead, it simply declared that “This Constitution, adopted by the people of Mississippi in convention assembled, shall be in force and effect from and after this the first day of November, AD 1890.”

If it had gone before the people, Black voters would have surely voted it down.

Because the Constitution was not put before the voters, there was some question about its validity, but that was put to rest in 1892, when, as The New York Times reported, “The Supreme Court today settled the point, which was made in a contested election case, holding that the Constitutional Convention was the embodiment of the sovereignty of the people, and that it was competent for it to put into effect the new Constitution without submission to be voted on.”

Without the courts or Congress stepping in to protect voter rights, Mississippi served as the shining beacon of a way forward, and state after state in the South followed, copying the Mississippi example and calling state constitutional conventions of their own, establishing Jim Crow in the South.

The racist South may have fallen in defeat in the Civil War, but it rose in victory in the ballot war.

Once Jim Crow was established, Washington was in no hurry to dismantle it. Liberals simply worked around it. For decades, they simply accommodated Southern racists so as not to offend them and to retain the possibility of earning their votes.

Black voters in the region, disenfranchised and therefore disempowered, were essentially written out of the political calculus.

It would take more than seven decades before Congress would fully restore voting rights for Black people in the South. So, a 30-year-old Black voter in Mississippi who was disenfranchised in 1890 very likely died never having cast another ballot.

These voter suppression efforts were so effective and so emboldening that they even developed a movement — though unsuccessful — to repeal the 15th Amendment that had guaranteed Black men the right to vote.

In 1903, Rep. John S. Williams of Mississippi, a proponent of the repeal, called the 15th Amendment “one of the greatest crimes in political history.”

Fast forward to the present, when Donald Trump is calling his election loss “the greatest fraud in the history of our country from an electoral standpoint,” in part because it was made possible by the votes of Black and brown people.

Most of Trump history was a failure and embarrassment, but one of its great ignoble successes is that it is ushering in Jim Crow 2.0.

Just as in the 1890, the courts and Congress are not doing much to stop the march of voter suppression. In 1890, Benjamin Harrison, a business-minded liberal who believed in Black people’s right to vote, was in office. He endorsed the federal elections bill that would protect Black people from raging voter suppression in the South.

The bill passed in the House but languished and died in the Senate — even though liberals controlled both chambers — in part because those liberals were more focused on other issues.

Then, as The Washington Post reported, around the time of the Mississippi constitutional convention, “African Americans from 40 counties in Mississippi had protested to President Benjamin Harrison, but he declined to intervene.”

President Joe Biden hasn’t declined to intervene, but he has dragged his feet and not used the full force of the bully pulpit and still hasn’t given a full-throated endorsement of ending the filibuster to protect voting rights.

America is having a déjà vu moment, reliving in real time a horrendous history of more than a century ago, and it is impossible to understand how Democrats in Washington don’t see that.

There is no reason to believe that this round of voter suppression is the end of those efforts, and every reason to dread that any successful implementation of them would serve as an accelerant of further suppressive efforts.

Voter suppression is like an invasive weed. Either snatches it up by the root at the first sign of a sprig or it will spread, unchecked, and consume the whole garden.

-New York Times

By Lisa Friedman

## Democrats call for a tax on imports from polluting countries

**WASHINGTON** — Democrats have agreed to include a tax on imports from nations that lack aggressive climate change policies as part of a sweeping \$3.5 trillion budget plan stocked with other provisions aimed at ratcheting down fossil fuel pollution in the United States.

The move to tax imports was made public Wednesday (14), the same day that the European Union outlined its own proposal for a similar carbon border tax, a novel tool that is designed to protect domestic manufacturing while simultaneously pressuring other countries to reduce the emissions that are warming the planet. The two actions in concert suggest that gov-

ernment leaders are turning toward trade policy as a way to attack climate change.

The budget plan also includes a number of significant Democratic priorities on climate change, including a mechanism known as a clean electricity standard that would require power companies to gradually ratchet up the amount of electricity they generate from wind, solar and other sources until they are no longer emitting carbon dioxide.

There are also new tax breaks for wind, solar and other renewable energy as well as electric vehicles, a “methane reduction fee” and funding for a civilian climate corps, modelled after

New Deal-era programs, to create jobs in addressing climate change and conservation.

The budget blueprint must surmount multiple political and procedural obstacles before it becomes a reality.

Unlike the Europeans, who outlined their plan in a 291-page document, Democrats released no details about their tax proposal Wednesday. Calling it simply a “polluter import fee,” the framework does not explain what would be taxed, at what rate or how much revenue it would expect to generate.

But in theory, a carbon border tax would require companies that want to

sell steel, iron and other goods to the United States to pay a price for every ton of carbon dioxide that is emitted during their manufacturing processes. If countries cannot or will not do that, the United States could impose its own price.

China is the world’s top emitter of greenhouse gases that are driving global warming, followed in descending order by the United States, the EU, India, Russia, Japan, Brazil, Indonesia, Iran and Canada.

The budget resolution is yet to be written. That work will be done by various committees in the coming months.

-New York Times



# COMMENTARY



Newly appointed Sri Lanka's Minister of Finance Basil Rajapaksa assumes duties as the Minister of Finance shortly after the swearing-in ceremony at the Ministry office in Colombo on July 8

By Jehan Perera

## Dealing with the downside of political decision making

Does Basil have the sophisticated understanding of democracy to ensure checks and balances are in place?

The appointment of Basil Rajapaksa as Finance Minister comes at a time when the country's economy is in shambles and large numbers of people are enduring hardship. His formal entry into the government, and the authority vested in him through a heavy load of government departments, has given rise to the hope that there will be greater rationality in government decision making in facing the economic challenges.

Imports have been restricted and the entirety of the country's foreign exchange reserve is committed to repaying foreign debt. It is necessary that there be an influx of foreign exchange. The two key economic challenges that the new minister faces is to find new sources of loans and to preserve the export markets the country currently has.

It appears that the reliance on Chinese finances alone, which was once thought possible, has reached its limits for both economic and political reasons. Minister Rajapaksa's appointment suggests that the policy followed by the government since the election of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in November 2019 will be changing.

Minister Rajapaksa is believed to have a greater receptivity to the concerns of the Western bloc of countries which have been disapproving of Sri Lanka's growing political and economic dependence on China with whom they have a strong rivalry. During both the period of war and its aftermath, Basil was the government's focal point in meeting with international donors and multilateral agencies with regard to relief, rehabilitation and recovery issues.

