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Amid asset declaration surge

CIABOC STAFF UNDER PRESSURE

Over 300k State officials submit asset declarations

Less than half of 967 positions filled

Legal dispute stalls new hires

BY BINGUN MENAKA GAMAGE AND ANJALI WITHANAGE

The staff of the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) is under severe pressure from the additional workload initiated following the unprecedented number of asset and liability declarations submitted by State officials and MPs, *Ceylon Today* learns.

This situation has been created as the CIABOC currently functions with less than half of the 967-member staff it requires, a situation that has delayed the processing of information and even slowed public communication, an official of the CIABOC said.

Continued on Page 2

HRCSL received 9,700 complaints in 2024



Over 1,000 filed against State institutions

BY RAVISHAN FERNANDO

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) received 9,708 complaints in 2024, including more than a thousand against State institutions for failing to act appropriately, HRCSL Chairman L.T.B. Dehideniya said.

Continued on Page 2

Illegal possession of elephant

'Ali Roshan' sentenced to 15 years' RI



BY HANSI NANAYAKKARA

The Colombo High Court Permanent Trial-at-Bar, on Friday (19), sentenced Samarappulige Niraj Roshan, also known as 'Ali Roshan', to 15 years of Rigorous Imprisonment. He was found guilty on two counts of illegally possessing a female elephant without a valid licence.

In addition to the prison term, the Court imposed a substantial fine of Rs 20.6 million on the defendant. The judicial panel also ordered the Director-General of the Department of Wildlife Conservation to take immediate custody of the elephant, declaring it State property.

Continued on Page 2

Drug network linked to 'Kehelbaddara Padme'

Court orders CID to expedite probe



BY KUMUDU UPUL SHANTHA

The Colombo Additional Magistrate's Court, on Friday (19), ordered the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to expedite a comprehensive investigation into the organised crime and drug trafficking network allegedly operated by Koralagamage Mandunu Padmasiri Perera, alias 'Kehelbaddara Padme'.

Continued on Page 2

'Stop burning garbage'

Court orders Jaffna MC to reduce air pollution

The Court of Appeal, on Friday (19), directed the Jaffna Municipal Council to take all necessary measures to reduce air pollution in the city, particularly by stopping the burning of garbage.

Continued on Page 2

Organised criminals arrested recently

Mobile phone data uncover political ties – Police

BY ANJALI WITHANAGE

Data recovered from the mobile phones of organised crime suspects arrested recently are uncovering their political connections, a senior Police officer said.

The officer said that although several of the suspects had erased data from some of their devices, investigators were able to restore it using advanced technology, exposing the full extent of their criminal networks.

Continued on Page 2

Mannar islanders protest against wind and sand mining projects

TEXT AND PIX BY SHABEER MOHAMED



Hundreds of residents from Mannar Island staged a protest in front of the Presidential Secretariat on Friday (19), demanding an immediate halt to proposed wind power and sand mining projects they claim have devastated their lives.

The protesters accused the projects of being illegal and environmentally destructive, citing severe flooding, threats to the fishing industry, worsening health conditions, and a growing water crisis in several villages. Community members also raised concerns about the deteriorating health of young children, which they link to the environmental damage caused by the projects.

Continued on Page 2

Cefuroxime-related death at Tangalle Hospital

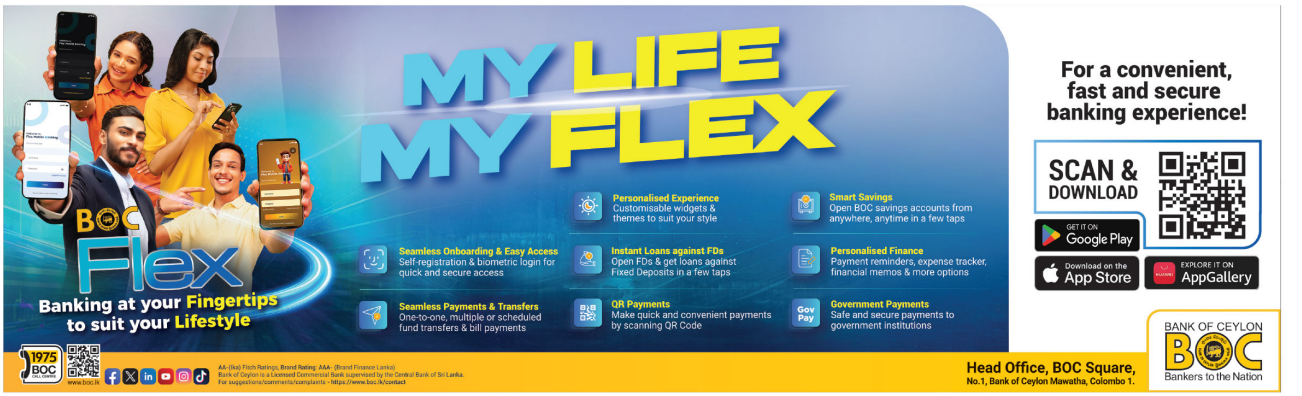
Health Ministry urged to launch probe



BY DILANTHI JAYAMANNE

With the autopsy report still pending, health sources have urged the Ministry of Health and Mass Media to launch an inquiry into the death of a patient at Tangalle Base Hospital, which has been linked to the administration of an antibiotic.

Continued on Page 2



Supplying rotten fish to Pallekele Prison

Suspect fined Rs 10,000

BY K. NISSANKA – TELDENIYA

A suspect who was found guilty of supplying three boxes of rotten fish, weighing 89 kg and worth Rs 95,000, to the Pallekele Prison kitchen was fined Rs 10,000 by Teldeniya Magistrate and Additional District Judge Ruwan Indika Silva on Wednesday (17).

The Magistrate further ordered the Kundasale Public Health Inspectors to destroy the rotten fish, which was unfit for human consumption, and to submit a report to the Court.

The suspect had been supplying fish to the Pallekele Prison for some time.

He was arrested on Wednesday morning at the gate of the Pallekele Prison and produced before the Teldeniya Magistrate by a team of Kundasale Public Health Inspectors and the Pallekele Public Health Inspector. The suspect was transporting the fish in three boxes in a small lorry. The fish was foul-smelling and was found to be unfit for human consumption.

PRESIDENT ATTENDS INDUSTRY EXPO 2025

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake attended the Industry Expo 2025 on Friday (19) at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH) in Colombo, engaging with entrepreneurs and industrialists at the exhibition stalls.

Organised by the Ministry of Industry and Entrepreneurship Development in collaboration with the Industrial Development Board of Sri Lanka, the four-day exhibition, held from 18–21 September, showcases the full spectrum of the country's industrial sector. The event aims to steer Sri Lanka towards an export-oriented production economy while addressing the challenges faced by the industrial community.

The exhibition highlights key contributors to national product promotion, recognises their role in the country's development, and fosters a positive perception of entrepreneurship among the public. It



also encourages industrialists to expand businesses, enhances public interest in entrepreneurship, and strengthens market linkages both locally and internationally.

Featuring 450 stalls across 25 industrial sectors, the expo provides participants with opportunities to evaluate competitiveness, gain knowledge on new technologies, foster innovation, and connect with support institutions. A special highlight this year is the Innovation Zone, which includes contributions from schools, universities, and both public and private sector organisations. Stalls under the School Entrepreneurship Club programme showcase products created by schoolchildren, while the National Engineering Research and Development Centre (NERD) and a One Stop Service stall provide guidance on State and banking support available to the industrial sector.

In addition, suppliers of machinery, packaging materials, and other essential industrial components are participating, creating further avenues for collaboration and growth.

Deputy Minister of Industry and Entrepreneurship Development, Chathuranga Abeysinghe, was also present at the event.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Mannar islanders...



More than 500 people, joined by social activists and political party representatives, took part in the demonstration. Protesters carried banners with messages such as "Mannar is not for sale" and "Minister Jayakody, there are birds in Mannar."

Residents have been voicing concerns for months, warning that large-scale development on the fragile island ecosystem is unsustainable and could threaten their livelihoods.

Health Ministry...

Ceylon Today reliably learns that on Friday (19), serious concerns had been raised regarding the quality of the antibiotic Cefuroxime, which had been administered to the patient. Informed sources alleged this was the first antibiotic-related death under the new government and expressed suspicion that the drug used may have been of substandard quality. According to hospital records, the patient, a resident of Beliatta, had been admitted to Tangalle Base Hospital on 15 August with pneumonia and subsequently given a Cefuroxime injection. The patient developed severe complications and was later transferred to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). However, the patient succumbed to his condition earlier this week.

Family members alleged that the delay by hospital staff in transferring the patient to the ICU had also contributed to his death.

When contacted, Tangalle Base Hospital authorities confirmed the sequence of events but stressed that the cause of death could only be determined after the Judicial Medical Officer (JMO) released the autopsy report.

CIABOC STAFF...

The official confirmed that over 300,000 State officials have now submitted their declarations of assets and liabilities, along with all MPs. These declarations are being verified and uploaded to CIABOC's official website for public access.

Director General of CIABOC, former Judge Ranga Dissanayake, has officially informed both the President and Parliament about the acute staffing shortage. He highlighted the issue during a recent meeting of the Committee on Public Finance (COPF), chaired by MP Dr. Harsha de Silva.

Dissanayake explained that, under the Anti-Corruption Act passed in August 2023, CIABOC was required to appoint a dedicated cadre of staff starting from 15 September 2023. Then Justice Minister Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe issued a gazette notification naming this date as the commencement of the Act. However, due to legal conflicts with the Public Financial Management Act, the new cadre has not yet been appointed.

Although State and Police officers are currently serving at CIABOC, Dissanayake emphasised that this arrangement is technically against the law under the new Act.

"Under Section 26 of the Anti-Corruption Act, the new Commission must appoint its own staff. Since this has not yet happened, those who were serving under the previous Commission have simply continued to work. We currently have 31 legal officers and 63 staff members, including legal assistants, prevention officers, and typists," he said.

He warned that if those State and Commission officers had been sent away on 15 September 2023, CIABOC would have been left with only 63 people, severely crippling its operations.

"This situation cannot continue indefinitely, because under the law, State and Police officers cannot remain here permanently. Since January, I have been making a major effort to resolve this. I believe it can be fixed. We have proposed a 967-member cadre, including staff for district offices," Dissanayake said.

He added that there have been extensive discussions with the Department of Management Services of the Finance Ministry, but that legal differences persist.

"The Department of Management Services believes that the cadre must be decided under the Management Services Act, but we argue that Section 26(1) of the Anti-Corruption Act gives the Commission the power to decide the cadre and then obtain parliamentary approval. I have also written to the Speaker explaining the Commission's position and seeking support," Dissanayake said.

HRCSL received...

Of the total complaints, 2,686 were related to violations of personal liberty. Dehideniya detailed that these included 1,225 complaints of arbitrary arrest and detention, 737 cases of cruel treatment, 487 of harassment, 96 of degrading treatment, 62 of threats, 32 on the rights of prisoners, 23 on sexual harassment, 12 deaths in custody, 11 complaints linked to killings, and one case of enforced disappearance.

The Commission also recorded 6,959 other human rights-related complaints in 2024. These included 1,142 complaints related to administrative functions, 1,098 on inaction by government institutions, 1,020 employment-related grievances, 474 cases of property rights violations, 380 on education, 222 related to welfare rights, 180 concerning the rights of the LGBTQI+ community, 96 regarding internal and essential services, 84 on civil and political rights, 67 on child rights, 50 concerning environmental rights, 47 on the rights of migrant workers, 45 on voter registration, 31 on health rights, 22 on women's rights, 11 on disability rights, four on language rights, four on elder rights, three on freedom of religion, and 1,979 categorised as miscellaneous complaints.

Dehideniya added that 63 complaints were referred to other institutions better suited to handle them.

He stressed that human rights are not privileges but legally protected rights, and that State officials must act to ensure they are not violated. "When people are aware of their rights, the number of complaints increases. Similarly, when officials become more aware of human rights, violations can be reduced," he said.

Court orders CID...

Additional Magistrate Lahiru de Silva instructed the Financial Fraud Investigation Unit of the CID to swiftly conclude all investigations into the syndicate and report their findings to the Court. The order was issued after considering a progress report submitted by the CID, which stated that the suspect is currently detained for a 90-day period for questioning.

During the hearing, the CID informed the Court that their investigation extends to a Sub-Inspector from the Gampaha Special Investigation Unit, Bentota Kankamlage Niroshan Uditha Udeshan, who is alleged to have supported Padmasiri Perera's criminal activities.

The CID also requested a Court order to keep the case file sealed and confidential until all facts related to the extensive criminal network are uncovered, a plea which the Court is considering.

Appearing on behalf of the CID, the investigating officer detailed the gravity of the charges against the suspect. "This suspect is a major drug trafficker and the mastermind behind numerous organised crimes. He was taken into custody on 25 August based on an Interpol Red Notice," the officer stated.

The Court was informed that 'Padme' faces a litany of accusations, including operating as an illegal trafficker, leading a powerful drug syndicate, orchestrating serious crimes in Sri Lanka from abroad, threatening Police officers, and masterminding the murder plot of 'Ganemulla Sanjeewa' inside the Colombo Magistrate's Court No. 5 premises.

"The suspect was arrested by the CID at the Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA), Katunayake, under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and is being questioned under a 90-day detention order at the CID," the officer added.

Investigators have reportedly seized multiple mobile phones and a large number of SIM cards used by Padmasiri Perera to direct his criminal operations in Sri Lanka from various foreign countries. The CID affirmed that investigations are ongoing to identify and apprehend other individuals connected to this organised crime network.

After reviewing the submissions, the Additional Magistrate ordered the CID to present a full progress report on the investigation by 13 October.

Mobile phone data...

Among those whose data was recovered are notorious underworld figures arrested in Indonesia, including 'Kehelbaddara Padme' and several associates, whose communication devices had also been wiped.

"While some suspects have admitted many details during questioning, the real secrets of their network are coming to light through this restored mobile phone data," the senior officer said.

'Kehelbaddara Padme' and 'Commando Salintha', who were arrested in Indonesia and brought back to Sri Lanka, are currently being detained and interrogated by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). Meanwhile, the Walasmulla Magistrate's Court recently granted permission to detain and question two other prominent members of the same gang – 'Backhoe Saman' and 'Thambili Lahiru' – until 2 December. They are under investigation over the murder of Anura Widanagamage, alias 'Kajja', and his two children.

Court orders Jaffna...

The order was issued by a Bench comprising Justice Rohantha Abeysuriya, President of the Court of Appeal, and Justice Priyantha Fernando, during a hearing on a petition filed by Dr. Uma Sukhi Nadarajah, a medical practitioner in Jaffna.

During the proceedings, Justice Abeysuriya questioned the lawyers representing the respondents about whether any action had been taken under the Environmental Acts to address the air pollution problem. The Bench instructed the Municipal Council to implement preventive measures in line with the law and noted that the Central Environmental Authority (CEA) should provide the necessary support to ensure compliance.

Dr. Nadarajah's petition alleged that air pollution in Jaffna was caused by improper garbage disposal and the release of chemical waste into the environment. She requested a Court order compelling authorities to take immediate steps to address the situation.

Senior Counsel Dr. Ravindranath Dabare, along with Attorneys Savanthi Ponnamperuma and Uvin Dissanayake, represented the petitioner.

The next hearing of the petition was scheduled for 11 November.

'Ali Roshan' sentenced...

The case was initially filed by the Attorney General during the Good Governance Government tenure, charging 'Ali Roshan' and three others with 33 counts, including the illegal possession of five elephants between 2009 and 2015.

The unanimous verdict was delivered by the Trial-at-Bar comprising Judges Manjula Thilakaratne, R.S.S. Sapuvida, and Lanka Jayaratne, following a lengthy trial that also considered a prior conviction of the accused.

The Court stated that a sentence of five years' imprisonment was imposed for the 27th charge, and a sentence of 15 years' imprisonment for the 28th charge, with the stipulation that the sentences be served concurrently, meaning that the total imprisonment would be 15 years.

In addition, the accused was fined Rs 200,000 for the 27th charge, with a default punishment of three months' imprisonment if the fine is not paid. For the 28th charge, a fine of Rs 20.4 million was imposed, with a default punishment of four years' Rigorous Imprisonment if the fine is not paid, as determined by the Court.

Delivering the judgment, President of the Bench, Justice Manjula Thilakaratne, addressed and dismissed key arguments from the defence. "The defence contended that under the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance, only tuskers require registration, not all elephants. However, upon careful consideration of the ordinance's provisions, the Court finds this argument untenable," the Justice stated.

The defence also argued that a gazette notification pertaining to elephant registration was invalid as it had not been approved by Parliament, and therefore, no offence could be established based on it. Justice Thilakaratne refuted this claim, clarifying, "The Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance itself does not mention such a gazette. The ordinance unequivocally states that a licence is mandatory for the possession of elephants. Accordingly, the Court rejects this argument as well."

Justice Thilakaratne further elaborated that under Section 22(A)12 of the ordinance, the elephant found in the defendant's possession is legally considered an animal that was captured and held without proper authority, thereby classifying it as public property.