As the brother of both President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, he will be a trusted interlocutor in navigating the process of change. In doing so it will be interesting to see the changes he makes from the past when large infrastructure loans were taken for projects with very poor returns.

While addressing the economic challenges, the new minister will also have to deal with the present downside of political decision making. His appointment as Finance Minister was accompanied by another event that also took political centre stage. This was the breakup by police of a peaceful protest by a civil society group including an icon of free education, Joseph Stalin, head of the Ceylon Teachers Union.

The protestors, including elderly women and the clergy, were arrested by the police on grounds of violating COVID-19 health guidelines.

When the judge refused to send them to a distant quarantine centre, the police forcibly carried them off and they were virtually thrown into buses to be transported to an army camp in the North. Arresting and detaining persons who are exercising their peaceful right to protest sending them to quarantine has a chilling effect on the freedom to dissent which is fundamental to de-

mocracy. Similar undemocratic actions have quelled other protests as well, such as those against the ban on chemical fertilizers which is threatening to destroy small scale farmers and force them to sell their land. The government needs to accept that recent demonstrations carried out by vulnerable communities relate to their unmet needs that creates insecurity and causes mistrust.

The lament of plantation workers in tea estates, the anger of farmers who suffer loss of their crops due to hasty decisions of the government with regard to importation of fertilizers cannot be brushed aside as being manipulations of opposing political actors alone, but they include those who voted for the government as well.

Ironically, during the past several days, government leaders have been receptive to meetings with members of civil society in the aftermath of the EU parliamentary resolution on Sri Lanka. The EU Parliament's resolution that calls for a withdrawal of the tariff concession, though as a last resort, has sent a shock wave through both the government and the country's business sector, as it could have very deleterious economic consequences. Support from civil society organizations (CSO) could stand the government in good stead, both by lobbying among the international community and by creating awareness among the general population of the course of action that the government has to follow if it is to salvage the country's economic fortunes.

Among the issues that the CSOs have presented to the government are matters relating to the post-war reconciliation process that go beyond the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA).

The EU parliamentary resolution specifically mentioned the PTA and the need to do away with it. The government has appointed a committee to formulate amendments to the PTA or to devise an alternative law which both fulfils international standards and ensures national security. However, the focus on the PTA by itself is unlikely to be sufficient to meet the EU requirement for continuation of the GSP Plus concession. The GSP Plus is given as an incentive to countries that are genuine in their intentions to uphold human rights and improve the living conditions of their people.

The 27 international agreements that Sri Lanka has ratified and needs to implement for purposes of the GSP Plus are wide ranging and include human rights, labour rights, environmental protection and also governance, including corruption which has been a mega problem in this country for decades. In terms of these agreements, civil society groups, such as the Ceylon Teachers Union play an important watchdog role.

In their meetings with the government, the civil society members called on the government to protect human rights defenders ensure a safe and enabling environment

in which civil society can operate free from hindrance, surveillance, insecurity and not threaten them with reprisals. Currently NGOs have been placed under the Defence Ministry and this can create an impression the government considers CSOs to be a national security threat instead of being part and parcel of the democratic system.

It should be noted that the EU parliamentary resolution is only one of four that has been passed against the government in the past six months. The other three are the UN Human Rights Council resolution on post-war transitional justice, the Ontario parliamentary resolution on genocide and the pending US Congressional resolution on the lack of forward movement in finding a political solution to the longstanding ethnic conflict. The best way to address these concerns, which are being kept alive in foreign capitals by the Tamil Diaspora, is to recommence the reconciliation process in earnest in addition to paying all round attention to human rights concerns. The present time, when the country is led by a government that has credibility as a nationalist one, and the opposition and international community is ready to support, would be the best time.

At their meetings, the CSOs have called on the government to, among other matters, implement the 13th Amendment in full and conduct provincial council elections immediately, ensure structural safeguards for the Human Rights Commission, the Office on Missing Persons and the Office for Reparations to operate effectively and independently and investigate and, if warranted, prosecute alleged crimes relating to human rights violations and serious violations of international humanitarian law, including for longstanding emblematic cases. Apart from seeking alternatives to the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), the government needs to find convincing answers to these issues.

While CSOs engage constructively with the government they need to play their watchdog role as well. At the base of democracy is the right of people to dissent and when they do so peacefully they need to be protected. As stated by the Bar Association, public protest straddles three important fundamental rights in the Constitution – the freedom of speech and expression, the freedom of peaceful assembly and the freedom of association. Public protests also strengthen the freedom of thought, which was entrenched as a fundamental right in the Constitution. Whether in Western nations or in Eastern ones, such as Japan and South Korea, these are akin to sacred rights, as much as they ought to be to us. Systems function best when there are checks and balances which requires a more sophisticated understanding of democracy and its frame.

**-Dr. Jehan Perera** is the Executive Director of the National Peace Council and this article was originally featured on [peace-srilanka.org](http://peace-srilanka.org)

By Kassapa

## Basil is no financial wizard

So why is a fuss being made about his re-entry to Parliament?

After weeks of speculation, inspired leaks and some misinformation, the youngest of the Rajapaksa siblings of that generation – who is sixty nine years old – returned to Parliament and was sworn in as Minister of Finance last week.

Actor and Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) National List parliamentarian Jayantha Ketagoda won the race among SLPP MPs to resign and make way for Rajapaksa. He is likely to be rewarded with an ambassadorial posting in Australia.

In the weeks leading up to all this, there was speculation that elder brother and Prime Minister, Mahinda Rajapaksa, would resist the allocation of the key finance portfolio to Basil. There were similar stories in the lead up to Gotabaya Rajapaksa's nomination as presidential candidate, claiming he did not have the full backing of his family.

We disagree. The Rajapaksas have many faults but family squabbles are not among them. Whatever differences they may have, they have always been settled at the family dinner table. That is one aspect where they have proven to be head and shoulders above the Bandaranaike siblings.

Nevertheless, what exactly does all this mean? Will Basil Rajapaksa's return to government change its trajectory- which is currently on a downward spiral-significantly, and if so, how?

There have been suggestions that Basil, as Minister of Finance, will be able to turn around the economy that is in the doldrums, with foreign reserves at an unprecedented low level. The younger Rajapaksa has been hailed - just as much as brother Gotabaya was - as a 'man who gets things done' and there is hope that he will resurrect and revive the ailing economy.