"It was clearly established during the trial that the elephant was in the defendant's possession. The defendant himself admitted this in his statement from the dock," the Judge noted. "The challenge of protecting elephants in our forests is severe, largely due to the illegal capture of these animals by certain individuals. Such activities not only undermine conservation efforts but also pose a significant threat to our nation's ecosystem and the rule of law."

President's Counsel Anuja Premaratne, representing the defendant, requested a lenient sentence, citing the prolonged period his client had faced trial.

The Court acquitted three other defendants in the case, citing a lack of evidence. Justice R.S.S. Sapuvida noted that the prosecution failed to prove charges of conspiracy and possession of stolen elephants, primarily due to inconclusive evidence regarding the elephant's age, which was critical for identification. The Court dismissed the testimony of veterinary witnesses, stating they lacked specialised expertise in determining the age of elephants.



Rs 900M fraud probe

CID officers grilled over delay in arresting suspects

Colombo Chief Magistrate, Asanka S. Bodaragama, questioned officers of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) as to why they were sluggish in arresting the suspects in a fraud case related to Nation Lanka Finance and Sinha Capital Investment.

The two institutions were accused of defrauding depositors of Rs 900 million by promising high interest rates.

The Magistrate ordered the CID to immediately arrest 8 of the 11 suspects it had identified and produce them in Court. The CID had already arrested three suspects in connection with the case.

When the case was taken up on Tuesday (16), the Chief Magistrate expressed his frustration and queried whether the CID was waiting for an 'auspicious time' to arrest the suspects, before ordering their immediate arrest.

He also questioned whether the CID was treating one suspect differently from another and instructed that it should act on the Attorney General's advice and immediately arrest the suspects and produce them in Court.

Numerous victims staged a silent protest demanding justice, calling for the immediate arrest of the Chairman of the two companies, Victor Ramanan.

During the hearing on Tuesday, one of the suspects, Udaya Pushpakumara, a Director of Nation Lanka Finance, was produced in Court and granted bail.

President's Counsel Neville Abeyratne, appearing for the victims, submitted that over 1,000 people had allegedly been affected by the scam, which is estimated to involve between Rs 900 million and Rs 1.2 billion.

He mentioned that the victims could provide information about the suspects' properties through sworn affidavits, and he urged the Court to expedite the process of recording those testimonies.

The Colombo Chief Magistrate ordered the CID to submit a progress report on the investigation on 30 September.

Due to shortage of doctors

PUNANGODA HOSPITAL FACES CLOSURE

BY DHARMADASA SIRIWARDHANA – AMBALANGODA

There is a risk of the Punangoda Regional Hospital in Rathgama being closed due to a shortage of doctors and other shortcomings at the hospital, residents said.

Meanwhile, Opposition members of the Rathgama Pradeshiya Sabha raised this issue in a special statement at the Pradeshiya Sabha meeting. They also demanded that the hospital's issues be addressed, as they could affect a large number of patients every day.

When queried by the media, the Medical Officer-in-Charge of Punangoda Hospital said the hospital should have six medical doctors to provide adequate service. However, he added, there are currently only three.

He further stated that about 200 to 300 patients visit the clinics every day, with between 20 and 30 patients admitted daily. In addition, women attending the maternity clinic also need treatment. All these services cannot be managed by just three doctors. If even one of them takes leave, a significant problem arises. Under these circumstances, it has even been necessary to limit outpatients to 200 per day.

When contacted by the media, Deputy Minister Rathna Gamage (Galle District MP) and Chairman of the Regional Coordination Committee said he was aware of the matter. He explained that one doctor from this hospital had been transferred to Karapitiya Hospital, and no replacement has been assigned to the vacated position so far.

He added that this has aggravated the issue. He also said he had informed the relevant departments and that the matter would be addressed soon.

WPC explores UK support, youth political engagement

The Women Parliamentarians' Caucus (WPC) recently convened a meeting to discuss potential pathways for UK support to the Caucus with representatives from the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD).

The meeting also included discussions with representatives from the Law and Society Trust (LST) on fostering intergenerational dialogue to encourage the political participation of young women. This meeting was held under the patronage of Prime Minister Dr. Harini Amarasuriya and chaired by the Minister of Women and Child Affairs and Chairperson of the Caucus, Saroja Savithri Paulraj.

Addressing the Committee, representatives from the WFD proposed support for introducing and implementing gender-sensitive law-making and gender-responsive budgeting. They also emphasised understanding and supporting the role of the Caucus in enhancing women's labour force participation. Furthermore, WFD offered to assist in strengthening and evaluating Parliament to become a gender-sensitive institution through research and policy support.

Members of the Caucus stressed the importance of focusing not only on high-level policy initiatives but also on grassroots activism. They reiterated the critical need to mobilise women at the grassroots level to drive meaningful change.





The challenges currently faced by women MPs were also highlighted, with a call for the establishment of support systems, including counselling services, to better assist them. In addition, the Caucus explored strategies for fostering intergenerational dialogue aimed at inspiring and increasing young women's participation in politics.

The meeting was attended by the Deputy Chairperson of Committees of Parliament, Hemali Weerasekera, and MPs Dr. Kaushalya Ariyarathne, Krishnan Kalaichelvi, Nilanthi Kottahachchi (Attorney-at-Law), Thushari Jayasingha (Attorney-at-Law), Anushka Thilakarathne (Attorney-at-Law), Deepthi Wasalage, Hiruni Wijesinghe (Attorney-at-Law), Oshani Umanga, Ambika Samivel, and Lakmali Hemachandra (Attorney-at-Law).





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PRESIDENT SHOULD INTERVENE TO RESOLVE CEB REFORM DISPUTE AMICABLY — ENG. ISURU KASTHURIRATHNE

BY SULOCHANA RAMIAH MOHAN

Amid the ongoing tussle between the NPP-led Government and Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) workers over the proposed historic CEB reforms, tensions continue to rise. More than 40 trade unions have warned of mass protests and strikes if the matter is not resolved.

Eng. Isuru Kasthurirathne, a CEB engineer and executive committee member of the CEB Engineers' Union (CEBEU), spoke to *Ceylon Today* regarding the issue.

Acting as the joint front representative of the CEBEU and spokesman for its Reform Subcommittee, he clarified the union's stance on the proposed reforms.

Following are excerpts:

How did the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) reforms become key for the public and the Government?

A:In the broader national context, reforms were regarded as the most effective tool, properly utilised — protecting public interests in businesses involving the Government, while maintaining government credibility in managing economic recovery.

When it relates to the electricity sector, electricity is an essential service that requires careful management considering broad factors, such as national security, ease of governance, transparency, the cost of electricity, improved accountability, efficiency, and many more.

Bear in mind that this electricity sector reform is the most significant reform exercise in the history of Sri Lanka, considering its size, value, and economic importance.

Further, for both sides (people and the Government), the electricity sector became symbolic: for the people, it touched their everyday lives and the cost of living; for the Government, it became a test case of how successful a deep structural reform could be executed in practice without major issues.

However, since no elaboration is necessary, the electricity sector's persistent financial losses placed significant pressure on public finances. Reforms became essential to achieving fiscal stability and fulfilling the country's obligations, such as those to the IMF and international development programmes.

Without the electricity reforms, where did the Government face obstacles, and how did the public bear the burden?

A: The electricity sector has experienced reforms, such as involving the private sector in generation, creating an independent regulator, and beginning efforts to include more renewable energy, although these changes have not been fully appreciated.

When discussing broad and holistic reforms of the sector in today's context, it's not only CEB that we should focus on, but also the Government, the Treasury, the regulator, the Sustainable Energy Authority, LECO, and, of course, the CEB.

One of the main factors contributing to the deprivation of the Sri Lankan electricity sector is policy inconsistency. With the change of governments after elections, a habit of changing critical policies has been observed throughout the past decades. Without addressing this critical issue, no sector reform would provide relief to the public burden.

Encouraging and fascinating unsolicited proposals outside the proper procurement process, and leaving doors open for such avenues to be exploited by corrupt parties, including political authorities, has caused considerable damage to the sector.

Of course, the elephant in the room, the CEB, had been operating at heavy losses for years without a cost recovery tariff and with inefficiencies caused by various interferences in decision-making. Without reforms, these losses continued to grow and were ultimately covered by the Treasury.

Further, the global lenders and investors demanded restructuring as a precondition for financing. Without reforms, the Government was unable to attract foreign investment or private capital into the energy sector.

Who lobbied for the new reforms, and how did it take shape?

A: The present reforms have two stages, started by the previous government through the Sri Lanka Electricity Act, No. 36 of 2024, and continued by the present government with amendments to the Act by the Sri Lanka Electricity (Amendment) Act, No. 14 of 2025.

This reform exercise is inevitable, given the financial situation of the country, to attract necessary investment, among other reasons.

So, the lobby was created naturally, the investors, lending agencies, policy makers, Treasury, professional bodies like IESL, Chambers, professionals and most importantly, CEB employees themselves were part of that lobby, with the intention of transition of current electricity sector towards a more efficient, competitive, depoliticised, regulatory-empowered, renewable-centric, security-ensured electricity market model to achieve reduction of electricity costs.

PUCSL had rejected the reforms, too. What was their concern?

A: That's a falsehood; as far as I can understand, the actual concern of the PUCSL is their independence and powers. From both stages of the Act (the original and the amendment), the due independence and authority of the PUCSL as the regulator have been stripped down, increasing the political authority.

However, the recent amendment brought by the present government has addressed several issues, including the cancellation of the National Electricity Advisory Council and increasing the accountability of the PUCSL, but has not managed to address several critical issues, including the changes brought through the Sri Lanka Electricity Act Amendment in 2013, which empowered the regulator.

It is often said that the CEB's workforce of over 22,000 is a well-earning community, yet they continue to demand pay rises and perks. There is also a widespread impression that it is one of the most corrupt sectors. What is your response to this?

A: Any professional is entitled to fair compensation and appropriate recognition, commensurate with their importance to the institution and the sector in which they work, taking into account market conditions.

I saw my colleagues and subordinates leaving the country for higher salaries and benefits in hundreds only during the past two years. There is a significant demand for many CEB employee categories abroad, especially for technical staff, including engineers.

CEB employees do not demand additional perks. What they are asking is to ensure that the transfer from CEB to successor companies is on terms and conditions not less favourable than those enjoyed by them as assured by the Act and the Supreme Court. In a restructuring process of this calibre, as per international practices, there shall be a collective agreement between the two parties to provide that assurance.

Further, the electricity sector may be the most corrupt, given the substantial amount of money involved. That's why there is so much attention and lobbying for unsolicited proposals with political interference. For example, even though it is well-proven that competitive procurement has significantly reduced electricity prices, the demand for Feed-in Tariffs for established technologies, such as solar and wind energy projects, remains.

But the latter has nothing to do with employee benefits or their salaries, and in fact, the authorities should focus more on retaining the experienced local talent rather than encouraging them to leave by offering increased compensation. Otherwise, this could have a catastrophic impact on the electricity sector due to a sudden shortage of skilled and trained employees, which may necessitate hiring expensive local or foreign contractors and consultants to fill the gap. CEB has demonstrated that we can save millions of dollars by utilising local expertise and labour instead of paying contractors. Those savings are many times the so-called salary bill of CEB.

> **Bear in mind that this electricity sector reform is the most significant reform exercise in the history of Sri Lanka, considering its size, value, and economic importance**

The CEB is often accused of crippling the system from time to time by deliberately causing power cuts. Do you agree that there is a mafia operating within the organisation?

A: Any employee has the right to union action under labour law. However, no one can commit sabotage. CEB employees have only mounted two full-scale strikes with the participation of Engineers, in 1996 and 2022. The reasons for both were not related to employee perks but had national significance, namely, opposing the decision to sell 51 per cent of LECO shares to a single private investor without transparent procurement at a low price in 1996, and against the vicious act to allow so-called unsolicited proposals in the guise of encouraging the renewable energy absorption, bypassing transparent and competitive procurement in 2022.

Even in today's context, no one intends for a power cut to harass the public; in fact, it should be the public who demands transparency and accountability in the ongoing reform process and calls for stakeholder consultations in accordance with the provisions of the Act, compelling the Government to come out from closed doors and honour their public mandate during the elections.



Eng. Isuru Kasthurirathne

During Ranil Wickremesinghe's arrest, there was a continuous power cut. The public has still not been given an explanation. Can you provide one?

A: If there is any wrongdoing or sabotage, the current government is more than capable of bringing them to justice.

The CEB is politically split, too, and why does that happen in Sri Lanka?

A: It's natural for any large government-owned organisation, like most other sectors in Sri Lanka, where governments and political parties try to establish control over the organisation and sector through employees and trade unions. This isn't limited to Sri Lanka. Even in developed countries, there are political splits and politically controlled trade unions in large organisations, especially under government control.

On the new reforms, the President is too strict to impose it, but the engineers say he did not consult the workers? Should he consult when the amendment is already in place?

A: The President is relying on the information he receives. Let's analyse the current status, taking a minute. The previous Act has been amended by the present government, of course, bringing several admirable positive changes, including ensuring government ownership for the successor companies, excluding the 2nd stage successor companies of generation and distribution categories, keeping the provisions for private sector investments, which is understandable, and has presented the proposed electricity market structure with clarity and precision. Further, the proposed amendments have provided clarity on the independence of the successor companies, increased the accountability of the regulator, and ceased the paths for bypassing the transparent and competitive electricity procurement.

However, when the amendment bill was published via gazette, CEBEU was compelled to issue a media statement that stated, "As a professional and responsible trade union representing engineers of the CEB, we express our deep concern over several amendments proposed in the recently gazetted Bill. Many of these changes are being seen by us for the very first time. Some of these amendments, if enacted, may cause irreparable harm not only to the sector but also to the reputation of the Government and the President."

Although this is in the past, it is important to reflect on what went wrong at the time. It mainly involves active stakeholder consultations. If due regard had been given to the constructive comments made by the stakeholders, the Supreme Court's decision, including the Article 3 violation, could have been easily prevented.

What is the main worry about the reforms?

A: This reform and restructuring exercise should not be perceived as a forced reform. There is a serious trust issue among 22,000 employees about their future. No awareness is happening. The communications received by employees have serious errors. Once the errors are pointed out, we receive clarifications. The promised deadlines are never met.

Do you want the most significant reform exercise in Sri Lanka's history to be like this? I will give you a simple example: under the provisions of the Act, employees should be notified of the assignment to their respective successor company in accordance with the transfer plan. The options available to the employee are either to accept the assignment to the company or to take the VRS and leave CEB. Everyone can understand the importance and sensitivity of this matter, which is precisely why it should be handled with the utmost delicacy.

But what happened? A simple letter with the company's name was issued to each employee, accompanied by nothing else. This is where experience and expertise in such specialised subjects are most needed. It is not about cost saving; it's about doing things correctly, and that's why we insist that subject matter experts handle such matters.

This process cannot continue like this. We are pleading with the President to get involved and resolve it before the matter becomes worse. Are we unfair?

You said the Act suggests six companies, whereas only four companies are in place. Explain the importance of the two companies that are not incorporated in the Companies Act?

A: The two remaining companies are the residual company, which should take all remaining assets, liabilities and functions of CEB which do not belong to the four other licence-holding companies and the other is the company which shall be acting as the Custodian and Trustee for managing the Provident Fund and Pension Fund of CEB.

Both companies shall be incorporated to complete the preliminary transfer plan.

The formation of the company as the Custodian and Trustee for managing the Provident Fund and Pension Fund of CEB is very critical for employees, as it contains their lifeline, which has not even commenced, even to this day.

The reason for the delay is unknown, creating unwanted doubts among the employees. Yet, the minister cannot publish the appointed date without completing this task.

Further, for whatever reason, the Articles of the four already incorporated companies do not comply with the provisions of the Act. We sought legal consultations, and the advice we received was that those articles had violated the Act.

Is it feasible for a government entity to have six private companies under a State-controlled energy sector? Where do you get such a concept imposed in the world?

A: Yes, they can. This government has a people's mandate for that. There are many examples globally, including China, Singapore, Western Australia, and France.

If the reforms are not met as stated in the Act, what would be the workers' next intended action?

A: The Act provides guidance on the process, including restrictions and clarifications. We can always seek judicial relief, but it may not be the most suitable course of action. Because if we go to Court, the process will be paused until a judgment is given. But we are left with no other choice. We will be forced to do that.

We need to understand that this is not solely a workers' issue. CEB, being a single entity responsible for providing continuous power to the country, must have a system in place to take over its operations if that establishment ceases to be operational. That is the essence of functional assurance. At present, we as CEBEU cannot provide that assurance to the people, as the entire reform process is solely focused on forming companies and completing other tangible tasks.

Someone needs to sit down and review the entire process step by step to ensure everything is covered before repealing the CEB. Otherwise, it could lead to a disaster. This is the danger we are mostly worried about. Everyone in CEB is willing to support, so what's the issue? We need to address that.