There is hardly evidence that Basil Rajapaksa is an economic miracle maker. Yes, his tenure as Minister of Economic Development from 2007 to 2015 was marked by several high-profile infrastructure development projects- mostly in highways - that have served the country well.

However, those projects were for the most part serviced by loans, the majority of which were obtained at no so attractive terms. These loans are partly the reason why Sri Lanka is being squeezed by its debt repayment commitments now. This is also why the government is finding it difficult to balance its books and having cash flow problems.

Basil's philosophy as the Minister of Economic Development was to borrow as much as he can and spend as much as he can on infrastructure projects, so his government could make political gains. Ironically, he has now returned to reap what he has sowed a mountain of debt, an economy in crisis and a Treasury unable to meet its financial obligations.

Therefore, if rigorous fiscal management is used as a yardstick, Basil Rajapaksa is no financial wizard who can usher in Gotabaya Rajapaksa's 'Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour'. To do so, he would have to abandon the many mantras chanted by this regime - including its policy on banning chemical fertilizer. He is extremely unlikely to do so because that would amount to undoing what Gotabaya Rajapaksa has done during most of his presidency.

Why then is such a fuss being made about Basil Rajapaksa's re-entry to Parliament? The reality is that it is not because he is the Messiah from Medamulana who will deliver Sri Lanka from the depths of despair but because of what he will mean to the ruling SLPP-led coalition and even more importantly, what he will do to ensure the continuation of the Rajapaksa dynasty and bring into fruition its plans for succession.

Basil may not be an economic whiz kid but he is certainly a cunning political strategist. In 2010, it was he who engineered cross-overs from the United National Party (UNP) for the safe passage of the 18th Amendment that removed the two-term limit on the presidency, enabling Mahinda Rajapaksa to contest a third time. He also coaxed, cajoled and coerced leaders of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress to support that effort.

More recently, it was his idea to start a separate political entity, the SLPP, when Maithripala Sirisena rather rashly took over the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) after winning the election with UNP support. The 'pohottuwa' was his brainchild and it is now in full bloom, capturing state power at the expense of both the SLFP and the UNP. As a result, the SLFP is now forced to cling on to the SLPP saatakaya, suffering many insults in the meantime.

Basil is the political brains behind the 'family firm' that is now the Government of Sri Lanka, and he will ensure it stays that way. The Rajapaksa brothers and Crown Prince Namal now hold five Cabinet portfolios - even the Royal family siblings in England don't hold that many titles!

There are concerns, though. Prime Minister Rajapaksa is reportedly not in the best of health, President Rajapaksa underwent heart surgery prior to assuming office and former Speaker Rajapaksa is closer to eighty years than to seventy. Young Namal only celebrated his thirty-fifth birthday a few months ago.

This is why Basil Rajapaksa is needed in Parliament. He will not only be the glue that keeps together the unruly bunch that constitutes the backbench of the SLPP, he will also be the 'go to' person to sort out intra-party disputes in the SLPP and inter-party disputes in the ruling coalition. He will be the safety net, the obvious alternative if, God forbid, any health scare were to befall the older Rajapaksas.

In other words, Basil is the 'spare wheel' and he is now in place. So, the Rajapaksa bandwagon can merrily motor on safe in the knowledge that come what may, they will be still in the driver's seat as they drive towards 'Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour' - at least for their family.

*-This article was originally featured on [counterpoint.lk](http://counterpoint.lk)*



# LIFELINES



Manifestation of a '*Homben Yana*' choice - convicted murderer Premalal Jayasekara shortly after being sworn in as a member of Sri Lanka's parliament on September 8, 2020

By Capt Elmo Jayawardena

## Our '*Homben Yana*' choice?

Many a truth is trampled and discarded simply because we have no choice

**Way** back in the 16th century there lived a man in Cambridge by the name of Thomas Hobson.

He rented and sold horses and was the proud owner of a stable that had 40 stallions of all colours and breeds. Anyone who wanted to rent a horse from him to ride the paddock or journey into the far horizon, paid money and got a horse. There was one condition; the renter was not allowed to select the horse. The 'wanna be' rider had only one choice. He had to take the horse that was in the stall nearest to the door. It was a simple matter of either 'take it or leave it.' When the word spread about this, it became known among possible horse renters that what they got was 'Hobson's Choice'.

Yet, they had one guarantee. The Hobson customer always got a horse to ride.

Now let me take you to the '*Homben Yana*' choice segment of my story. First let me explain what '*Homben Yana*' means. You crawl on all fours with your head bent down and your chin digging into the ground. Of course, we don't have a Thomas Hobson and 40 horses locked up in a fancy stable. What we, the sons and daughters of Sri Lanka have for choice is the one and only Diyawanna Oya to rule us. Sadly instead of 40 steeds, our inheritance is at least 40 thieves, like in the Ali Baba fable. Oh no, we are certainly not going to get stallions to ride into the glorious sunset simply because we thought we voted sensibly! What we received in return after every election is another 5 years of '*Homben Yana*' prosperity. For 73 years of a pretentious democracy that is all we got. Whatever political choices we made, we ended up with our chin shoved to the ground that is what I mean when I say we are a '*Homben Yana*' proletariat perpetually crawling an unassailable Calvary.

Sri Lankans stood up proudly and faced the new world with hopes running high when we received our freedom from the Colonial Masters in 1948. Yes, we were a united people of an independent paradise isle. But, from then on it has been a slow slide, as the average Sri Lankan struggled to find answers to the ever-multiplying woes the country's leadership brought upon its eternally suffering citizens.

Let's look at the recent past, the 21st century. The ethnic war was in full swing when the new millennium dawned in the year 2000. We all breathed a sigh of relief when the 30-year-old carnage ended in 2009 at Nandikadal. That entire story is best left in the past; too many people from all races and all religions suffered when unmarked graves or mounds of earth buried the victims of the miserable war. Then came the hope of peace, along with the blessed promise of prosperity. Things did change, less for some, more for others, but things did change for the better. But, unfortunately this euphoria didn't last long. People were forced back to the '*Homben Yana*' syndrome. Undoubtedly, the minorities got most of the flak.

Presidential elections came in 2015 and Diyawanna Oya changed colours. The win-

ners had a Clarion Call that reverberated "corruption, corruption, corruption" in flashing neon. Nepotism and power-abuse were also added to the sin-list along with other misdeeds with which the winners branded the defeated. New hopes began to sprout and the '*Homben Giya*' ordinary men and women slowly rose to their feet pleading the new brooms sweep Lanka clean.

A bright and beautiful life filled with marsh-mellow dreams was offered to the masses by the new coalition regime occupying Diyawanna Oya. We, the '*Homben Yana*' population of Lanka came out of the blocks like Olympic sprinters, full of whim and vigour. New appointments were made to bring justice to the fore. This committee and that commission went into action to crucify the culprits who supposedly stole from our national wealth. Yes, they erected the cross at Galle Face Green and brought in the nails and the hammer, 'full of sound and fury' like the Bard quoted, but alas! There was no one to crucify. Everyone walked away, as innocent as new born babies; it appeared the new brooms didn't sweep at all. I only read in the papers the likes of a school principal who was sentenced to 5 years of rigorous imprisonment for taking a bribe to admit a student to her school!!!

We can leave all that for now and take a time-out to give a rousing cheer to 007 the Bond man who came from Singapore. Of course, he had friends and that too in the right places. So, he did what he wanted to do and high-tailed it to Singapore and perhaps, as I write, is sipping a chilled Margarita sitting on a wicker chair in the prestigious Raffles Hotel. And we who have lost 11 billion (could be much more - I don't know) came back to our '*Homben Yana*' status, while helplessly despising Diyawanna Oya for its unbelievable tomfoolery! There goes a pompous fairy-tale, if ever there was one.

2019 brought in another change. Those who had been in the freezer for five long years marched back to Diyawanna Oya like saints on parade. A few new faces were in the team but most were the same horses that ran the old race. As for us, our hopes skyrocketed as high as kites. Before anyone or anything could settle into the minted path of prosperity, COVID-19 took over the entire planet. Everybody was swimming upstream in the waters off a busted dam and everybody was blaming everything on the Corona Pandemic.

Between election gatherings and Port City scrambles and opening LCs for luxury cars, the government got their priorities mixed up. If Sri Lanka trimmed their boast of controlling corona to a whisper and got their act together, I am sure we could have done better in handling the ramifications of the pandemic. The 2/3 majority and 20th amendment were handy tools to govern with, but unfortunately COVID -19 would not give a hoot to all that autocratic power.

It all boiled down to how well the planning was done and how efficiently the powers handled the situation. Today most peo-

ple have become partners of the '*Homben Yana*' clan, not by choice, but by sheer circumstances. Everyone knows that with the current time and mood it is difficult to govern, but the question is, are we handling the catastrophe in the best possible way or have we become poor 'also rans' with no clear answers in sight?

When a young university student told me that she and her mother and father shared a packet of rice for the day, doesn't that tell the whole story? That's all they had to eat. It is not just them, but millions who live below the poverty line suffer a similar fate.

In the current state of the country, the future does look fractured and bleak. The front pages of the newspapers are always full of political tugs-o-war and on the evening TV 'Face the Nation' is filled with the 'wise' and the 'not-so-wise' lambasting their party oppositions mostly in a meaningless melee. All that is fine for us, the '*Homben Yana*' TV audiences. But what is difficult to stomach is the senseless and super-stupid arguments some 'Kade Yana' buffoons bring out to defend their political godfathers. Many a truth is crushed and trampled and discarded and we watch the programs like fools simply because we have no choice. Whether they be 'in power' or 'out of power' seldom would we hear anything that resembles the truth.

So where can the average you and I find the logic to cast our vote? How do we evaluate the pros and cons of Diyawanna Oya to come to some reasonable conclusion to nominate a candidate?

Come election time do we follow the same script as we did for 73 years and send some local Einstein's to Parliament. Are we going to get our usual Hobson's choice? Are we willing to go another 5 years dragging our chins on the ground with yet another '*Homben Yana*' result?

As far as Diyawanna Oya is concerned in its current state in July 2021, one can see a ripple or two of discontentment that crawls like a weed-clogged wave. Looks like the horoscope is indicating possibilities of turbulence and probabilities of apple-carts tumbling down.

All that is fine, but what is the answer for the long-suffering denizens of Mother Lanka? Whom do we vote for? Sure, among the so-called exalted leaders of the land there are a few who toe an honest line. Honest and determined people who want to change the tide. But would they get the ballot to be selected?

Three more years to run before we go to the polls again. It is difficult to know what is in store as COVID-19 is currently dictating terms and no one has the faintest idea how long this miserable pandemic will last.

Apart from all that, if the world manages to tame the virus and the next Sri Lankan election comes around, we will have another chance to select whom we want.

So much for the choices we make, will we ever learn we are choice-less?

**-Capt Elmo Jayawardena** can be contacted on [Elmojay1@gmail.com](mailto:Elmojay1@gmail.com)

By Anuj Khemka

## Shavini's resilience

Diagnosed with a life threatening heart condition, she not only chose to live life on her own terms, but also to give a fighting chance at survival for others with the same condition



-OxiWear founder Shavini Fernando

**In** 2017, while a graduate student at Georgetown University, Shavini Fernando's heart suddenly stopped beating.

"I was working, and my friend started to scream that my entire face was blue," said Fernando, who now lives in Arlington. "It didn't even take one minute. I couldn't breathe and my heart stopped."

Fernando managed to revive herself by self-administering CPR before the oxygen supply to her brain cut out, but the incident frightened everyone around her. Fernando's doctor at The Johns Hopkins Hospital suggested that it was no longer safe to live on her own.

But Fernando, who was unwilling to let the condition control her life, refused. Instead, she decided to develop a wearable device that continuously monitors her flow of oxygen with the help of her graduate school program director and fellow students. Whenever Fernando's blood oxygen levels fell below a normal threshold, the ear-worn device sends an emergency alert to her doctor.

"I'm sort of a rebel. When people tell me 'you can't do this,' I want to show them that I can," Fernando said.

She channelled that fighting spirit two years prior, when a cardiologist told Fernando — who was 33 at the time — that she had just two years left to live. She flew from her home country of Sri Lanka to The Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore for a second opinion and treatment. There, she received medicine and equipment to help manage severe pulmonary hypertension, a condition in which the heart has trouble pumping blood through the lungs. The condition leaves people vulnerable to sudden and undetected drops in oxygen, known as silent hypoxia.