Will CEB workers quit their jobs at any point?

A: I cannot answer that question. However, there is certainly significant frustration among the employees of CEB, including the engineers.

What is the alternative? Should the President listen to the workers, or should the workers listen to the President?

A: The entire issue can be easily resolved by the President. He understands what the core problem is. The Government should seize this opportunity to act in accordance with the law and, most importantly, do so properly, while public support is on its side. This process must not be treated like a child's game, making silly mistakes and only correcting them when pointed out. Instead, we implore the President to personally get involved, carry out an independent review without relying on others' assurances, and make appropriate decisions to complete the task. We will wholeheartedly support him. This is about the future of the country's electricity sector, not a simple buying and selling business. We have trust in the President to do the right thing. We'll wait and see. - ***(amiesulo@gmail.com)***

CHRONIC KIDNEY DISEASE: A PRESSING PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE

Symptoms of CKD often do not become apparent until approximately 70 per cent of kidney function has already been lost

According to projections, by 2050, it could become the fifth leading cause of death worldwide





BY DILANTHI JAYAMANNE

Sri Lanka is facing a serious public health challenge as Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD), including its more mysterious variant known as 'Chronic Kidney Disease of Unknown Aetiology (CKDu)', continues to affect the masses.

Health crisis

According to the Renal Disease Prevention Unit (RDPU) of the Provincial Department of Health Services in the North Central Province, ten out of the country's 25 districts have been identified as having a high prevalence of the disease. "CKDu was first reported in the early 1990s, primarily in the North Central Province, and it has disproportionately affected underprivileged farming communities. A majority of the patients are men, highlighting a demographic trend that continues to concern health authorities," the RDPU noted. It said that Researchers had also suggested that multiple factors, including environmental exposures, occupational hazards, and lifestyle influences, had collectively contributed to the development of the disease.

Rising numbers in Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa

The North Central Province has recorded some of the highest incidence rates of CKDu in Sri Lanka. In Anuradhapura District, the annual incidence per 100,000 population increased dramatically from 129.07 between 2010 and 2013 to a startling 331.06 between 2014 and 2016. Between 2017 and 2020, this rate declined slightly to 185.57 - suggesting a modest improvement but still indicating a serious public health concern.

Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD)

Also, Screening programmes conducted in 2023 revealed that out of 35,156 individuals tested in Anuradhapura, 1,309 were positive for CKD. In 2021, the district reported a total of 11,824 CKD patients, with 660 deaths attributed to the disease during the same year. Polonnaruwa District also reported high numbers, with 8,710 CKD patients and 376 deaths recorded in 2021. Across Sri Lanka, more than 213,000 hospital admissions were linked to chronic kidney disease in 2023, resulting in over 1,600 deaths, an average of nearly five fatalities every day. These figures illustrate the significant burden of CKD on the nation's health system and highlight the urgency of preventive measures.

Global context and causes

The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified CKD as one of the fastest-growing health conditions worldwide, estimating that nearly 10 per cent of the global population is affected by the disease. Mortality from CKD is rising steadily, and projections suggest that by 2050 it could become the fifth leading cause of death worldwide.

In Sri Lanka, the main drivers of CKD today are non-communicable diseases, particularly diabetes and hypertension. Other contributing factors include kidney infections, kidney stones, and hereditary disorders. CKDu, however, remains a distinct concern, particularly in the North Central Province, where environmental and occupational exposures appear to play a critical role. Studies suggest that repeated exposure to heat, dehydration during long hours of farm work, and potential contact with nephrotoxic chemicals may collectively contribute to the development of CKDu, although no single cause has been conclusively proven.

The danger of late detection

A major challenge in tackling CKD is that it progresses silently. Consultant Community Physician Dr Chintha Gunaratne has emphasised that the symptoms of CKD often do not become apparent until approximately 70 per cent of kidney function has already been lost. This makes early detection and regular screening essential, particularly for individuals living with non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and hypertension. She noted that CKD was both a cause and an effect of other health conditions.

For example, people with CKD are at a significantly higher risk of developing cardiovascular disease. Studies show a tenfold increase in cardiovascular-related deaths and complications. Similarly, while diabetes is the leading cause of CKD, it can also be seen that the presence of kidney disease could further worsen the severity and complications of diabetes itself, which can result in patient death. It is known to create a dangerous cycle that can be difficult to break without timely intervention.

Awareness and safe practices for farmers

cKDu has been closely linked to farming communities, where exposure to environmental and occupational hazards is frequent. Dr Nadeeka Perera, Consultant Community Physician of the North Central Province, highlighted that certain everyday practices can unintentionally harm kidney health. For instance, repeated use of painkillers without medical supervision can lead to kidney damage over time. In addition, the improper use of pesticides, insecticides, and fertilisers can be harmful if safety protocols are not followed.

Farmers are advised to strictly adhere to label instructions, use protective clothing during application, and ensure that chemicals are applied only at the recommended times, such as two weeks before harvesting crops. Also, proper disposal of empty containers and adherence to safety measures could significantly reduce the risk of kidney injury resulting in CKD.

Public health response

The Government has invested significant resources in the prevention, early detection, and treatment of CKD. Screening programmes, health education initiatives, and support for early diagnosis have all been expanded in high-risk areas. Health authorities also stress that raising awareness about safe practices, regular screening, and early medical consultation is vital in protecting vulnerable groups.

Be alert

Chronic kidney disease should be considered as one of the island's most pressing public health challenges. With the disease progressing silently and treatment options limited once kidney function fails, prevention, early detection, and adherence to safe practices are essential. Regular kidney screenings, proper management of diabetes and hypertension, and careful use of medications, pesticides, and fertilisers could help reduce the risk. The communities could help reduce the disease burden by staying vigilant and informed about CKD.



"See the World through Pages"

Reading Month is a time to celebrate the importance of books for knowledge, entertainment, and personal development. During this month, people are encouraged to spend time with books, enriching the mind with fresh ideas and knowledge. Clear vision is essential to fully enjoy and engage with a book. Many of us don't pay much attention to the strain on our eyes while reading. Reading for long periods can cause problems like eye fatigue, headaches, and blurred vision.

Good eyesight and the right spectacles are key for readers who want to enjoy every page.

If a book is a wealth of knowledge, spectacles are the tools that help you to absorb it clearly. Therefore, if you are a lover of reading, it is very important to take care of your eye health.

This occasion is a timely reminder to care for your vision. Vision Care, the country's leading provider of eye care services, offers advanced eye examinations using modern technology and high-quality spectacles. To experience the joy of reading with clarity and comfort, consider getting your eyes checked at Vision Care. It's a thoughtful step towards protecting the future health of your eyes.

VISION CARE
OPTICAL SERVICES



Workers at the dyeing plant



A stock of dyed yarn



Finished handloom products ready for sale

TEXT AND PIX BY NAALIR JAMALDEEN, MARUTHAMUNAI

HANDLOOM INDUSTRY YEARNS FOR A HELPING HAND

The centuries-old handloom cottage industry will fade away if the younger generation is not encouraged to pursue careers in the traditional handloom sector



Mohamed Ibrahim Ubaithur Rahman, a professional weaver in Maruthamunai



Mohamed Jahe, handloom entrepreneur



M. S. H. Murad, handloom weaver

The local handloom textile industry, with its rich, long-standing history, requires greater care and rejuvenation to prevent it from fading away, as it faces significant challenges from major players of the power-loom sector, which dominate both the local and international textile markets.

The history of the handloom industry of Sri Lanka dates back over a thousand years, with early cotton textiles traded with India and China, and its roots tied to legends like Princess Kuweni at a spring wheel. This craft was essential to daily life, producing attire and religious textiles, with designs often inspired by nature. Today, it remains a significant home-based, predominantly women-led industry focused on preserving traditional skills, producing items like saris and shawls and contributing to rural economies.

Maruthamunai Handloom Industry

The history of the Maruthamunai handloom industry potentially dates back 200 years, compounded by its association with ancestral traditions. Although there is no precise date of origin, the craft has constantly provided a significant source of income for many families in the village. A major setback was after the tsunami in 2004, which destroyed many weaving factories and forced many families to abandon the industry. Despite this, the industry has since been revitalised, adopting its designs to meet market demand and continuing to be a key cultural and economic activity in the region.

Ceylon Today spoke to a group of randomly selected local artisans engaged in the handloom industry in the Maruthamunai Village, where the villagers are collectively appealing to the Government to step forward and safeguard the industry from decline and ensure its survival for future generations.

Since its inception nearly 200 years ago, the handloom industry has remained deeply interwoven with the lives of the people in Maruthamunai Village. According to historical evidence, in the early days, the villagers produced their own yarn to produce handloom textile materials. As the industry gradually expanded, they began sourcing cotton from other parts of the country to produce additional yarn. The current generation imports high-quality yarn from India.

Despite numerous challenges and hardships, the industry has endured through the years. This traditional craft, which reflects the rich heritage and glory of Sri Lanka's textile industry, must be preserved and passed down to future generations. Today, the local artisans continue to use the traditional techniques passed down from the ancestors to produce high-quality internationally recognised products.

The handloom industry offers manufacturers the flexibility to produce garments tailored to the specific choice of individual buyers, whereas this advantage is somewhat lacking in the power-loom sector. Each handloom product reflects the unique mindset, creativity, and skills of the weaver, making every piece distinctive. However, this traditional resource-limited industry, which relies on heavily skilled artisans, faces serious challenges from the power-loom industry. Power loom enables mass production at a lower cost, posing a significant threat to the survival of the handloom sector.

Of late, a competitive environment has emerged between the handloom and power-loom products in the local market. Many customers prefer to buy the power-loom products because they are more affordable and readily available. In contrast, handloom products tend to be comparatively more expensive, which makes them less attractive to price-sensitive buyers.

Notably, the buyers who purchase textile items for commercial resale tend to focus on power-loom products, as these are available in large quantities and allow for higher profit margins. In contrast, handloom products, due to their limited production, receive less attention from commercial buyers. However, the handloom textiles have always remained popular among individual consumers and have endured through centuries because of their unique craftsmanship and cultural values.

Shortage of skilled weavers

In addition to various challenges, the prime issue facing the handloom industry today is the shortage of skilled weavers. This situation has arisen due to several reasons. Many experienced weavers have retired because of ageing and age-related health issues. Moreover, the younger generation, often unaware of the cultural and economic significance of this traditional craft, shows little interest in pursuing careers in the handloom sector. As a result, the industry struggles to sustain its legacy and meet current demand.

If the new generation is not introduced to the handloom industry, it is certain that this centuries-old tradition will face a serious decline in the near future. However, encouraging youth participation cannot be achieved by individual efforts alone.

It requires a collective approach, with strong support and active involvement from relevant authorities. Only through coordinated action can we preserve and revitalise this valuable part of the cultural heritage.

Furthermore, compared to other industries, the handloom sector is less attractive due to unstable income. Handloom products require dedicated marketplaces to ensure consistent earnings for those involved in the industry. Without such support, when the handloom market shrinks, obviously, other related sectors such as the power-loom industry tend to dominate the textile market. This shift can lead to the gradual collapse of the handloom industry. Therefore, the current Government must play a significant role in safeguarding and promoting the handloom sector to prevent it from fading away.

Handloom industry in Maruthamunai: Then and now

According to residents and historical records the Maruthamunai handloom industry had virtually become paralysed, following the 1977 policy liberalisation that led to a flood of imported textiles and a decline in local production and owing to natural disasters as cylones, Due to the lack of alternative source of income, only a handful of locals continued to remain in the industry, contributing a small portion to the local handloom textile sector. This situation had persisted till 1999, when some locals took the initiative to safeguard this industry, which had remained dormant until then, said Mohamed Ibrahim Ubaithur Rahman, a professional weaver in Maruthamunai during his interview with *Ceylon Today*.

However, this industry, which had experienced a steady and remarkable growth during this period, fell into an irrecoverable state after the tsunami catastrophe on 26 December 2004. The disaster claimed the lives of a large number of skilled weavers and destroyed many handlooms and dyeing plants, causing losses amounting to millions of rupees for those engaged in the industry, according to Ubaithur Rahman.

Elaborating further, he said: "The current Agriculture, Livestock, Land and Irrigation Minister K. D. Lalkantha, who served as the Minister of Industries in the then Government, had organised a Mega Exhibition of local products, including handloom products, at the BMICH in April 2004, prior to the tsunami tragedy. A significant number of individuals engaged in the handloom industry in Maruthamunai actively participated in this Exhibition. The then Government provided transport and other necessary facilities to ensure their involvement".

Ubaithur Rahman also noted that "The exhibition of local manufacturing held at the BMICH in 2004 was a golden opportunity in the long-standing history of the Maruthamunai handloom industry. Such opportunities are no longer available today. However, we remain hopeful that the current Government will extend a helping hand to revive the traditional Maruthamunai handloom industry by providing the necessary support and assistance".

Impact of Easter Sunday terror attack and economic crisis

Furthermore, Ubaithur Rahman said: "The industry suffered a significant setback following the Easter Sunday terror attack in 2019, which was further exacerbated by the subsequent economic crisis. During this period, the industry remained largely dormant and was completely paralysed during the Covid-19 pandemic. The weavers and those in the industry had been badly affected due to the pandemic because the production and sale remained at zero level".

"During the economic crisis, those in the industry faced numerous challenges. The exchange rate of the local currency against the US dollar skyrocketed, making it difficult for weavers to market their products at a competitive price. However, the situation has since stabilised, and the industry is currently functioning smoothly. While the present condition appears to be favourable, ensuring a sustainable environment for the industry remains critical.

"The Maruthamunai handloom industry relies heavily on raw materials, most of which are imported from India. As a result, a sufficient supply of US dollar reserves is essential. In the event of a shortage of US dollars, the Maruthamunai handloom industry would likely be one of the first industries to be affected.

"A total of more than 2,000 families directly and indirectly rely on this industry for their livelihood. A significant number of job opportunities have been created in Maruthamunai through this industry".

Other villages in Eastern Province, engaging in the handloom industry

In addition to Maruthamunai, some residents in Kalmunai, in the Ampara District, as well as in the villages of Kaluwanchikudy, Kattankudy, Eruvil, Eravur and Palamunai in the Batticaloa District, and Muttur in the Trincomalee District are currently engaged in the handloom industry. This industry operates as a cottage-based enterprise and continues to survive despite numerous difficulties and hardships.

Approximately 5,000 families are currently engaged – both directly and indirectly, in the handloom industry across these areas, making a significant contribution to the local market. Their involvement spans a variety of essential services, including dyeing, value addition, product sale and resale, as well as the supply of raw materials.

The local weavers, who have traditionally focused on a limited range of handloom products such as sarees, sarongs, ladies' garments, shirts and shawls, are now planning to diversify their manufacturing process to appeal to the younger generation

As this industry continues to expand, it will undoubtedly help address the unemployment issues in the province. The local residents will have the opportunity to earn additional income while continuing with their routine businesses or jobs. Regardless of the industry's current size, the Government is obliged to facilitate its development, given its national importance.

Attracting the 'uninterested' new generation

The survival of the handloom industry depends on its transmission to the next generation. However, attracting youth to the industry is not easy, as many perceive it as outdated and consider working in it an embarrassment. It is essential to educate the younger generation about the importance of the handloom sector and the benefits it offers, both to individuals and the nation as a whole.

Unlike many other industries, the handloom industry has managed to remain independent, allowing its artisans and stakeholders to operate freely without external dominance. It is a dignified and respected industry, deeply rooted in our cultural heritage. It is essential that the younger generation is made aware of the value and significance of the industry. To achieve this, relevant authorities should take proactive steps by organising nationwide handloom promotion programmes in collaboration with the private sector. Such initiatives would help popularise and sustain the handloom industry for generations to come.

Prioritising high-quality raw materials to produce high-quality handloom

Ensuring the purchase of high-quality raw materials is crucial for maintaining the required and/or high standards of handloom production. This can be achieved effectively by sourcing materials constantly from reputable companies or manufacturers. Among these raw materials, high-quality yarn plays a crucial role. Unfortunately, some individuals within the industry resort to using low-quality yarn to produce handloom items, which they then sell at a low price in the market.

Mohamed Jahe, an upcoming entrepreneur in the handloom industry, commenting on this practice, had this to say: "This practice not only compromises the quality and authenticity of handloom products but, also poses a serious threat to the integrity of the entire industry. As a result, genuine handloom producers who prioritise quality face significant challenges in marketing and competing with substandard products".

Adding further, he said: "Using low-quality or substandard dye in the production process significantly compromises the quality of handloom products. Unfortunately, many buyers lack the skills or knowledge to identify inferior handloom products, making them vulnerable to deception by unscrupulous traders".

"Customers often purchase handloom products trusting their authenticity and craftsmanship, but fraud is increasingly prevalent even in this traditional industry. Such unethical practices not only betray consumer trust but, also cause serious harm to the reputation and sustainability of the entire handloom sector. Certain individuals in the industry adopt unscrupulous methods in order to maximise income or earn a large sum of money in a short period," said Jahe with much concern.

M. S. H. Murad, a weaver in Maruthamunai, also remarked: "It is the bounden duty of everyone in the industry to safeguard it, especially the reputation it has built over more than two centuries, which must not be tarnished in any way. Substandard products in the market pose a threat to genuine products, thus undermining their quality and reputation".

Murad also expressed concern that power-loom products are also currently being marketed under the label of handloom, which misleads consumers and undermines the authenticity of genuine handloom products. He emphasised the need to establish a dedicated society consisting of individuals from the handloom sector to protect and promote the true handloom industry. He further suggested that this initiative should be implemented and overseen by the Department of Industries.

Training for local weavers to produce export-quality handloom

Handloom weavers in Maruthamunai collectively acknowledged that, although their products closely resemble export-quality standards, they currently lack the necessary expertise to meet the full requirements of the export market.

To bridge this gap, it is essential to provide targeted training and skill development programmes that will empower these local weavers to consistently produce export-quality handloom products, positioning them to successfully enter and compete in the international handloom market.

It is the responsibility of the relevant authorities to guide the local handloom manufacturers in identifying products suitable for the international market. By providing the necessary training and support, authorities can enable local weavers to produce high-quality handloom products for both domestic and global markets.

This, in turn, will make the industry more attractive to the younger generation, ensuring their involvement and interest. Such efforts will not only help safeguard the traditional handloom sector but, also pave the way for its growth and sustainability in the future. According to local weavers, suitable strategies need to be devised and implemented to ensure the survival of the handloom industry and further expansion of the handloom market. The local weavers in Maruthamunai are also seeking the support and cooperation of social media platforms for 'voluntary' advertising of their handloom products.

Seeking the authorities' help for expansion in the handloom product line

The local weavers, who have traditionally focused on a limited range of handloom products such as sarees, sarongs, ladies' garments, shirts and shawls, are now planning to diversify their manufacturing process to appeal to the younger generation. Though they recognise the need to adapt to changing market trends, they appear to be lacking the necessary expertise in new product development. Hence, they are seeking assistance and support from relevant authorities to provide them with the necessary training and develop their skills in order to expand the production line and stay competitive. The lack of experienced hands is another issue the industry faces today.

Providing training for new entrants in the handloom industry

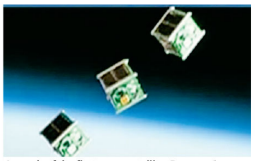
As experienced weavers retire or leave the industry due to age, illness, or other reasons, the handloom sector will face the risk of a serious workforce shortage. To prevent this, it is essential to provide proper training to newcomers. The Government must take this initiative, which will help to protect the industry from decline.

It is suggested that, for more exposure and expert knowledge sharing, the authorities concerned could explore collaborations with relevant, established local or international bodies and jointly conduct training and skills development programmes for newcomers so that this traditional cottage industry could be passed down from generation to generation.

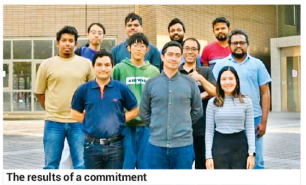
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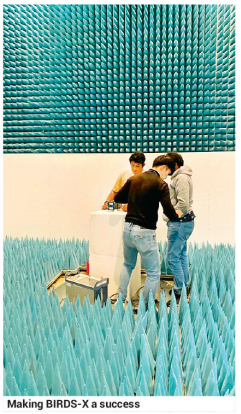




Launch of the first nano satellite, Ravana-1, into orbit



The results of a commitment



Making BIRDS-X a success

SRI LANKA'S THIRD NANOSATELLITE LAUNCHED INTO ORBIT

The historic event occurred on 19 September at 2.15 pm local time

BY NISHANTHA CHAMINDA PEIRIS

Another significant step forward in Sri Lanka's space technology journey took place on 19 September. It was truly a historic moment. The third nanosatellite created with the technical contributions of Sri Lankan engineers, BIRDS-X DRAGONFLY, is now on an experimental space mission. We will be able to see the results of this in the near future.

The launch of the BIRDS-X DRAGONFLY nanosatellite into space marked a milestone in the history of satellite technology in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, it was carried to the International Space Station (ISS) by NASA's SPX33 rocket mission launched on 24 August of this year. Accordingly, the nanosatellite was released into orbit from the International Space Station at 2.15 pm Sri Lankan time that day.

The first nanosatellite

In 2019, Sri Lanka's first nanosatellite, the Ravana-1 satellite, was launched into orbit. This was followed by the KITSUNE satellite, which was created through a technical cooperation project involving five international parties, in 2022. Accordingly, the BIRDS-X Dragonfly research nanosatellite, which was launched into space as the country's third nanosatellite, marked another significant achievement in Sri Lanka's space technology development journey.

Maximum benefits at low cost

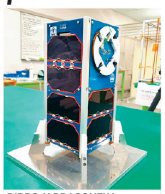
One unique aspect of this project was that no capital costs were incurred by Sri Lanka. The collaboration of several international organisations operating in the space sector, including the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) and the Agency for Digital Radio Communications (ARDC), was also received for this purpose. This project was planned as a space technology collaboration project implemented by the



Dr.Sanath Panawennage



During the work on the nanosatellite



BIRDS-X DRAGONFLY nanosatellite



During the work on the nanosatellite

Arthur C. Clarke Center in Sri Lanka and the KYUSHU Institute of Technology in Japan.

Research team commitment

The project was launched by Engineer (Dr.) Sanath Panawanne, former Director General of the Arthur C. Clarke Institute and founder of the Sri Lankan Space Technology Development Programme, with the consent of the relevant foreign parties. He led the Sri Lankan research engineering team on the project. Other members included former Deputy Director General (Technical Operations) Engineer Kamani Ediriweera; Director of the Communications Engineering Division Engineer Kavindra Jayawardena; and Research Engineer Tharindu Dayarathna. Also present were Research Engineer Kaveendra Sampath; Research Engineer Uditha Gayan, and Research Scientist Thilina Wijebandara. As a result of the determination and dedication of all these people, we were able to conquer another unique frontier in space.

Successful leadership

Engineer (Prof.) Sanath Panawanne said that by making these nanosatellite projects a success, the development aspirations of many sectors in our country could be further achieved. "We started this satellite launch effort in 2014. The technologically and economically rich countries of the world have national space stations. We started this work amidst the watchdogs of such countries," he said. Engineer Panawanne stated that space technology and its applications were democratised accordingly. "We were also interested in sending nanosatellites after carefully studying a feasibility report, comparing them with the developed countries of the world. We took this programme forward by initiating several international cooperation projects," he mentioned. Accordingly, he stated that the first two satellites were placed in orbit in 2021 and 2022, and then the third step in 2025 was successful.

The achievements of our space researchers

The BIRDS-X DRAGONFLY research satellite is scheduled to carry out three primary space research missions. A new low-cost communications subsystem designed by engineer Tharindu Dayaratne for use in nanosatellites is being tested, as well as another communications research mission. It also includes testing the BUS System, the entire common structure made up of the satellite's basic subsystems, under space conditions.

Space travel from Japan

The BIRDS-X DRAGONFLY nanosatellite was launched from the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, which has ties to the International Space Station. This was at 5:45 PM Japan time, or 2:15 PM Sri Lanka time. Engineer (Prof.) Sanath Panawanne, who is also the founder of the country's Space Technology Development Program, officially participated in that special event from Japan, and the attention of many countries around the world was drawn to it.

This BIRDS-X DRAGONFLY nanosatellite will pave the way for a major breakthrough in the technological field of our country. It will also be a great encouragement and motivation for those involved in satellite technology research in the country.

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"GOOD FROM THE INSIDE"

Capital Maharaja Group COO shares his recipe for success in corporate leadership

BY SHANUKA KADUPITIYAGE

Group Director and Chief Operating Officer of Capital Maharaja Group S.C Weerasekera has been awarded the prestigious Overall Gold Award at the CPM Management Leadership Awards this year. He was also recognised as winner in the Outstanding Leadership Competency, Sustainability and Circular Economy, and CSR Excellence categories.

"I don't see this as a win just for me," Weerasekera shared in an interview with Ceylon Today. "What I have today is the recognition of the hard work and dedication from everyone in the entire company." He explained that rather than as colleagues and subordinates, the bond shared by those at his workplace stretch further, all of whom he regards as family.

"You spend most of the day while awake at the office, more than your own family, and that should reflect on how we treat each other. We need to have that connection, and that willingness to be more."

A leader, not a boss

Weerasekera defined a clear line between someone who is a boss at your workplace, and someone who is a true leader, as he further illustrated in his philosophy in leadership. "Everyone feels everyone else's pain, and everyone is human. Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity, respect, and be cared for. A boss doesn't do this, but leaders do."

His words were put to the test when the country fell into turbulent times, starting from the Easter terrorist attacks in 2019, to the Covid pandemic and subsequent economic crisis that crippled the country's economy, bringing industry to a halt and companies reeling from the aftershocks.



"It was one of the hardest times I've had to navigate as a leader in my entire career," he expressed. "But we were one of the few companies that still did well. We made sure all our employees were taken care of, and we did the right thing, even when times were tough. That's why we've been able to stay resilient through this, and why we share this bond. This is the secret for our strength and why this award was given to us."

Doing the right thing

This extends to their interactions with customers as well. "We like to say that we are 'Good from the inside,'" he noted. "For example, we constantly reach out to and ask for feedback and thoughts on our services and products from retailers, whom are our contact point with the market. We are always ready to help when help is needed. As a business, our goal is to make profits, yes, but there is a correct way to do this. That's why we say that we make products that are for family members. That means that we always want the best for them, and we would never hesitate to use our products in our own homes. That's what makes us different from the rest."

Weerasekera's approach to business is proving successful with their results. Upon inquiry, he shared that for S-Lon, one of the products under his wing, the company holds a market share of 80 per cent in the urban areas and 65 per cent in more rural regions of the country. "It's thanks to us doing the right thing, and earning the trust of plumbers, electricians, and hardware providers island wide. We have an open communication, and I'm always reachable for their needs, and that trust and confidence is what has helped us reach where we are."

Thinking beyond boundaries

This care also extends to the many CSR initiatives introduced by Weerasekera, which includes the highly acclaimed "Thuru Kapakaru" initiative, encouraging youth to learn and care for a sapling and reporting on discoveries and progress using digital platforms. We learned that the initiative was highly acclaimed by the President and government representatives and might be expanded to a larger scale under the 'Clean Sri Lanka' initiative, which Weerasekera also plays a significant role in.

For him, the outlook for the future is a positive one, but doesn't come without a warning. "There's this trend of separating and categorising people based on generational factors, from 'Baby-Boomers' to 'Gen-Zs', 'Millennials' and so on," he explained. "We should be careful with these divisions, and recognise that people are living, feeling, beings, no matter the generation. Morals, ethics, our culture, beliefs, and our upbringing all shape us into who we are as individuals, and we shouldn't forget these aspects of ourselves, no matter the era, and no matter the circumstances."

Weerasekera shared his enthusiasm to continue his work and philosophy of leadership, inspiring as many as he can while making a difference in the corporate workplace, and in greater society.

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A long journey towards accessibility

When Sri Lanka ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2016, it formally acknowledged that accessibility is not a privilege, but a right. Yet, nine years later, the lived reality for thousands of people with disabilities remains far removed from the promises made on paper. The landmark ruling of the Anuradhapura High Court last week, directing authorities to ensure that all railway stations between Mahawa and Vavuniya are fully accessible, is therefore both a moment of hope and a stark reminder of how much further the country has to go.

The ruling itself was historic. For the first time, a High Court in Sri Lanka issued an order compelling State institutions to meet their legal obligations under the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, No. 28 of 1996. Judge Dr. Nalinda Hewawasam not only affirmed that the rights of persons with disabilities had been violated, but went further: mandating modernisation of twenty railway stations, ring-fencing part of the Department of Railways' annual budget for accessibility upgrades, and requiring regular compliance reviews.

This case is significant not merely because of its outcome, but because of the principles it affirms. For decades, accessibility has been treated as an optional add-on rather than a fundamental design requirement. The 1996 Act first articulated the State's responsibility to ensure equal access, but enforcement was weak. The introduction of the Disabled Persons (Accessibility) Regulations, No. 1 of 2006, was a milestone, setting out technical standards for ramps, toilets, signage, and lifts. Yet, nearly twenty years later, compliance remains patchy. Countless government offices, schools, hospitals, and transport hubs still lack basic facilities for wheelchair users or those with limited mobility.

The Supreme Court did weigh in on the matter in 2009, emphasising that reasonable access to public buildings was a right, not a favour. But judicial declarations alone do not dismantle physical barriers. Too often, accessibility is an afterthought in Sri Lanka's infrastructure projects. The recent renovations of the Northern Line stations are a perfect example: modernisation without inclusion, progress that leaves some citizens behind.

The Anuradhapura ruling is therefore a corrective, and perhaps a catalyst. It demonstrates the power of the Judiciary to enforce rights that have long been ignored by the Executive and Administrative arms of the State. It shows that civil society advocacy, when combined with legal action, can produce tangible change. And it places accessibility firmly on the national agenda in a way that is difficult to sidestep.

Yet, one must be realistic. The ruling applies specifically to a stretch of the Northern Line. Its precedent may encourage further litigation, but until the Government adopts a comprehensive approach, many barriers will remain. Accessibility should not depend on the courage of individual petitioners or the discretion of sympathetic judges. It must be embedded in the DNA of urban planning, transport policy, and building design.

The gulf between legislation and implementation is wide. Most new buildings are still constructed without proper adherence to the 2006 regulations. Retrofitting older structures is often ignored on the grounds of cost. There is no single national building code that integrates accessibility standards across the board, meaning responsibility is fragmented. And while Sri Lanka has ratified the CRPD, reporting and enforcement mechanisms remain weak.

The consequence is that people with disabilities continue to face daily indignities: the student unable to enter her classroom, the patient struggling to climb hospital steps, the commuter excluded from a train platform. These are not minor inconveniences; they are denials of dignity and participation. A society cannot call itself inclusive while it bars a section of its population from public life.

The path forward requires more than Court rulings. It demands political will, budgetary commitments, and cultural change. Ministries must allocate funds not as afterthoughts but as priorities. Local councils must be empowered and held accountable for enforcing accessibility in their jurisdictions. Training for architects, engineers, and contractors should make universal design the norm rather than the exception. And, crucially, people with disabilities must be included in decision-making, ensuring that policies reflect real needs rather than bureaucratic assumptions.

The Anuradhapura judgment is a breakthrough, but it is also a challenge. It dares Sri Lanka to move beyond symbolic ratifications and regulatory texts, towards genuine implementation. Until every school, hospital, railway station, and government office can be entered and used by all citizens, the promise of equality remains unfulfilled. Accessibility is not charity; it is justice. And justice delayed, as we are often reminded, is justice denied.

CEYLON TODAY

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SRI LANKA'S MILLIONAIRE MINISTERS AND THE POLITICS OF EXPLANATION

ceylonpolitics
BY GAGANI WEERAKOON

Sri Lanka has taken a decisive step in its post-crisis recovery with the recommencement of construction on the long-delayed Kadawatha–Mirigama section of the Central Expressway. President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, presiding over the 17 September ceremony, described the Project as emblematic of the nation's determination to emerge stronger from the economic collapse of 2022–2023.

The 37-kilometre expressway, suspended midway due to the crisis, is a vital link in Sri Lanka's national transport network. Construction has begun on the Kadawatha interchange and the first 500 metres of road, costing Rs 8.692 billion and fully funded from domestic resources. The total Project, estimated at Rs 229.5 billion, combines local funding with a concessional loan from the Export-Import Bank of China, with completion expected by mid-2028.

In his address, President Dissanayake highlighted the broader lessons of the crisis, stressing that the social and economic collapse did not occur spontaneously. "Our generation witnessed the collapse of the economy. We saw people dying in queues, and we experienced the breakdown of the social fabric. We became heirs to that tragedy. Today, I assure the people that we are committed to rebuilding Sri Lanka in such a way that such a crisis will never recur," he said.

He emphasised that infrastructure alone could not ensure stability. "In the past, economic development efforts were focused solely on infrastructure. But infrastructure is only one component of establishing a stable economy and society. If that component stands alone, it becomes distorted. That is why our country has pursued a distorted development strategy. Economic and social stability cannot be built merely through construction — the rule of law must be firmly established."

President Dissanayake issued stern warnings to organised criminal networks and their political patrons, asserting that corruption, bribery, and misuse of public funds would no longer be tolerated. He highlighted ongoing reforms at the Ceylon Electricity Board and pledged improved salaries and facilities for public servants as part of a broader effort to professionalise the State machinery.

The President also pointed to early signs of economic recovery, including single-digit interest rates, a stabilised rupee, and nearly 5 per cent growth for two consecutive years. Foreign reserves are expected to reach USD 7 billion, while direct investment has already hit USD 1 billion during the Government's first year. Major Port City Projects and expanding Tourism, Exports, and Remittances signal renewed confidence in the economy.