This condition makes it dangerous to live in high altitudes, so rather than return home to Sri Lanka, she settled in the DC area to keep receiving medical treatment and start her master's degree at Georgetown. That decision ultimately set her up to establish OxiWear so that she could share the product that she wears to survive with others.

"Most of the deaths happen in the pulmonary hypertension and cardiovascular patient community because they don't get the help in time," Fernando said. "If they have an alert and a way of calling for help, these deaths can be prevented."

By the end of this year, Fernando and OxiWear plan to launch a product to be used by the public for fitness. A medical device for those with heart conditions will come later, once it gets approval from the Food and Drug Administration.

Both devices connect to a smartphone to show users their oxygen levels and enable them to contact emergency services during sudden drops.

OxiWear is now closing in on \$1 million in funding since its launch in the spring of 2019. Most recently, after securing patents in the US, China and Japan, the company received investments from CIT Gap Funds and Tie DC. Before that, Fernando obtained funding through her connections at Georgetown and a crowd funding campaign.

"Currently, there is no other device available to continuously monitor oxygen levels. OxiWear is a game changer for those affected by the complications of pulmonary hypertension, and could be the difference between safety and danger," Tom Weithman, Managing Director of CIT GAP Funds, said in a press release.

Fernando says that investors and potential consumers initially expressed doubt about the importance of the product. As COVID-19 raised awareness of the dangers of silent hypoxia, however, OxiWear gained traction.

"Because of COVID-19, fundraising became really slow. At the same time, a lot of people started contacting us, asking, 'Is there a way we can purchase this device?' I'm like 'I wish I could get it out fast, but we don't have enough money,'" Fernando said.

In the early stages of the company, as funding dried up, Fernando and her employees went months without pay. Still, the OxiWear founder carried on.

"Even if it kills me, I will get this done. That's why, even without funds, we've managed to get so far in such little time," said Fernando. "For me, this is not about making money. It's about helping those like me. Once you get silent hypoxia, even if you are recovered, you will end up with life-long after effects."

Fernando and her OxiWear employees work remotely. The company's address is publicly listed as a condo in Rosslyn.

- [arlnow.com](http://arlnow.com)



# LITERARY LIVES

Andy Warhol - 1928-1987

## It was all art to him

Sir Christopher Ondaatje, in this two-part series, explores the life, art and eccentricities of one of America’s most prolific and famous artists, deemed a Pop iconoclast, who from Coca-Cola bottles to Campbell’s soup cans, and Brillo boxes to celebrity face, managed to change the culture he pictured and continues to influence it in a limitless way through a variety of media



A moment of sudden revelation: Andy Warhol's six self-portraits

**Part 1**  
“If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There’s nothing behind it.”  
-Andy Warhol

Andy Warhol was born Andrew Warhola on August 6, 1928 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was the fourth child of Ondrej Warhola and Julia (née Zavacká) – working-class emigrants from Mikó, Austria-Hungary – called Miková today in North-eastern Slovakia. Warhol’s father emigrated to the United States in 1914, and his mother followed him in 1921. Warhol’s father worked in a coal mine. The family lived in the Oakland neighbourhood of Pittsburgh, and were Ruthenian Catholics, one of twenty-three Eastern European branches, and attended the local St. John Chrysostom Byzantine Catholic Church.

Before he was ten years old – in third grade – Warhol developed Sydenham’s chorea (St. Vitus dance) – a nervous disease that causes involuntary movements of the extremities and skin blotches. He spent a lot of time in bed, drawing, listening to the radio and collecting pictures of movie stars, which he stuck on the wall around his bed. His father died in an accident when he was thirteen.

Warhol graduated from Schenley High School in 1945, and won a Scholastic Art and Writing Award. He hoped to study at the University of Pittsburgh and become an art teacher, but instead he enrolled in the Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University) and studied commercial art. He served as art director of the student art magazine Cano and designed a cover in 1948, and a full-page interior illustration in 1949 – his first two published artworks. He earned a Bachelor of Fine art in pictorial design in 1949, and that same year moved to New York City to begin a career in magazine illustration and advertising.

“Art is what you can get away with.”  
-Andy Warhol

One of Warhol’s first commissions was to draw shoes for *Glamour* magazine. This led to a job as a designer for Israel Miller – a shoe manufacturer.

“Nobody drew shoes the way Andy did. He somehow gave each shoe a temperament of its own, a sort of sly, Toulouse-Lautrec kind of sophistication, but the shape and style came through accurately and the buckle was always in the right place ... The vamps on Andy’s shoe drawings kept getting longer and longer – but Israel Miller didn’t mind. He loved them.”  
-John Coplans  
American photographer

Warhol realized early on that he could adapt the silk screen printing technique to making paintings. He was taught in Manhattan by Max Arthur Cohn. He used tracing paper and blotted the ink while it was still wet – a crude method of printmaking, which allowed him to create endless variations on the theme. He was intensely creative and quoted in his book *Pop-ism: The Warhol Sixties*:  
“When you do something exactly wrong, you always turn up something.”

He used an epidiascope, which is an opaque projector that can project images of book pages, drawings and photographs on to other surfaces – like canvases. These images under Warhol’s manipulation would be transformed into other art forms by tracing contours and developing shadows. This was the initial

technique he used to propel his creative artistic career. He used a photograph by Edward Wallowitch (an early boyfriend) *Young Man Smoking a Cigarette* (1956) for a 1958 design for a book cover he sold to Simon and Schuster for the Walter Ross pulp novel *The Immortal*, and later used other images for his dollar bill series, and for *Big Campbell’s Soup Can with Can Opener (Vegetable)* – 1962, which initiated Warhol’s most sustained motif, the soup can.

“Don’t pay any attention to what they write about you. Just measure it in inches.”  
-Andy Warhol

RCA Records hired Warhol, and another freelance artist, Sid Maurer, to design album covers and other promotional material to participate in the expanding record industry.

Warhol began exhibiting his work in the late 1950s. He had exhibitions in the Hugo Gallery and the Bodley Gallery in New York, and held his first West Coast exhibition in the Los Angeles Ferus Gallery with ‘Campbell’s Soup Cans’. It was the first pop art exhibition on the West Coast. His first New York solo pop art exhibition was hosted at Eleanor Ward’s Stable Gallery from November 6 to 24, 1962. This exhibit featured: *Marilyn Diptych*, *100 Soup Cans*, *100 Coke Bottles*, and *100 Dollar Bills*. Warhol met the poet John Giorno at the Stable Gallery, who would star in Warhol’s first film *Sleep* in 1963.