China's support has been integral to the revival of stalled infrastructure projects. Speaking at the ceremony, Chinese Ambassador Qi Zhenhong described the resumption of the expressway as a "truly commendable achievement" and a symbol of enduring bilateral friendship. He hailed the project as a priority for the Sri Lankan government, essential for overcoming economic challenges and achieving national revitalisation. The Ambassador expressed confidence that both countries would continue to collaborate pragmatically to ensure the project's timely and high-quality completion.

The event underscored the dual importance of domestic reform and international partnership. While the expressway promises to ease transport and stimulate economic activity, it also reflects a broader agenda: linking infrastructure development with governance reform, accountability, and anti-corruption measures. President Dissanayake's firm stance on law enforcement, public service efficiency, and financial discipline signals a new political culture aimed at preventing a repeat of past crises.

Concluding his remarks, the President urged stakeholders to deliver the project efficiently and without delay. "Political unrest elsewhere does not deter us. Sustainable development requires both political authorities and citizens to progress together. I urge all involved in this project to complete it efficiently and deliver it to the nation without a single day of delay."

The Ceremony was attended by Minister of Transport, Highways, Ports and Civil Aviation Bimal Rathnayake, Deputy Ministers Prasanna Gunasena and Janitha Ruwan Kodithuwakku, MPs, Chinese Ambassador Qi Zhenhong, senior officials from key ministries, the Road Development Authority, and other dignitaries.

The recommencement of the Kadawatha–Mirigama expressway thus represents more than infrastructure progress. It is a Statement of intent: that Sri Lanka is determined to recover from its 'lost decade', uphold the rule of law, strengthen institutional capacity, and leverage international partnerships to build a resilient, prosperous future.

Assets explained

Another week, another Minister explaining away his millions. This time it is Wasantha Samarasinghe, Minister of Trade, Commerce, Food Security and Cooperative Development, whose declaration of assets and liabilities — reportedly worth over Rs 275 million — has sent social media into overdrive.

In an era when ordinary Sri Lankans are struggling to put food on the table, news of a Minister's vast holdings of commercial buildings, gold and even cryptocurrency predictably sparked outrage. Samarasinghe, however, appeared unfazed. On a private television channel, he calmly attributed his fortune to family inheritance and nearly three decades of entrepreneurial hustle.

The Minister's tale is a familiar one: tuition classes, small-town institutes, modest beginnings blossoming into three-storey buildings. He even offered a nostalgic glimpse into his gold-buying habits, recalling how he and his wife began accumulating it in 2006 when a gold sovereign cost just Rs 6,000. Then came the flourish — a son clever in IT who opened a crypto account during the Covid lockdown. One could almost mistake it for a modern-day rags-to-riches story.

The problem, of course, is not that a politician has wealth. It is that in Sri Lanka, political wealth has a tendency to defy both logic and arithmetic. As opposition MP Kavinda Jayawardena caustically observed, Ministers are supposed to surrender their parliamentary salaries to party coffers. Yet somehow, they keep becoming millionaires. If this is not the "eighth wonder of the world", what is?, as Jayawardena queried.

Jayawardena's jibes about expanding waistlines — "as their wealth grows, so do their bellies" — may sound petty, but they strike a nerve. The optics are undeniable: a bloated political class literally and figuratively consuming more than their fair share, while citizens queue for essentials and scrape together remittances from abroad.

What is most striking about Samarasinghe's defence is not the content, but the ease with which it was delivered. Like so many before him, he insisted: not a cent of public money. A tax file here, a TIN No. there, and suddenly the optics of abundance are meant to look legitimate. This ritualistic denial has become almost as predictable as the asset scandals themselves.

But the deeper question remains unanswered. Why do politicians in Sri Lanka so often become inexplicably wealthy while in or around office, regardless of party or ideology? The pattern cuts across decades, governments, and slogans of 'good governance'. Asset declarations, meant as a bulwark of transparency, remain shrouded in secrecy — surfacing only through selective leaks and political point-scoring.

The danger is not only in the corruption that may or may not lie behind such fortunes. It is in the erosion of public trust. Each revelation, each clumsy justification, pushes citizens further into cynicism. People who once believed in politics as service now see it as little more than a ladder to enrichment — a perception that corrodes democracy itself.

Sri Lankans do not begrudge wealth honestly earned. But in a nation still reeling from bankruptcy, it is galling to hear yet another Minister trace his millions back to tuition classes and conveniently lucrative ventures. The stories are beginning to sound like parodies. And until a culture of accountability replaces this theatre of explanation, the people will continue to ask: in a country this poor, how do its rulers keep getting richer?





Wants more time

Meanwhile, Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa has formally requested the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) to allow him to submit his assets and liabilities in digital form.

Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) Gampaha District organiser Waruna Deepatha Rajapaksa, who released to the media copies of Premadasa's correspondence with the Commission, noted that the Opposition Leader had already declared his assets and liabilities to the Secretary General of Parliament on 23 April this year. The Secretary General, Kushani Rohanadeera, subsequently forwarded the declaration to CIABOC.

However, CIABOC had insisted that the declaration be presented in a digital format, in line with its move to publish such records online as part of a broader push for transparency. In response, Premadasa submitted a letter on 10 September 2025 requesting additional time to comply with the requirement.

Rajapaksa, speaking to the media, said, "Premadasa will declare his assets and liabilities in digital form before long."

The development comes at a politically sensitive moment, when public trust in accountability mechanisms and calls for cleaner governance are once again at the forefront of national debate. Premadasa's decision to digitise his declaration may be seen as a gesture towards transparency, though whether this move will resonate with a disenchanted electorate remains to be seen.

Lal kantha's reminder to colleagues

Agriculture, Livestock, Lands and Irrigation Minister K.D. Lal kantha struck a revealing note this week, chastising government-aligned MPs for behaving as if they were still in opposition. His rebuke was not just a passing remark but a reminder of a deeper malaise in Sri Lankan politics: the inability of ruling parties to shift from the theatre of protest to the discipline of governance.

"If we want to do what we did while in the opposition, then we don't need a government," he told reporters. It was an unusually candid Statement from a sitting Minister — and one that exposes the uneasy contradiction at the heart of the current administration. Some government MPs appear more comfortable heckling from the sidelines than grappling with the complexities of power.

Lal Kantha's frustration also spills into the larger constitutional debate. He reminded his audience that the question of the Executive Presidency cannot be postponed indefinitely. It was, after all, an electoral pledge. "From a democratic perspective, it is important," he insisted. "Our country has been governed under an undemocratic system. We must steer democracy in a positive direction. The people will support that – even if some might be displeased."

Here lies the tension. On one side, a government still tempted by the habits of opposition politics — sloganeering, symbolic gestures, easy defiance. On the other, a mounting expectation that those in power must finally reckon with structural reform, including the thorny issue of whether the Presidency itself should survive.

Sri Lanka has lived for decades under the shadow of the Executive Presidency — alternately defended as a safeguard for stability and denounced as a vehicle for authoritarianism. Every government in recent memory has flirted with reform, only to recoil when the vast powers of the Presidency proved too convenient to surrender. Lal Kantha's call, therefore, has the flavour of both conviction and déjà vu.

Whether his warning is heeded will depend on whether the government can resist the temptation to play opposition while in office. For if it cannot, his words may prove prophetic: perhaps there really is no need for a government at all.

In an era when ordinary Sri Lankans are struggling to put food on the table, news of a Minister's vast holdings of commercial buildings, gold and even cryptocurrency predictably sparked outrage. Samarasinghe, however, appeared unfazed. On a private television channel, he calmly attributed his fortune to family inheritance and nearly three decades of entrepreneurial hustle

UNP Convention

At the UNP Anniversary Convention, Party Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe chose brevity. His arrest was mentioned only in passing, though it was his first public appearance since. He explained his presence at a University graduation during an official visit, saying he had simply accepted the date the organisers suggested. With duties in Colombo that Sunday, he had returned at once.

The speech then pivoted to politics. A year had now passed since the government took office, Ranil noted, urging all parties to resist what he called an arrogant, self-serving, and hypocritical regime.

"Since 1947, we have walked this road," he said. "The Sama Samaja Party and the Tamil Congress were here before us. In seventy-six years, we did much, but also failed much. The war dragged the economy down, preventing us from reaching our goals. Too often, we mixed politics with economics. But in the midst of crisis, under my Presidency, we began anew.

Sri Lanka is a diverse society. That is why we have a multi-party system. Our duty is to protect it, for without it, many voices will be silenced. The JVP's way is to bulldoze that system. We must stand against the bulldozing."

He reminded the audience that countries prospered when multi-party democracy thrived, and faltered when it did not.

The gathering also revisited the Aragalaya. Many noted how the uprising was resolved without bloodshed, a feat credited to Wickremesinghe's strategy, which steered the nation back from collapse. Nepal's crisis was cited in contrast.

Wajira Abeywardena observed: "After the turmoil, an Election was held, people chose freely — and yet now the one they chose cannot govern."

Thalatha Atukorale was blunt: "The hidden fortunes of Wasantha and Vijitha are surfacing. These are 'no illusions'."

Chamara Sampath cut in with laughter: "If Wasantha says he made money by selling items in the train, then he must have been selling gold biscuits in the train to earn that much!"

"Or crypto?" someone teased.

"Politicians can't even trade crypto legally," came the reply. "But they will have to explain how they came by these millions."

The jibes continued. "Watagala owns a property worth Rs 3,200 million in Cinnamon Life," one noted. A mocking leaflet titled 'From poverty-stricken lives to Cinnamon Life' drew even a smile from Ranil.

Ruwan, more serious, asked: "If this is the progress after just one year of government, what awaits us if it continues longer?"

The sharpest irony, of course, was that these fortunes were amassed during the very period once denounced as a curse.

Meanwhile, the UNP's Working Committee quietly shifted course. It lifted the bans on members who had joined the Samagi Jana Balawegaya, and appointed a Committee under Tilak Marapana to study the legal backdrop. The move removed barriers for reunification — a signal that the party was preparing for collaboration once more.

The Meeting also unanimously resolved to thank all parties that had rallied behind Wickremesinghe during his arrest.

Planning for the Anniversary celebrations fell to Party Leaders, with Ranil entrusting the most delicate tasks to Wajira Abeywardena, declaring him the best suited. And as the UNP marked its 79th year, Wickremesinghe decided to invite all party leaders and representatives, recalling that the party itself had been founded with the blessings of many.

Politics spilt into social life as well. Neth FM News Director Hemantha Kahawalage's son tied the knot at a hotel in Bolgoda, where "who's who" in politics got invited. Ministers Vijitha Herath and Sunil Watagala represented the government; Rajitha, Vijitha, Watagala and Mervyn Silva were seen chatting closely, raising eyebrows.

When Wickremesinghe arrived, Namal Rajapaksa greeted him warmly, with Yoshitha nearby. Around them mingled Wajira, Anura Priyadarshana, Susil Premajayantha and many more, proof that in Sri Lanka, politics and personal bonds are never far apart — and never free of irony.

A test of political culture

Several State institutions have formally requested that official residences previously occupied by former Presidents be allocated to them, Cabinet Spokesman and Minister of Mass Media and Health Dr Nalinda Jayatissa announced in Colombo.

These requests, he explained, came from institutions providing essential public services, many of which currently spend millions of rupees annually on rent. Reallocating such high-value State properties could, in theory, ease their financial burdens and simultaneously strengthen the Treasury. Yet, Jayatissa admitted, no final decision has been made on how the residences will ultimately be utilised.

"The Government intends to use these properties in ways that maximise economic productivity and benefit the Treasury," he told the weekly Cabinet briefing. Asked whether the government was considering revenue-generation on par with market value, the Minister framed the move as part of a broader effort to create uniform, transparent rules for State-owned residences.

"This is not about targeting anyone," he stressed. "For decades, individuals — including Ministers, Prime Ministers, and even Presidents — have occupied State residences indefinitely, in some cases for over thirty years, despite owning private homes in Colombo. Their families, and even extended families, have lived in these houses. This is a clear abuse of State property. We were elected on a mandate to end this culture, and we have made the law applicable to everyone, including the sitting President."

Among those affected is former President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, who, according to Jayatissa, requested an additional two months through her lawyers before vacating her residence. Other former officeholders, he added, had yet to formally hand over their State-provided homes.

At one level, the issue might seem administrative: State property reclaimed and reassigned. But at another, it represents a confrontation with a deeply embedded political culture. For decades, Sri Lanka's ruling elite treated State residences not merely as temporary entitlements linked to public service, but as private eStates to be enjoyed well beyond their terms of office. Successive governments turned a blind eye, normalising a sense of entitlement that blurred the distinction between public property and personal privilege.

The timing of this push is not incidental. Sri Lanka is still reeling from the economic crisis of 2022, which saw the State declare bankruptcy and ordinary citizens suffer severe austerity. In such a climate, the sight of former leaders clinging to sprawling, taxpayer-funded residences has become more than a symbolic excess — it is a reminder of a political class often insulated from the struggles of the people it governs.

Jayatissa's comments also reflect a government attempting to shore up its reformist credentials, signalling that 'rules for all' is more than just a campaign slogan. Yet the challenge lies in enforcement. Sri Lankan politics is littered with promises of reform that faltered once they collided with elite privilege and political convenience. Former leaders, armed with legal teams and political influence, rarely relinquish benefits without resistance.

Still, the reallocation of Presidential Residences could mark a small but telling shift. If the government genuinely follows through — ensuring that State properties serve the public rather than privilege — it would set a precedent that challenges decades of impunity. It would also provide a modest but symbolic economic benefit, redirecting assets towards institutions that directly serve citizens rather than sheltering the families of former rulers.

Whether this episode ends in meaningful reform or yet another compromise with entrenched privilege will depend not only on Jayatissa's assurances but on the political will of the government as a whole. For now, the battle over State residences is more than a property dispute; it is a test of whether Sri Lanka's leaders can finally begin to disentangle governance from entitlement.



ACCESSIBILITY: NOT CHARITY BUT A CONSTITUTIONAL IMPERATIVE



BY MITHUN JAYAWARDHANA

"Accessibility is not charity but a constitutional imperative," High Court Judge K.B. Hewawasam declared in a landmark ruling on 18 September, sending a resounding message to Sri Lanka's public infrastructure authorities. The Anuradhapura High Court ordered immediate upgrades to twelve railway stations along the Mahawa–Vavuniya line to ensure compliance with the 1996 Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act and the 2006 Accessibility Regulations, correcting systemic oversights in recent station renovations.

The ruling, widely hailed as historic by disability rights advocates, underscores both the persistent enforcement gaps in Sri Lanka's public infrastructure and the judiciary's emerging role as a critical driver of disability inclusion. For N.G. Kamalawathi, a veteran activist who filed the case on behalf of the Association of Women with Disabilities (AKASA), the ruling represents decades of advocacy translating into tangible change. "This victory opens doors—literally—for thousands overlooked in development," Kamalawathi stated.

The case and the human story behind it

The petition arose from non-compliance during railway station upgrades funded in part by international aid, affecting approximately 1.6 million Sri Lankans living with disabilities who rely on public transport. Despite the significant financial and logistical investment in modernising the northern corridor, stations lacked essential features such as ramps, tactile paths, braille signage, and priority seating.

Ms. Kamalawathi, a pioneering advocate from rural Anuradhapura, has spent over three decades championing disability rights. In 1989, she co-founded AKASA, focusing on empowering women with disabilities through vocational training, legal aid, and shelter services. Her activism extends to collaborating with UN Women and UNFPA to highlight the intersectional vulnerabilities women with disabilities face, including heightened risks of abuse and systemic marginalisation.

In her petition, Kamalawathi highlighted the "invisible barriers" confronting mobility-impaired, visually-impaired, and hearing-impaired railway passengers, arguing that exclusionary design violated constitutional guarantees under Article 12(4) and contravened both domestic and international obligations. Represented by Attorney Upali Marapana, she challenged Transport Minister Bandula Gunawardena, Secretary Janaka de Silva, and Railway General Manager M.J. Indipolage, seeking judicial recognition of the right to equitable mobility.

Legal violations and court directives

the High Court's 45-page judgment identified multiple breaches of statutory obligations:

1. **Section 23 of the 1996 Act –** Mandates non-discriminatory access to public places, including transport. The Court found station entrances lacked handrails, doorways were not widened to the legally required 900mm minimum, and tactile guides were absent.
2. **Disabled Persons (Accessibility) Regulations No. 1 of 2006 –** Specifies universal design requirements, including ramps with a 1:12 gradient, tactile paths, audio announcements, and a minimum of 10% accessible rolling stock. Authorities had cited budget constraints, but the Court rejected these claims, emphasising obligations under Article 9 of the UN CRPD, ratified by Sri Lanka in 2016.

> The Mahawa–Vavuniya railway stations may soon become more than transit points—they could become beacons of a more inclusive, rights-based Sri Lanka, provided the momentum generated by this landmark case is maintained and expanded across sectors and regions

The Court's orders were robust:

- **Immediate station upgrades:** All twelve stations, including Anuradhapura, Mihintale, and Vavuniya, must incorporate ramps, elevators where feasible, widened platforms, tactile and braille signage, and audio guidance by the second quarter of 2026.
- **Funding prioritisation:** At least 5% of the Railway Department's annual LKR 50 billion budget must be allocated for accessibility, subject to monitoring by the National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD).
- **Action plan submission:** The Attorney General must file a timeline with quarterly milestones by November 15, 2025 non-compliance may trigger contempt fines up to LKR 100,000 per station.
- **Compensation:** Ms. Kamalawathi was awarded Rs. 1 million (~USD 3,300) for "emotional distress" caused by systemic exclusion.

Judge Hewawasam emphasised that accessibility is a constitutional right, not an optional or charitable measure, drawing parallels to the 2018 Supreme Court precedent (FR 273/2018) regarding public space access.

Case	Focus	Outcome	Lessons
SC FR 273/2018	Public building access	Mandated compliance	Judicial enforcement necessary
Colombo Bus Terminal Petition	Bus terminal upgrades	Partial compliance	Enforcement gaps persist
Proposed Disability Rights Bill	Draft legislation	Pending	Consolidates legal obligations
Northern Housing Accessibility	Rural housing	Implementation incomplete	Rural areas lag in execution

Historical and socio-economic context

sri Lanka's journey toward disability inclusion has been incremental, shaped by historical, socio-economic, and political realities. Post-independence efforts focused on welfare, but the civil war (1983–2009) and the 2004 tsunami highlighted the inadequacies of charity-based interventions, accelerating the shift toward rights-based legislation. The 1996 Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act marked a legal milestone, followed by the 2003 National Policy on Disability (NPD), and the 2006 Accessibility Regulations.

Despite these frameworks, compliance remains uneven. A 2022 multidimensional vulnerability index found households with disabilities faced 60.4% exclusion rates, compared to 34.4% for non-disabled households — a gap worsened by the 2022 economic crisis. Public transport exemplifies these disparities: rural stations often fail to meet accessibility standards, while urban areas show partial compliance.

The Mahawa–Vavuniya railway line, recently upgraded with Indian Line of Credit funding at USD 91.27 million, serves communities affected by conflict and poverty. For many, disability results not only from congenital conditions but also from war injuries and socio-economic marginalisation. In this context, the Court's intervention is critical for equitable mobility and post-conflict reconciliation.

The petitioner and advocacy landscape

ms. Kamalawathi's leadership underscores the power of sustained grassroots advocacy. AKASA, her organisation, operates shelters for abused women with disabilities, runs vocational programmes, and provides legal support. Her activism highlights the intersection of gender and disability: women with disabilities face 1.5 times higher rates of violence, often hidden due to family stigma.

Civil society in Sri Lanka has historically filled gaps left by under-resourced institutions. The Disability Organizations Joint Front (DOJF), Brighter Life Foundation, and Humanity & Inclusion provide advocacy, legal mobilisation, and service delivery, effectively amplifying the voices of persons with disabilities in policy and legal arenas.

Judicial rationale and enforcement gaps

the High Court ruling is part of a broader pattern of judicial activism in Sri Lanka. Courts have repeatedly been called upon to enforce rights when executive agencies fail to act. In the 2018 Supreme Court case, Ajith Perera Vs Hon. Daya Gamage, the Judiciary compelled Government action on public building accessibility, establishing that non-compliance is a punishable offence.



Image credit: Cora Hays, Univ of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (2021)

> Sri Lanka's disability rights evolution parallels trends in other developing nations, where strong legal frameworks often clash with weak enforcement. Internationally, ratifying the UN CRPD in 2016 signalled a commitment to universal design and reasonable accommodation

Similarly, the Anuradhapura ruling highlights systemic weaknesses:

- The NCPD's monitoring is insufficient, particularly in rural areas.
- Budgetary arguments cannot justify violations of statutory rights.
- Without enforcement, legislative gains remain "paper rights" rather than lived realities.

By integrating accountability mechanisms, including quarterly reviews and financial penalties, the Court has sought to address these enforcement gaps, signalling a potential shift from passive to proactive governance.

Challenges ahead

Despite the Court's clarity, practical hurdles remain:

1. **Funding Constraints –** The Railway Department carries LKR 200 billion in debt. Allocating 5% of its budget to accessibility may strain other operational priorities.
2. **Bureaucratic Delays –** Past experience, including the 2023 Colombo bus terminal petition, shows that only 60% of court-ordered accessibility upgrades are completed on schedule.
3. **Monitoring and Accountability –** Without robust, independent auditing, upgrades risk being superficial or incomplete.
4. **Societal Attitudes –** Stigma, entrenched perceptions of disability as a personal misfortune, and low public awareness may limit the full societal impact of infrastructural changes.

Nevertheless, advocates point to potential positive spillovers. Accessibility improvements on the Mahawa–Vavuniya line could set precedents for tourism, ICT, and housing sectors, boosting employment opportunities and social participation for disabled persons.

Comparative perspective

Sri Lanka's disability rights evolution parallels trends in other developing nations, where strong legal frameworks often clash with weak enforcement. Internationally, ratifying the UN CRPD in 2016 signalled a commitment to universal design and reasonable accommodation. Domestically, however, compliance with accessibility regulations has remained low.

These cases illustrate the gap between legal intent and operational reality, highlighting the critical role of both judiciary and civil society.

Looking ahead: Policy, legislative, and social imperatives

The Anuradhapura High Court ruling arrives at a pivotal moment. Sri Lanka, while chairing the 2025 Conference of State Parties to the CRPD, faces scrutiny over domestic implementation gaps. Experts argue that this ruling could catalyse broader reforms if complemented by policy, legislative, and social initiatives:

Policy and Legislative Recommendations

- **Pass the New Disability Rights Bill:** Integrate provisions for reasonable accommodation and intersectional discrimination.
- **Constitutional Reform:** Explicitly include disability as a protected ground under Article 12(2).
- **Enforce Existing Regulations:** Establish a time-bound compliance plan for all public buildings and transport infrastructure.

Institutional and Capacity-Building Measures

- **Empower NCPD/NSPD:** Expand enforcement authority and budget for regular audits.
- **Inter-Agency Coordination:** Create a dedicated mechanism to coordinate disability inclusion across ministries.
- **Sector-Specific Initiatives:** Enhance accessible education, vocational training, and ICT inclusion.

Social and Attitudinal Interventions

- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Combat stigma and highlight contributions of persons with disabilities.
- **Support Civil Society:** Strengthen OPDs' capacity to act as watchdogs and service providers.

Conclusion

Sri Lanka's disability rights landscape reflects a paradox: strong legal frameworks and international commitments juxtaposed with low practical compliance. The Anuradhapura High Court ruling exemplifies the Judiciary's pivotal role in bridging this gap, translating policy into action, and elevating the lived rights of persons with disabilities.

Yet, sustained change will depend on multi-sectoral engagement. Judicial orders, while critical, cannot alone ensure equity; they must be paired with political will, institutional capacity, resource allocation, and societal attitudinal shifts. For Ms. Kamalawathi and millions of Sri Lankans living with disabilities, the ruling represents a concrete step toward inclusion—a symbolic and practical affirmation that accessibility is a right, not a privilege.

The Mahawa–Vavuniya railway stations may soon become more than transit points—they could become beacons of a more inclusive, rights-based Sri Lanka, provided the momentum generated by this landmark case is maintained and expanded across sectors and regions.

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Kattankudy 'Women Safe Home'

A SAFE HAVEN FOR ORPHANED, IMPOVERISHED AND MARGINALISED

Solicits public support to provide a separate shelter for vulnerable girl children

BY NAALIR JAMALDEEN

Every child deserves love and compassion, and they naturally seek it from their parents more than anyone else. However, a significant number of children long for this love and affection, but for them, it remains only a distant dream, like a mirage that never becomes reality.

The 35th U.S. President, John F. Kennedy, had made popular and enduring statements such as "Children are the world's most valuable resource and its best hope for the future". "We can say with some assurance that, although children may be the victims of fate, they will not be the victims of neglect." These quotes highlight the importance of investing in children for a brighter future and emphasise society's responsibility to care for them.

Childhood, a world of dreams and hopes

Childhood is a world where children seek love, compassion, affection and protection, but at certain stages or circumstances, knowingly or unknowingly, it is being disrupted. The world faces serious challenges, including poverty, hunger, and lack of access to education, clean water and healthcare facilities, like in certain African countries. They also experience issues like child labour, child marriage, violence and exploitation. Other problems include mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, challenges with social media and cyberbullying, and the increasing impact of climate change on their lives.

Social responsibility

Society is made up of people from various age groups and mindsets, including small children, middle-aged people, and the elderly. Every capable person has a duty to care for the poor, helpless elderly, and young children who depend on others for support in order to live a fulfilling and meaningful life. In this context, it is heartening to note that many philanthropists and renowned personalities often offer their fullest support to alleviate the hunger pangs of the poor, especially young children.

It is the social responsibility of every individual to help uplift poor children and transform them into the future of the country, rather than allowing their potential to go to waste; thanks to the good, kind-hearted individuals and philanthropists who care for these children by providing them with food, shelter and proper education.

Founder and President of Children's Defence Fund, Marian Wright Edelman said, "Just because a child's parents are poor or uneducated is no reason to deprive the child of basic human rights to health care, education and proper nutrition". Other famous quotes are as follows: "Everyone can be great, because everyone can serve" **- Martin Luther King Jr,** "This country will not be a good place for any of us to live unless we make it a good place for all of us to live in". **– Theodore Roosevelt**. "I have found that among its other benefits, giving liberates the soul of the giver"**- Maya Angelou**

"Lord, we know You love all children, and we pray that when they must work, You would protect children's growing bodies. Please keep them safe and free of injuries and toxins. Deliver them from oppressive bosses and hazardous conditions. Make it possible for children at risk to stay in school". **– Mathew:25/ World Vision website**

Happy child

A happy child finds pleasure in spending time with parents and family as well as parents. As they grow, their social preferences evolve, shifting from family-centred interactions to peer-focused connections. Young children typically prefer the company of their primary caregivers, such as parents, grandparents, or babysitters.

This pleasure remains nothing more than a dream to many orphans. Although they deserve love, they often have no one to shower it upon them. A closer look at society reveals a large number of children longing for affection and care. These children can be given a brighter future, but this cannot be achieved by a single person or group alone.

A collective effort is essential to address this issue. Only then can we hope to build a well-disciplined and educated society in the future. All philanthropists and social services activists who care about children must come forward to help create a better future for orphans, ensuring their potential isn't lost before it has the chance to bloom.

Safe home in Kattankudy

There lies a safe home in Kattankudy (near Batticaloa) which serves as a sanctuary for some of the most-vulnerable members of the community. It currently provides shelter, food, and care for elderly women who have been marginalised by their families, orphans, and children from poverty-stricken households. In addition to ensuring basic needs are met, the home supports the education of children once they reach school age, helping to build a foundation for a better future.



The Front View of the Home

The home aims to transform these girls into professionally-able women as they grow. To support this goal, every child of school-going age is sent to nearby schools. Additionally, school leavers and middle-aged women are provided with vocational education. The women who were affected by domestic violence, who were referred through Police and Court orders, are now living peacefully there and receiving vocational training, such as in stitching or tailoring.

This home offers refuge to women, small and girls of all ages, regardless of region of origin.. Among the inmates are those who have no guardians to look after them. With the necessary support provided by this home, there is much hope for a better future for these women and girls.

Conforming to regulatory requirements is costly

The women of all age groups have been accommodated here, including young girls under 18, adult women between 18 and 50, and elderly women over 60. Since all of them are housed in one and the same building, this arrangement does not fall in line with the rules and regulations of the Child Care authorities.

In this backdrop, a volunteer organisation has come forward to undertake the construction of a separate three-storeyed building for children. The new facility will cater to various developmental and spiritual needs of the children, including a cultural hall, learning and activity-based hall, library, assembly hall, prayer hall and boarding facilities. Towards this endeavour, the organisation has requested the home's management to provide a 30 perch plot of land. Despite a demand for land in Kattankudy, a suitable plot has been identified and the owners for Rs 25 million. The home, which relies entirely on public support and donations, is currently facing serious difficulties in raising the necessary funds to make this purchase possible.



Some inmates at the Home

The home management is making a humble request to philanthropists and generous people to extend a helping hand in its effort to make the dreams of these innocent children a reality. Every contribution, big or small, brings the home closer to its goal.

Seeking public support

The Women's Safe Home in Kattankudy, which has been operating for the past seven and a half years, currently provides sanctuary for girls, middle-aged and elderly women.

However, the girls at the Home are studying in the neighbouring schools. It also strives to transform them into professionally able women by providing them with vocational education, such as stitching.

At present, this Home accommodates approximately 17 girls and 18 women. However, the Department of Child Care and Probation has notified that housing girls under the age of 18 together with adult women in the same building is legally inappropriate. This has created an urgent need to provide a separate building for the girls under the home's care.

Accordingly, it has been initiated to construct a new building for this purpose, and an organisation in Colombo has generously agreed to construct the building on condition that suitable land is provided to build on.

A suitable land is available for a purchase value of Rs 25 million, but the Home does not have the necessary financial resources.

Although some donors have pledged partial support, the home is faced with a daunting task of finding a commitment for the substantial balance amount. Therefore, the Women's Safe Home in Kattankudy makes a humble appeal to the Public to contribute generously towards this charitable project.

More support needed

Asma Thawfeek, the Home's Administrative Officer (AO), stated that there is a 'tragic story' behind every child as well as every elderly woman residing there. Before their admission, the prime need of these 'unfortunate' individuals was food.

She highlighted that, although sufficient food is available, there are still additional needs that require significant spending. The Home faces a severe shortage of essential day-to-day items such as soap, detergent and school supplies for the children.

Many of the children at the Home are slow learners and require additional care and support in their education. Although they are enrolled in extra classes, they often struggle to grasp the content being taught. As a result, there is a need to purchase specialised learning materials and books tailored to the needs of slow learners. These resources will play a crucial role in helping them to understand their lessons more effectively and meet their educational goals.

She also pointed out that, despite facing numerous challenges, these innocent children rarely reveal their struggles to others, especially when it comes to family issues. She added that they have been entrusted with a great responsibility towards caring for and supporting these children.

Parental drug addiction

In certain cases, when both parents become addicted to drugs, female children are brought to this home for their safety. The home provides shelter to children from various backgrounds. Some families enrol their children in the home primarily to ensure they have enough to eat and access to basic care.

When sharing her experience at the home, AO Thawfeek expressed that every child there longs for love and care, something that had apparently been a distant dream in their earlier family environment. This deep yearning becomes evident in the way the children respond when outsiders speak to them with kindness and affection. "Every single minute spent with them holds immeasurable value, and it is truly priceless".

"Especially, when they receive gifts from those who visit the Home, the joy on their faces is simply indescribable by words. This Home offers remarkable support to children who have sought refuge there. It is the social responsibility of every individual to care for poor children and orphans. 'Look after orphans. God will look after you' ". This highlights a deep truth: those who show kindness and care draw closer towards goodness and divine favour. "By supporting the vulnerable, we not only uplift their lives but also elevate our humanity".

Counselling services

The Home currently provides counselling for all women and girls. Many arrive depressed due to physical, mental and sometimes sexual abuse. Counsellors visit the home regularly to provide support, and some girls are referred to hospitals for specialised counselling. This holistic approach aims to address both their physical and emotional needs, helping them to recover and rebuild their lives.

In summary, the Kattankudy Women's Safe Home plays a vital role in providing shelter and support to women and children in need. Despite facing significant financial and logistical challenges, the home remains committed to its mission of offering refuge and care. With continued support from the community and donors, it aims to expand its services and provide a brighter future for those it serves.

Marginalisation

Every member of society has a moral obligation to care for poor children and orphans as if they were their own. However, it is observed that while certain visitors to the home appear to 'maintain a distance' with those innocent children, compassionate individuals treat these children with kindness and affection, offering them love and care they richly deserve.

Care should be taken to ensure that these innocent children are not marginalised in any way so that they have equal access to all aspects of normal life and livelihood. Unfortunately, they often face difficulties when being enrolled in schools because they are marginalised due to their background or living conditions. Such discriminatory practices appear to stem from the grounds that they are coming from a 'home'. The society as a whole should shun and eliminate such behaviour and approaches. Ideally, these poor, innocent children must be treated with compassion and humanity by people of all strata. Thereby, a brighter future for marginalised and vulnerable children can be 'rest assured'.

Note: Donors who wish to make a meaningful contribution towards the welfare and well-being of these orphaned Girl Children and Women are kindly requested to make their deposits to the following Bank Account:

Account Name: WEDF
Account Number: 89024427
Bank: Bank of Ceylon
Branch: Kattankudy Branch

For further details, you may also contact the 'Women Safe Home', Kattankudy, on their Hotline Nos. +94773624691 or +94773595558 or via email: mlasalma1111@gmail.com



The proposed land for which funds are required to purchase



Another view of the proposed land for which funds are required to purchase

To boost Investments and Exports

SL HOSTS A JOINT BRIEFING SESSION FOR DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS





Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vijitha Herath, along with Minister of Industry, Sunil Handunnetthi, and Minister of Trade, Wasantha Samarasinghe, launched an integrated mechanism to enhance collaboration between Sri Lanka's overseas Missions and national institutions. Joined by Ministry Secretaries and agency heads, the initiative aimed to revitalise the country's trade and investment agenda through coordinated efforts. The session on 16 September, attended by all Heads of Mission and Post, served as a platform to share key policy directives, practical proposals, and focused ideas.