“What’s great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca Cola, and you can know that the President drinks Coke. Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking.”  
-Andy Warhol

During the 1960s Warhol made paintings of iconic American objects like dollar bills, mushroom clouds, electric chairs, Campbell’s Soup Cans, Coca-Cola bottles, and celebrities like Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, Marlon Brando, Troy Donahue, Muhammad Ali, and Elizabeth Taylor, as well as newspaper photographs of police dogs attacking African-American protestors during the Civil Rights Movement. He founded his studio ‘The Factory’ and gathered around him a number of artists, writers, musicians, and underground celebrities. His work became very popular as well as controversial. The Museum of Modern Art in New York hosted a symposium on pop art in December 1962, and artists like Warhol were criticized for their flagrant consumerism. Warhol’s critics were scandalized by his open embrace of commercial market culture but the symposium also set the tone for Warhol’s reception.

“They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself. Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art. Making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art.”  
-Andy Warhol

The 1969 exhibition *The American Supermarket* was held in Paul Bianchini’s Upper East Side Gallery. The show was presented as a typical US small supermarket, except that everything in it, including the produce, canned goods, meat, and posters were all created by six prominent pop artists – among them the controversial Billy Apple, Mary Inman, and Rob-

ert Watts. Warhol’s painting of a can of Campbell’s Soup cost \$1,500, while each autographed can sold for \$6.

Warhol shamelessly used assistants to increase his productivity in the 1950s and 1960s. This remained a controversial aspect of his artistic career – particularly in the 1960s. Gerard Malanga assisted him with his increasing production of silk screens, films, sculpture and other works at ‘The Factory’ – Warhol’s aluminium foil-and-silver-print-lined studio on 47th Street (later moved to Broadway). Members of Warhol’s Factory crowd included Freddie Herko, Ondine, Ronald Tavel, Mary Woronov, Billy Name, and Brigid Berlin. He also groomed a retinue of bohemian eccentrics whom he called his ‘Superstars’, including Nico, Joe Dallesandro, Edie Sedgwick, Viva, Ultra Violet, Holly Woodlawn, Jackie Curtis, and Candy Darling. Everyone participated in the Factory films, and some like Brigid Berlin (from whom he got the idea to tape his telephone conversations) remained friends with Warhol until he died. Other important figures in the New York underground art/cinema world, such as writer John Giorno and film-maker Jack Smith also appeared in 1960s Warhol films which premiered at the New Andy Warhol Garrick Theatre and 55th Street Playhouse. He was a tremendous self-promoter and showed his involvement in a whole series of artistic ventures. And then disaster struck. On June 3, 1968, Valerie Solanus, a radical feminist writer, who had been a peripheral figure in the Factory scene, shot Warhol and Mario Amaya, a curator and art critic, at Warhol’s studio. In 1967 she had authored *SCUM manifesto*, a feminist tract that advocated the elimination of men. She had also appeared in Warhol’s film, *I, a Man*. Earlier in the day she had been rejected from entry into the Factory, asking for the return of a script she had given to Warhol. Mario Amaya was released from hospital the same day, but Warhol was seriously wounded and barely survived. He had physical problems for the rest of his life and had to wear a surgical corset. The shooting had an enormous effect on Warhol’s art and life. Solanus was arrested the day after the shooting and explained that Warhol “had too much control over my life”. She was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and sentenced to three years under the control of the Department of Corrections. Security on the Factory increased substantially but for many the Factory ceased to exist. They simply did not come around anymore.

“Before I was shot, I always thought I was more half-there than all-there. I always suspected that I was watching TV instead of living life. People sometimes say that the way things happen in movies that’s unreal, but actually it’s the way things happen in life that unreal.”  
-Andy Warhol

The 1970s were a much quieter decade for Andy Warhol. He became more entrepreneurial and spent months of his time getting rich patrons for his portraits: the Shah of Iran and his wife Empress Farah Pahlavi, the Shah’s sister Princess Ashraf Pahlavi, Mick Jagger, Liza Minelli, John Lennon, Diana Ross and Brigitte Bardot. Mao Zedong was created in 1973. He founded *Interior* magazine with Gerard Malanga, and Bob Colacello was the first editor. He published *The Philosophy of Warhol* in 1975.

He was quieter and socialized at various nightspots in New York City, including Max’s Kansas City, and later in Studio 54. He was now regarded as being quiet, shy and an observer. He founded the New York Academy of Art with his friend Stuart Pivar.



Marilyn Monroe

“I’m afraid that if you look at a thing long enough, it loses all its meaning.”  
-Andy Warhol

The 1980s were a critical and financial success for Warhol, mainly because of his affiliation with prolific younger artists: Jean-Michel Basquiat, Julian Schnabel, David Salle, as well as the Transavantgarde Movement in Europe, including Francesco Clemente and Enzo Cucchi. He teamed with fifteen other artists including David Hockney and Cy Twombly and contributed a speed skater print to the Art and Sport collection. *The Speed Skater* was used in the official 1984 Sarajevo Winter Olympics poster.

Graffiti artist Fab Five Freddy paid homage to Warhol when he painted an entire train with Campbell’s Soup cans. But Warhol was now being criticized for being a “business artist”. Reviewers disliked his portraits of personalities and celebrities. In hindsight, however, critics have hailed Warhol’s superficiality and commerciality as “the most brilliant of our times”.

In 1984, *Vanity Fair* commissioned Warhol to produce a portrait of Prince to accompany an article celebrating the success of *Purple Rain* and its accompanying movie. *Orange Prince* (1984) was created similar to the 1962 Marilyn *Flavors*– among some of Warhol’s best celebrity portraits.

Warhol was gay, and he recorded how excited he was to see Prince and Billy Idol at a party in the mid 1980’s and compared them to the movie stars of the 1950s and 1960s who inspired his paintings.