Opening the session, Foreign Secretary Aruni Ranaraja provided an overview of the current investment and export landscape, briefing the importance of adopting targeted strategies to diversify Sri Lanka's export portfolio and attract foreign direct investment. She reiterated that enhancing economic resilience and driving sustainable growth will require a proactive, coordinated approach across all relevant stakeholders. Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath emphasised that the role of Sri Lanka's Heads of Mission and Post is more crucial than ever, as the country navigates a pivotal phase in its economic recovery. He underscored the responsibility of Missions in identifying new markets, attracting sustainable foreign investment, and enhancing export performance. Recognising these as key pillars of the national economic agenda, the Minister noted that progress will be subject to regular review to ensure accountability and impact. He further stressed that strengthened coordination among trade and investment-related institutions will be essential to delivering tangible outcomes.

Minister Handunnetthi, speaking on industry perspective, highlighted ongoing efforts to attract foreign investment aimed at revitalising key industrial sectors and addressing barriers that hinder their growth. He emphasised the importance of value addition in Sri Lanka's manufacturing sector which uses natural resources in the country. Attracting investors into industrial zones was presented as a vital step towards accelerating industrial development and export expansion. Secretary of Industry Thilaka Jayasundara outlined the need for expanding Sri Lanka's market opportunities and strengthen the country's position in global trade.

Minister Samarasinghe highlighted the importance of Sri Lanka focusing on attracting foreign investment and advancing export development in light of the current global economic conditions. He stressed the need for coordinated and forward-thinking strategies to meet the country's export targets for 2030. Additionally, Secretary of Trade K.A. Vimalenthirarajah affirmed the Trade Ministry's strong commitment to providing continued support and assistance to Sri Lanka's Missions abroad, to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

Comprehensive presentations were delivered by the Chairmen of Board of Investment and Export Development Board to the Missions, highlighting the country's economic performance through detailed facts and figures. These presentations outlined the targets set for 2030, the roadmap for achieving them, and the collective strategies required to address the challenges and obstacles ahead.

The session concluded with the decision to take forward the proposals and their implementation to be periodically assessed.





SL–India Society celebrates India's 79th Independence Day



High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka, Santosh Jha, graced the annual dinner organised by the Sri Lanka–India Society (SLIS) to mark India's 79th Independence Day. Minister of Health and Mass Media, Dr. Nalinda Jayatissa, also attended the event, which was held on 15 September 2025. The dinner was attended by prominent members of the Indian and Sri Lankan business communities, media, investors, CEOs, and members of SLIS, including its President Yamuna Ganeshalingam.

Speaking on the occasion, the High Commissioner said that India–Sri Lanka relations are at a historic high, recalling the visits of President of Sri Lanka Anura Kumara Disanayaka to India in December 2024 and Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi to Sri Lanka in April 2025. These visits led to seven MoUs, new projects, and progress in key areas such as connectivity, energy security, digital transformation, capacity-building, and regional stability. He emphasised that India and Sri Lanka are natural partners and civilisational twins, and noted that India's timely support to Sri Lanka in times of need reflects its 'Neighbourhood First' policy and 'MAHASAGAR' vision.

The High Commissioner noted India's emergence as the fastest-growing major economy, projected to be the world's second-largest (PPP) by 2038, and invited Sri Lanka to benefit from it, as a market for exports, supply chain partner, and source of investment. He reaffirmed India's nearly USD 7 billion development portfolio in Sri Lanka, including over USD



800 million in grants, covering all 25 districts, covering projects in areas of housing, health, railways, education, digitization, and renewable energy.

During the event, Minister Dr. Nalinda Jayatissa remarked that Sri Lanka is proud of and looks forward to India's fast-paced economic growth. He emphasised that the Government of Sri Lanka seeks to harness the opportunities of being close to a country on its way to becoming the world's third-largest economy, while also working to ensure peace and stability in the Indian Ocean region. He invited Indian companies to invest in Sri Lanka including in areas of pharmaceutical and medical equipment manufacture. He also acknowledged the Sri Lanka–India Society's role since its founding, in strengthening and promoting social and cultural ties between the two countries.

Founded in 1949, SLIS is the oldest friendship society between the two countries and continues to play a vital role in deepening people-to-people ties and promoting mutual understanding.



Business ethics for protecting consumer rights

BY DR. NIMAL D. RATHNAYAKE



Ethics represent the fundamental principles of decent human conduct. They encompass universal values, including the essential equality of men and women and their rights, adherence to the law, concern for health and safety, and a commitment to the natural environment. Business ethics refers to the moral principles that guide a company's conduct and interactions with its stakeholders. This concept extends beyond mere legal compliance, establishing a framework for determining right or wrong in business decisions and actions.

In Sri Lanka, various acts and regulations impact business ethics, including the Companies Act No. 7 of 2007, the Anti-Corruption Act No. 9 of 2023, and the Banking Act No. 30 of 1998, as well as regulations related to insider trading and corporate governance. The laws and internal policies are designed to prevent unethical practices such as bribery, conflicts of interest, discrimination, and unfair competition, while promoting corporate social responsibility.



Importance of business ethics

Protection of consumer rights: The primary goal of a business entity is to satisfy customer needs, as customers are the most critical stakeholders in a business. However, consumers are often the most neglected and exploited group. The application of business ethics will protect consumer rights by preventing malpractices and ensuring that businesses are consumer-oriented.

Improved social responsibility: Business ethics contribute to making businesses socially responsible. Social responsibility refers to the accountability of individuals or corporations to fulfil their duties toward the public and to take actions that benefit society as a whole. Companies that prioritise social responsibility make decisions aimed at maximising profits while safeguarding the interests of the community. Compliance with ethical standards guarantees the safeguarding of consumer rights, promotes public accountability, protects the interests of workers, and ensures the responsible use of natural resources.

Equal sharing of gains: Since profit results from the ethical efforts of the group, it should be distributed among employees, shareholders, consumers, suppliers, and other relevant stakeholders.

Preserving the secrecy of customer information: Businesses should not disclose the information of their customers to a third party for any reason. According to Section 77 of the Banking Act No. 30 of 1988, a bank is not permitted to disclose the information of an account to a third party, except (a) when required to do so by a court of law or by the person to whom such matters relate; (b) in the performance of the account holder's duties; and (c) to comply with any of the provisions of this Act or any other law. Any person who knowingly or wilfully authorises or permits such default shall be guilty of a term of imprisonment not exceeding three years, or a fine not exceeding one million Sri Lankan Rupees, or both such fine and imprisonment.

Types of ethics

Transactional ethics—Emphasises honest and fair behaviour in any interaction, especially in business or financial transactions, focusing on equality and mutual respect.

Participatory ethics—Emphasises the importance of inclusive and collaborative decision-making in ethical frameworks, particularly within research and social contexts.

Recognitional ethics—Emphasises the fundamental importance of acknowledging the worth, dignity, and rights of all individuals, viewing human rights as a core ethical principle.

VUCA nature of current markets and common unfair business practices

The term VUCA describes the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous nature of today's markets. In these unpredictable environments, threats and opportunities are difficult to anticipate, and the risk of disruption is significantly elevated. To succeed in today's market, businesses must offer customised solutions that cater to the unique needs and journeys of their customers. However, a notable characteristic of the current competitive landscape is that small businesses frequently become victims of unfair business practices of larger companies. They do almost anything to gain an advantage over the current competition. However, organisations should not anticipate short-term returns by compromising their integrity to take a risk.

Organisations should conduct their business by fair market practices. The following are some standard unfair market practices.

Conspiring to fix market prices—Discussing prices with competitors, even though the small marketplaces are affected.

Price discrimination — Using the dominant industry power to secure favourable product prices from buyers, even though such prices are unavailable to weaker companies in the same industry.

Different prices — Charging higher prices to wealthy customers and offering different prices to different clients based on their business profiles.

Conspiring to boycott — Having conversations with other businesses towards a potential boycott of another competitor.

Conspiring to allocate markets or customers — Entering into agreements between competitors to divide customers, territories, and markets.

Monopolisation — Preserving a monopoly through the acquisition of competitors.

Overemphasising materialism — A tendency to consider material possessions and physical comfort as more important than spiritual values.

Misleading advertisements — Advertising causes people to buy more than they can afford—bundled products.

Additionally, conflict of interest can also be considered another reason for several unfair market practices— a conflict of interest arises when an entity or individual is deemed unreliable due to a clash between personal interests and professional obligations or responsibilities.

The initiatives listed below are essential for making wise ethical decisions.

Sound relationships with all stakeholders — They have the power to influence the decision-making process of an organisation.

Invisible hands in the marketplace — Rivalry among existing businesses can eliminate any product or corporate practices that are harmful and inappropriate.

Governmental duty perspectives — The government should establish legislation and regulatory agencies to avoid irresponsible and unethical practices.

Ethical management — The corporate management of an organisation should be able to create an ethical environment with an enlightened sense of employees and customers.

Some ethics in business

Ethics in production

- Avoid manufacturing defective, addictive, and inherently dangerous products.
- Establishing environmental ethics to avoid environmental pollution and carbon emissions trading.
- Focus on ethical problems arising out of new technologies—genetically modified food
- Product testing ethics
- Ensuring the availability of the Product specification—a document that provides critical defining information about a product.

Ethics in communication

- Marketing communication programs should focus on the ethical and legal concerns.
- Marketers must evaluate the legal impact and social concerns on proposed and ongoing communication efforts.
- Marketers should be aware of the prevailing legal setup of the country and its impact on their communication efforts.
- Advertising is legal but can be controversial to ethics. Hence, ensure the use of suitable content for advertisements.
- Avoid child-oriented advertising.

Ethics in sales

- Avoid unclear, incomplete, or misleading product literature.
- Avoid undue influences by sellers.
- Avoid unsuitable bundled products and sales.
- Ensure sufficient understanding of customer needs.
- Avoid price fixing, price discrimination, and price skimming.
- Avoid anti-competitive practices—manipulation of supply, exclusive dealing arrangements, and tying arrangements.
- Minimise the employment of children for marketing activities.
- Avoid black markets and grey markets.
- Avoid Misselling—Misselling is a sales practice in which a product or service is deliberately misrepresented, or a customer is misled about its suitability.

Significant characteristics in misselling

- Failure to explain the solution being sold.
- Failure to explain the terms and conditions of the solution being sold.
- The solution being sold was not suitable for the prevailing needs of the consumer.
- Misleading the customers to sell the product.
- Failure to explain the relevant charges and commissions.

The following best practices can be used to avoid misselling:

- Better understanding of the customer
- Include product risk in the product specification
- Making the product specification available with the product
- Sales team's understanding of the products to be sold
- More transparency in financial solutions
- Producing more consumer-oriented products
- Enhanced monitoring of the sales force
- Strengthening the controlling processes
- Periodic reviews on the incentive structures of the employees

Signing documents and agreements

Signing documents and agreements is essential to both the seller and the customer. People routinely sign documents and agreements without giving them much attention. Further, they are not well-read in those documents, assuming they are "in order," "routine," "standardised," or "too complicated." Some customers think that the necessary adjustments could be made later.

It is the responsibility of a seller or service provider to request their customers to read and understand the contents of an agreement before signing. The signature of a party may legally bind them to actions. The signature is unique to a person, and no one else can place it on their behalf. To ensure the protection of both parties, they must clearly understand the consequences and reasons for signing the agreement.

Business entities need to be fair and honest when selling their goods and services to customers. Businesses certainly have a role to play in protecting consumer rights. Yet, ethical and socially responsible business practices can boost profitability and growth, as well as onboard new businesses, gain an ethical reputation, and enhance customer loyalty.

The writer is a practising marketer, a Senior Banking Management Professional, and an academic professional. He serves as an international reviewer for the South Asian Journal of Social Studies and Economics (SAJSSE).

"Mindfully Empowered Nation"



Venerable Udairiyagama Dhammajiva

MINDFULNESS FOR ELDERLY CARE

Dear Readers,

Today I would like to reflect on a subject that is quite sensitive – Mindfulness and Elderly Care or Palliative Care.

When I look back at my past, during the period of age 36–38, I had the rare opportunity to take care of my teacher. He was 88 years old and had reached maturity, a personality in high contentment, yet he was unable to get up from the seat, unable to rise from the bed, and unable to bend down and pick up something from the ground. Therefore, someone always had to help around all the time. With the responsibility of caring for the teacher, I became familiar with doctors who attend to such cases – palliative specialists. They advised keeping elderly people on seats or beds above knee level, so that they could climb up or sit down more easily and safely, without a high risk of falling. They also advised never to allow such people to sit in low places or to bend unnecessarily.

In situations like this, when you have the emotional intelligence toward the person being cared for, both the communication and the physical support provided become easier. Imagine a situation where you are taking care of your grandmother, grandfather, or perhaps an elderly aunt or uncle. At such times you would naturally and wholeheartedly extend your caring and support to them as there wouldn't be an emotional barrier towards those who are dear to you. However, when you look at the West, many countries have higher elderly populations and there is a greater demand for qualitative elderly and palliative care. Of course, there are organizations in those countries that also provide mindfulness practices through their services.

Still you need to recognise that this type of care is only possible and develops in an organic manner. You need to be friendly and associate personally for the elderly person to truly feel such caring. If you do not connect with the elderly person, if you do not feel wholehearted in offering your services, it would be quite difficult for you to build trust in them and care freely.

When you act with mindfulness, vigilance, and diligence, the mind-to-mind connection will be established. The telepathic connection can also be established, enabling you to understand the behaviour, moods, and needs of the elderly person more humanely. So for that, you must understand that soft skills are essential. Emotive literacy needs to be developed. This is what can be called real humanity. But the moment you harbour dislike or conceit, you easily cut yourself off from the connection with others. Your communication capacity and embracing will be weakened. This is what we mean by the need for mental strength and stability. At the same time, you must also have the physical strength and ability to perform the actual tasks of elderly care with comfort and efficiency.

This balance between physical and mental strength is vital to provide total care for an elderly person. You must maintain a pleasant mood and an accepting attitude toward any situation that arises. As people age, they develop a lot of negative characteristics which are not pleasant to the people around. They may neglect their health and hygiene. They may disregard the emotional mindset of the caregiver. They may ignore the advice and instructions given by doctors. In fact, stubbornness becomes a frequent characteristic of the elderly. These are people who may have lived luxurious, successful lives in their younger days, but as they grow older, they succumb to circumstantial distractions, weaknesses, and disabilities.

Many elders are not in a position to accept this reality. This is a crucial juncture where you, as the caregiver, must extend your hand with help. But in order for you to extend help, you need to remain in a balanced and healthy state of mind yourself. It has been noticed that some of the caregivers have attempted to communicate and introduce mindfulness, introduce diligence and vigilance. For such attempts to succeed, you definitely need to develop the beginner's mind. You may even be able to encourage the elderly person – whether in general old age or even with a terminal illness – to experience this beginner's mind themselves.

Often these individuals are hopeless. We must remember that youngsters and middle-aged people too can develop this beginner's mind through the practice of mindfulness, to accept their weaknesses, adamant nature, and become more tolerant of their own shortcomings. Embracing this practice before approaching old age will be quite significant in your aged life. Ultimately, we must all understand that one day, we too will face the very same stage of life and the very same situations that today's elderly are already experiencing.

When such ages are reached, all the outer glory and beauty of life will be eroded. But whatever happens, if you have continuously practised, your mindfulness will remain intact. Through such mindfulness practice, you will know to remain independent, without being a burden to another. When you are a caregiver, caring for elders who may have no idea how mindfulness could support their failing lives, you can guide them gently into incorporating mindfulness into daily living. Most of the time, they have not known a way of life where one lives and behaves without troubling others. Therefore, they often appear hopeless, and such hopelessness can spread like a contagion among elderly groups.

When you do the caregiver service as well, you may feel exhausted, as they have no positivity with them. These are the people who have spent a lifetime and now end up with some type of disability with the eyesight, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and mental state. Supposedly, if they have good memories and past achievements, you may be able to bring up those good positive memories from them. Then try to show them many of their achievements can be attributed directly to mindfulness, though they may not attribute it to mindfulness.

Even when you try, they may hesitate at first. But with time, you can help them see that qualities such as faith, energy, concentration, and knowledge all come into action only through mindfulness. Success in life often happens because of mindfulness, but with success and achievements, people tend to attribute it to other factors. That is an intrinsic nature of mindfulness. So you can therefore take different issues and connect them to the elderly person's past achievements, helping them reinterpret their experiences in terms of mindfulness, vigilance, and diligence.