Andy Warhol died in Manhattan at 6.32 a.m. on February 22, 1987. He was fifty-eight years old. He had delayed having his recurring gallbladder problems checked as he was frightened to enter hospital and see doctors. He seemed to be making a good recovery from gallbladder surgery at the New York Hospital before dying from a post-operative irregular heartbeat. His family sued the hospital for inadequate care, and the malpractice case was quickly settled out of court for an undisclosed amount of money. Doctors expected Warhol to survive the surgery, but his medical state before the operation revealed significant risk. Warhol’s brothers took his body back to Pittsburgh where an open-coffin wake was held at the Thomas P. Kunsak Funeral Home. The bronze casket had gold-plated rails and white upholstery. He was dressed in a black cashmere suit, a paisley tie, a platinum wig and sunglasses. The funeral liturgy was held at the Holy Ghost Byzantine Catholic Church on Pittsburgh’s North Side. After the liturgy, the coffin was driven to St. John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Cemetery in Bethel Park, a south suburb of Pittsburgh. At the grave the priest said a brief prayer. Before the coffin was lowered, a copy of *Interview* magazine, an *Interview* T-shirt, and a bottle of Estée Lauder perfume ‘Beautiful’ were dropped into the grave. Warhol was buried next to his mother and father. A Memorial Service was held in Manhattan for Warhol on April 1, 1987 at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, New York.

-Part II next week

About the Author

Sir Christopher Ondaatje is the author of The Last Colonial. The author acknowledges that he has quoted liberally from Wikipedia; Holy Terror; Andy Warhol Close Up (1990) by Bob Colacello; The Genius of Andy Warhol (2009) by Tony Scherman and David Dalton; Warhol: The Biography (2000) by V. Bookris; and The Inpatient Pen (2019) by Nicky Haslam. Literary Lives is sourced through The Sri Lankan ANCHORMAN, Toronto, Canada



SPORTS

COUNTER PUNCH

By The Line Judge

Muralitharan stir hornet’s nest by naming conspirators in pay dispute

**COLOMBO** - It is an open secret that some senior players played an influential role in the rebellion by national cricketers to not sign the annual contracts with their employer, Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC), prior to the Bangladesh and England tours citing lack of transparency in the new performance-based criteria. The contract saga contributed to the abysmal performance of the Sri Lanka team who were whitewashed for the first time in an ODI (one-day international) series by Bangladesh and drubbed by world champions England in both the T20 and ODI series. The national selectors found a convenient scapegoat by sacking newly appointed ODI captain Kusal Janith Perera. The cat is now out of the bag. In a significant development, Sri Lanka cricket legend Muttiah Muralitharan stirred a hornet’s nest by naming at least two former captains, Angelo Mathews and Dimuth Karunaratne, as being the main conspirators in the stand taken by cricketers that nearly brought SLC to its knees. The leading wicket-taker in Test and ODI cricket and a member of SLC’s Technical and Advisory Committee, Muralitharan charged during an interview on a private TV channel on Monday (12) night, that four senior cricketers had deprived the younger players from getting a central contract from SLC because of their greed for money. He did not name the other two cricketers involved in the coup.

Muralitharan accused the senior players of warning the youngsters against wearing the Sri Lanka logo and the sponsorship logos. This is a serious allegation coming from a respected cricket legend, and should be inquired into by the authorities concerned. “The players for the contract were selected by the selection committee and the coach. Priority was given to performance and then discipline, fitness, etc. When you introduce a new system, it has to be experimented at least for one year and then only we can see whether there are any shortcomings in it and then rectify it the next year,” he said. The players were given a July 8 deadline after their return from the UK to sign the central contract but by the time they agreed, SLC in collaboration with the Technical and Advisory Committee headed by World Cup legend Aravinda de Silva, had already decided they would offer only four contracts. “When we offered the players the contract, they refused to sign it on the grounds of transparency, so we are not giving them a central contract for this year,” Muralitharan said. This is a blow for the cricketers who will not get a monthly stipend but only match fess, according to the tour contract. This will mostly affect the Test cricketers who have no series to play until late November, when West Indies tour Sri Lanka for a two-match series as part of the second World Test Championship.

Muralitharan also proposed that World Cup winning team mate and former ICC (International Cricket Council) Match Referee, Roshan Mahanama, should be given charge of the national team. There are also reports that another legend, Mahela Jayawardene, who has enjoyed success as coach of Mumbai Indians in the IPL (Indian Premier League) will serve as a consultant of the Sri Lanka Under-19 team. Jayawardene has previously submitted a blueprint to restructure junior cricket and has always displayed an inclination to improve the quality of school cricket, which in the past served as a feeder to the national team. Meanwhile, another former Sri Lanka captain, Dinesh Chandimal, has sought clarity about his future in the national team seeking a meeting with Aravinda de Silva. One of the senior players who was involved in the contract dispute with SLC, Chandimal has been overlooked in the 30-member squad named for the upcoming ODI and T20I home series against India and not offered a tour contract. He featured in the series against West Indies in March, but was ignored by the selectors for the tours to Bangladesh and England. Chandimal becomes the second senior cricketer to show concern about his future with SLC after Mathews informed SLC not to consider him for further selection as he was contemplating retirement. Although it did not come as a surprise,

what took the icing was the dethroning of Kusal Perera and reinstatement of all-rounder Dasun Shanaka as captain for the India series. Captaining Sri Lanka has become a crown of thorns since Chandimal stepped down during the middle of 2014, T20 World Cup, which Sri Lanka went on to win under the leadership of Lasith Malinga. T. M. Dilshan, Thisara Perera and even Dimuth Karunaratne will vouch that the mantle weighs heavily and is not always linked to performance. Shanaka stepped up to the plate when many seniors refused to tour Pakistan in 2019 and confounded everyone by leading Sri Lanka to an ODI series triumph. He was hailed as a leader in waiting but the new selectors headed by Pramodya Wickremesinghe handed over the reins to Kusal Perera who promised to play a “fearless” brand of cricket. Perera was not only made to eat his words but Sri Lanka were made to eat humble pie. With his deputy Kusal Mendis suspended, Sri Lanka have turned to Shanaka and appointed emerging star Dhananjaya de Silva as vice-captain for the India series. Notwithstanding the performances against India, it is hoped that they get a longer run to ensure consistency and instill confidence in their leadership roles to resurrect Sri Lanka from the dumps with the next World Cup less than two years away.

-ENCL

KEEPING THINGS  
REAL AND CREDIBLE..!

Turning Points 2021

Out NOW!

USD \$5  
LKR 500/-

Turning Points  
Global Agenda 2021

A Year of Radical Political Imagination - By Nadya Tolokonnikova

A Chance to Repair the Cracks in our Democracy - By Joseph E. Stiglitz

Agents of mass distraction - By Sanjana Hattotuwa

Automation, Brexit: What Were We Thinking? - By Russell Brand

I was the last one left - By Johnny FD

Why My Father Fled Seoul’s Lockdown - By Hye-young Pyun

Give the AI Economy a Human Touch - Kai-Fu Lee

How Can a Dress Be Cheaper Than a Sandwich? - By Imran Amed

Geneva and the way forward - By Hilmy Ahamed

The Gotabaya Rajapaksa Presidency - By Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu

And many more, insightful, interesting and thought provoking articles from New York Times and Weekend Express

For details call:

011 7322789 | 077 7751021 | 011 7322743

National Olympic Committee puts Team Sri Lanka on track for Olympics in hectic year

**COLOMBO** - With the Tokyo 2020 Olympics less than a week away, the National Olympic Committee of Sri Lanka (NOCSL) knows that for the time being at least their job is done – even if the moment for relaxing is still some way away. The past year after all has been among the most testing for athletes and officials alike. The pandemic has been life altering to say the least, but more so for athletes, for whom it has threatened to derail a lifetime of hard work. “The huge problem for the athletes was to focus for an extra year – that is a tough, tough thing,” explains NOCSL President Suresh Subramaniam. “You know, you have your targets and then suddenly it gets shifted. The postponement of the games was definitely not easy.” Subramaniam shares how some found it difficult to keep up the necessary levels of training, having been stuck at home due to curfew regulations. Others such as swimmer Mathew Abeysinghe, who was in the US when the pandemic struck, was forced to train alone, which brought with it its own complications. “If he’s training alone, without a coach, who’s timing him?” asks Subramaniam, adding, “It’s very difficult for athletes to push themselves in situations like that. Most of our athletes are also from outside Colombo, so training from home proved difficult too.” It was therefore up to the NOC to ensure that they gave their athletes the best chance of reaching the games and potentially winning a medal, whether this meant enlisting contacts within the armed forces to ensure athletes received the correct nutrition to maintain their diets or simply ensuring they had training equipment on hand. Not to mention the endless petitioning of the International Olympic Committee to allow some athletes in with wildcard entries, owing to the unprecedented circumstances put forth by the pandemic. “Normally to qualify, athletes need to take part in tournaments, but this was completely out of the question over the past year. “To keep their morale up we even hosted motivational sessions involving past athletes around twice a week. These were held virtually, but it was essential in keeping the athletes in the correct frame of mind.” It wasn’t just for the athletes though, even the coaches had to continue their courses, with several NOC-organised education programs held virtually for coaches and officials. “Since it was held online, we even had foreign coaches join in on the sessions,” explains Subramaniam. For an organization, whose sole goal is to ensure medals, much of this was above and beyond the call of duty. Since taking over the NOC in 2018, Subramaniam has overseen the introduction of a High Performance Committee to identify talented athletes and arrange scholarships for them, while there is also the Junior Development Committee – jointly conducted by the Ministry of Sports, Ministry of Education, NOC and National Sports Federations – which looks into helping talented school kids make the transition to national athletes. Despite these efforts Subramaniam is acutely aware that there is still much more to be done to fully actualize Sri Lanka’s potential, though he is hopeful there might be a surprise or two this time around. “This time’s games, I may be wrong, but I don’t think any records are going to be broken. People have been side-lined for quite some time, with sub-optimal training conditions. “But I’m still hopeful that someone from our contingent can come back with a medal, the talent is there, and we know the desire is definitely there. But whatever said and done we’re extremely proud of

what they have achieved so far regardless.” Subramaniam’s thoughts will no doubt be backed by all those watching along at home as Team Sri Lanka strives to do their island nation proud. The NOC has sought to keep their athletes on track and focused, amidst the most unpredictable of build-ups, and now it’s down to the athletes to put into action the hard work the preceding months have been leading up to. Sri Lanka will be represented by nine athletes and 17 officials at the upcoming Tokyo Olympics, which will be on show from July 23 to August 8. Out of the nine athletes show jumper Mathilda Karlsson, gymnast Milka Gehani and sprinter Yupun Abeekoon have earned direct qualification, while shooter Tehani Egodawela, shuttler Niluka Karunaratne, middle distance runner Nimali Liyanaarachchi, swimmers Matthew Abeysinghe and Aniqah Gaffoor and judoka Chamara Dharmawardhana have earned their passages through Tripartite Quota Places, offered by a three-way collaboration between the IOC, the Association of National Olympic Committees (NOC) and the respective International Federations. They will be backed throughout the tournament of course by a host of sponsors, namely Presenting Partners – Brandix and Hirdaramani; Associated Partners - MAS and Sunshine Holdings; Official Broadcasting Partners – Rupavahini and Channel Eye; and Activity Partners - Eventistry (Official Marketing Partner), Daraz (Official Digital Partner), Cinnamon Life (Official Hospitality Partner), LOVI (Official Lifestyle Partner), Swarnavahini Media Group (Official Electronic Media Partner), Richardson (Official Outdoor Media Partner), and PG Martin (Official Accessories Provider).

- NOC Media

Flower faces Sri Lanka inquiry over virus bubble breach

**COLOMBO** - Sri Lanka’s cricket board is planning disciplinary action against batting Coach Grant Flower, following allegations that he breached a bio-secure bubble during an England tour, cricket sources said Thursday (15). Sri Lanka’s preparations for a home series against India were disrupted when Flower, 50, tested positive for COVID-19 on his return to the national team on July 6. Three Sri Lankan players, including vice-captain Kusal Mendis, were sent home early after they left the team’s bio-secure hotel for a night

out in Durham ahead of the first one-day international. Official sources said Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) will investigate reports that Flower also breached the COVID-19 restrictions. “An inquiry will be held after he (Flower) recovers fully,” a board source told AFP. “There are allegations that he also breached the bio-secure bubble.” Media reports said the board was also unhappy with the performance of Flower, a former Zimbabwe Test player who is under contract until the end of the year.

Sri Lanka are eighth in the Test team rankings and ninth in one-day formats and team morale is reportedly low. The players have been at loggerheads with the board over new performance-linked contracts. The board has brought in local coach Dhammika Sudarshana as a temporary replacement for Flower for three one-day games and three Twenty20 matches against India starting Sunday. The India matches were delayed by five days to July 18 following positive tests by Flower and a team’s data analyst.

-AFP