So this can give them hope. This can give them motivation. Because even without realising it, they have already developed many of these qualities. If you are successful – truly successful – you can even introduce mindful sitting practices. Since walking may be difficult, mindful games may be another option. Such activities can encourage appetite, improve sleep, and bring relaxation. At the same time, you as the caregiver also gain relaxation.

Therefore, if you are skilful, you can treat caregiving as a blessing in disguise, since you too are slowly advancing in life and will eventually face the same stage. In this sense, it becomes a rehearsal – preparing you for difficulties yet to come. The elderly person's experiences can be revalued and reinterpreted, as long as there is motivation and positive thinking. For this reason, it is good to share simple practices such as mindful games, mindful sitting, mindful breathing, or mindful understanding – even something as simple as being aware that "I am sitting and not walking."

Do not assume they are incapable of understanding. Like children, with compassion, emotional intelligence, and sympathetic understanding, you can guide them into acceptance. You can help them to treat you like family, and in time, even a telepathic communication may occur. If you experience such moments, please do share them with us. We are ready to offer you the opportunity to publish your testimonies of success.

Thank you very much.

www.satipasala.org

COMBANK PARTNERS WITH INDIRA CANCER TRUST TO RAISE BREAST CANCER AWARENESS

Becomes Gold Sponsor of TLC Triathlon 2025 series in Kilinochchi, Batticaloa, Matara and Colombo

The Commercial Bank of Ceylon has joined hands with the Indira Cancer Trust (ICT) as the Gold Sponsor of the TLC (Touch | Look | Check) – Triathlon 2025, a nationwide series of events to raise awareness of breast cancer – which tragically claims three lives a day in Sri Lanka – reaffirming the Bank's commitment to empowering women and promoting community well-being as a core pillar of its corporate social responsibility efforts.

This unique initiative combines the power of sport with health education to highlight the importance of early detection of breast cancer, as part of the Trust's activities in the month of October.

The TLC Triathlon 2025 will be the first nationwide triathlon series in the country, to take the message of breast self-examination to the public. The triathlon will take place across four cities – Kilinochchi, Batticaloa, Matara, and Colombo – through a combination of swimming, cycling, and running. Alongside the sporting events, healthcare professionals and trained volunteers will conduct live demonstrations to educate participants on how to practise the simple, free, and effective TLC method of self-checking for early signs of breast cancer.

The events are scheduled to take place on 5th October in Kilinochchi (Rodrigo Grounds), 12th October in Batticaloa (Weber Grounds), 19th October in Matara (Kotawila Grounds), and 26th October in Colombo (Independence Square). More than 4,000 athletes and over 10,000 spectators are expected to participate in this landmark series, making it a powerful platform for awareness, fitness, and community engagement.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer affecting women in Sri Lanka, with an average of 15 new cases diagnosed every day. Early detection through regular self-examination can significantly improve treatment outcomes and survival rates, which makes the TLC message – Touch | Look | Check – a critical life-saving practice.



Sanath Manatunge, Managing Director/CEO of Commercial Bank presents the Bank's sponsorship to Dr. Lanka Dissanayake - Chairperson of the Indira Cancer Trust, in the presence of senior representatives of the Bank and members of the Trust

Speaking about the Bank's sponsorship, Commercial Bank Managing Director/CEO Sanath Manatunge said: "Breast cancer affects far too many Sri Lankan women and families. We believe awareness and early detection are key to saving lives. As a Bank with a strong commitment to empowering women and supporting community well-being, we are honoured to partner with the Indira Cancer Trust on this landmark initiative. By joining forces through the TLC Triathlon, we hope to drive awareness across the country and encourage more women to take that simple but critical step of self-examination."

The Indira Cancer Trust, established in 2016, is Sri Lanka's first dedicated helpline and support service for cancer patients and their families. Among its flagship initiatives, Suwa Arana near the Apeksha Hospital in Maharagama, is the country's first paediatric palliative care centre and provides 32 family rooms and free meals and lodging for families of children undergoing treatment.

Organised by the Indira Cancer Trust in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka Medical Association and under the technical guidance of the Sri Lanka College of Oncologists, the TLC Triathlon 2025 is supported by Commercial Bank as part of its corporate social responsibility agenda. Through this partnership, the Bank reaffirms its dedication to women's health, empowerment, and the creation of a healthier, more informed society.

The first Sri Lankan bank with a market capitalisation of more than USD 1 billion, Commercial Bank was also the first bank in the country to be listed among the Top 1000 banks of the world, and has the highest capital base among all Sri Lankan banks. The Bank is the largest private sector lender in Sri Lanka and the largest lender to the country's SME sector. Commercial Bank is also a leader in digital innovation and is Sri Lanka's first 100% carbon-neutral bank.

Commercial Bank operates a network of strategically located branches and automated machines islandwide, and has the widest international footprint among Sri Lankan banks, with 20 branches in Bangladesh, a fully-fledged Tier I Bank with a majority stake in the Maldives, a Microfinance company in Myanmar and a representative office in the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC). The Bank's fully owned subsidiaries, CBC Finance Ltd. and Commercial Insurance Brokers (Pvt) Limited, also deliver a range of financial services via their own branch networks.



"VEERABHIVANDANA" PROF. E. A. WEERASINGHE FELICITATION CEREMONY

Honouring a Visionary Leader, a Transformative Force, and a True Inspiration for Generations to Come.

The Founding Vice Chancellor of NSBM Green Prof. E. A. Weerasinghe was proudly honoured during the "Veerabhivandana" felicitation ceremony organized by the Alumni Association of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. This special event celebrated Prof. Weerasinghe, an esteemed alumnus of the University, for his recent recognition as the Most Visionary Leader of the Year 2025 at the Sri Lankan Entrepreneur Awards.

The ceremony was held under the respectable patronage and presence of Chancellor of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura Ven. Dr. Ittapana Dhammalankara Anu Nayake Maha Thero, the Chief Prelate (Mahanayake) of Kotte Sri Kalayani Samagri Dharma Maha Sangha Sabha of Siyam Maha Nikaya.

Also in attendance were senior officials and staff from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura (USJP), led by Vice Chancellor Senior Professor Pathmalal M. Manage, Senior Professor Sampath Amaratunga, Former Vice Chancellor of USJP, Emeritus Professor Sunil Ariyaratne, the Chancellor of the University of the Visual and Performing Arts as well as members of the alumni association under the leadership of Mr. Gamini Silva, President of the Alumni Association.

Representatives from NSBM Green University, including Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor Chaminda Ratnayake, deans, heads, family members of Prof. Weerasinghe, and other notable dignitaries were also present to celebrate his remarkable achievements.









For NSBM Green University, Prof. Weerasinghe's pioneering vision has been the driving force behind the institution's growth, innovation, and international collaborations. His exceptional leadership, and transformative contribution inspire the NSBM community to uphold excellence, embrace innovation, and make a meaningful impact on society.













LIFEBUOY BALL BLASTER 1ST ELEVEN FOOTBALL CHALLENGE TROPHY 2025 SET TO IGNITE SCHOOL FOOTBALL PASSION ACROSS SRI LANKA

School football fever is set to grip the nation once again as the Lifebuoy Ball Blaster 1st Eleven Football Challenge Trophy 2025 prepares to kick off in early October. Bringing together the top 16 Division 1 school football teams from across Sri Lanka, the tournament is expected to deliver weeks of high-intensity competition, showcasing the next generation of football talent.

Organised under the guidance of the Ministry of Education in partnership with the Sri Lanka Schools Football Association (SLSFA), the event will be broadcast live and professionally covered by Sri Lankan Sports TV, allowing fans around the country to experience every moment of the action.

This year's edition will begin with a grand opening ceremony followed by two exciting matches. Hameed Al Hussaini College will face Al Falah College, Negombo in the official opening game, while defending champions Zahira College, Colombo will take on Darrussaalam College in the much-anticipated curtain-raiser.

The tournament format will see the 16 schools divided into four groups of four teams each, playing a round-robin stage. The top two teams from each group will progress to the quarter-finals, followed by semi-finals, and then the grand finale, which is scheduled for the first week of November. The venue for the final will be announced based on the qualifying schools, ensuring maximum support from fans of the competing teams.

This year's tournament is driven by a group of dedicated sponsors who are playing a vital role in elevating the experience for players and supporters alike. Lifebuoy, the title sponsor, continues its mission of promoting health and active living through youth sports. Their long-term commitment to grassroots development and hygiene education aligns perfectly with the spirit of school football.

Complementing this is Elephant House Lemonade, joining as the refreshing partner, delivering energy and revitalisation to players and fans under the hot October sun. Known for its crisp taste and iconic legacy, Lemonade has become synonymous with celebration and refreshment, especially in the sporting arena.

Supporting the logistics of the tournament is Sky Market Travel, the official travel partner, ensuring smooth journeys for teams across the island.

Meanwhile, Aacty Wear, the in-house brand of Aasgard Sports, steps in as the official clothing partner, providing custom-designed sportswear for players, referees, and officials — merging performance, identity, and style into one.

Organisers expressed confidence that this year's Lifebuoy Ball Blaster will be more than just a tournament — it will be a celebration of teamwork, sportsmanship, and national pride. With every pass, tackle, and goal, young players will not only represent their schools but, also inspire communities and ignite dreams.

As the opening whistle draws near, anticipation is building among students, parents, coaches, and fans across the country.

KFL 006 brings an international fight night experience to Cinnamon Life in October

Cinnamon Life will once again host Colombo's most spectacular sporting event as Karma Fight League (KFL) stages its sixth fight night, KFL 006, on 11 October. More than just a night of combat, this event highlights Colombo's rise as a premier destination for sports tourism and international entertainment, bringing global athletes, fans, and media together in the heart of the city.

The fight card is stacked with international talent, featuring athletes flying in from the USA, UK, India, Pakistan, and beyond.

Headlining the action is Will Chope, a former UFC fighter whose return to Sri Lanka brings international star power and anticipation. Adding to the global appeal are the ever-compelling India versus Pakistan clashes, bouts that ignite passion and capture worldwide attention. Local fighters and rising stars will also take their place under the lights, ensuring a thrilling mix of pedigree and fresh talent that will deliver an unforgettable spectacle.

For Colombo, the significance of KFL 006 extends beyond the ring. The event strengthens the city's reputation as a hub for combat sports in South Asia, while also fuelling growth in tourism, hospitality, and entertainment. With media attention and fight enthusiasts from around the world turning their eyes to Sri Lanka, Colombo is being positioned alongside regional entertainment capitals such as Dubai, Bangkok, and Singapore.

As the official venue and hospitality partner, Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams provides the ideal setting for an event of this scale. With its international-standard facilities, luxurious amenities, and signature Sri Lankan warmth, City of Dreams will ensure that athletes, fans, and visitors experience a fight night that is both world-class and uniquely Colombo.

Tickets for KFL 006 are already in high demand and can be secured through PickMe Events, Tickets Ministry, and MyTable, or directly at *tickets.karmafightleague.com*. With global attention on the event, early purchase is recommended to avoid disappointment.

On 11 October, Colombo will not just host another fight night. It will showcase its future as a premier entertainment destination for South Asia. KFL 006 promises not only explosive action inside the ring but, also a milestone moment in the city's journey to becoming a global stage for sport and entertainment.

Arjan Perera Memorial Trophy – All Island Inter-School Tennis Championship 2025

British School in Colombo makes history



The British School in Colombo (BSC) etched its name in history by winning the first-ever Under-12 Boys Division 3 Championship at the prestigious SLTA Yeti All Island Inter-School Team Competition – Arjan Perera Memorial Trophy 2025, held at the Sri Lanka Tennis Association Courts in Colombo 7.

This year's championship saw an unprecedented scale of participation, with over 60 schools fielding 254 teams, highlighting the growing depth of young tennis talent across the island. The tournament, played over several days, featured both individual and team events, giving future stars of Sri Lankan tennis a valuable platform to showcase their skills.

The BSC Under-12 Boys team, competing in the tournament for the very first time, comprised Avyn Abeywardene (Age 9), Rahel Palisena (Age 9), and Talib Imran (Age 11).

Demonstrating remarkable consistency and skill, Avyn went unbeaten throughout the individual competitions, clinching the Under-12 Division 3 Individual Championship.

In addition, the team's road to victory was equally impressive, overcoming Royal College in the semi-finals before defeating St. Sebastian's College in the finals to secure the Under 12 Division 3 Overall Championship Title in their category.

The BSC Under-12 Girls team also delivered an impressive performance, advancing to the semi-final stage of the competition in their category.

This historic win not only marks a proud milestone for the British School in Colombo but also reflects the growing promise of Sri Lanka's next generation of tennis players.

A Tug-of-War over talent

Player poaching and the future of Schools' Rugby

The rise of commercialised School Rugby

BY VIMAL PERERA

School rugby in Sri Lanka has moved far beyond the touchlines of school grounds. Live broadcast, dissected on social media, and marketed as national spectacles. Sponsors, alums, and broadcasters all fuel this transformation, creating heightened visibility but, also unrelenting pressure on young athletes.

The cost is clear: stress, burnout, and a diminishing sense of joy.

The 79th Bradby Shield captured this trend perfectly. Marketed as a blockbuster, even featuring a foreign referee, the match was tense but, underwhelming. The atmosphere was further soured by pre-game mudslinging online, leaving an unanswered question -whether this once-blue-ribbon event has lost its original charm.

Poaching: The open secret

At the heart of commercialisation lies player poaching — schools recruiting developed players with scholarships, hostel spots, and perks. Unlike family-driven transfers, poaching is targeted and strategic. Is this a practice that undermines tradition and fairness?

Once whispered about, it is now an open secret. Scouts, academies, and old boy networks engineer transfers, drawing children into a tug-of-war between rival schools. The question for the 2025 season is not whether poaching exists, but how deeply it corrodes competition and welfare.

The late Franklyn Amerasinghe, a respected corporate voice, wrote bluntly in 2023 that Catholic schools were guilty of enticing players from smaller institutions with inducements. In 2024, a rival school accused Wesley of fielding an ineligible player. Though cleared, the case highlighted how enforcement is more reactive than preventative.

This problem is not new. In 2017, St. John's College, Nugegoda, which had built its rugby programme from scratch, lost 14 players to bigger schools. A decade of steady progress — from launching rugby in 1989 to reaching Division 1 by 2013 — was undone in a single season. Unable to field an Under-20 side, the programme collapsed.

Former Education Ministry Sports Adviser Sunil Jayaweera described the situation as complex and often beyond regulatory reach. Once a principal signs a No Objection Certificate (NOC), transfers are legitimised. In St. John's case, the exodus was technically above board, but devastating in effect.

School Rugby at a crossroads

School rugby was once rooted in loyalty, identity, and the slow building of tradition. Players wore jerseys that symbolised lifelong loyalty. Are they now commodities? The 2025 Schools Rugby League, with nearly 80 schools, was overshadowed by disputes over player eligibility, legal battles, and even Court interventions, which led the game itself to the risk of being reduced to bureaucratic warfare.

The economics of success

The formula is straightforward. Television rights bring visibility; visibility attracts sponsors; sponsors demand trophies. Schools that once took decades to build championship sides now expect instant results. The outcome is a marketplace for teenage athletes.

The burden on players is immense. Sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds are uprooted from their communities and pushed into high-pressure environments where losing disappoints not only their peers but, entire institutions and financial backers. Smaller schools, once nurseries of raw talent, are stripped of their best prospects and left unable to compete.

This imbalance has created a two-tier system, where a handful of powerhouses dominate, and others fade. The fallout is not confined to the field. Violence among spectators, seen in multiple matches this season, reflects a culture where results matter more than respect.

Why poaching persists

Prestige economics: Titles bring money, television coverage, and old boy influence.

Weak enforcement: Loopholes, ad hoc waivers, and slow rulings make risks worthwhile.

External actors, such as academies and alums groups, broker transfers to serve their own pipelines.

The consequences

Competitive imbalance: Talent concentrates in a few schools, hollowing out the rest.

Child welfare risks: Mid-year transfers, hostel shifts, and pressure to play through injury erode safety and education.

Escalating costs: Incentives and perks escalate, with budgets skewed toward short-term wins over long-term development.

Towards reform

The situation is not irreversible. Several reforms could restore balance and credibility:

1. **Transfer window:** One annual window, with no mid-season debuts except for family relocations, vetted independently.
2. **Transparency:** A public register of transfers and scholarships, updated weekly, plus monthly compliance reports.
3. **Clearance reforms:** Standardised NOC templates with a 14-day deadline. Silence equals approval. An independent education and sports tribunal handles appeals.
4. **Scholarship disclosure:** All benefits are audited and standardised.
5. **Alternative pathways:** Expanded Division B/C festivals, interzone tournaments, and national scouting to ensure players don't need a 'big badge' to be noticed.
6. **Incentives for loyalty:** Recognition or bonus points for schools fielding squads with a minimum percentage of players enrolled before age 16.
7. **Education Ministry ownership:** Rules should be codified as education policy, not just sporting bylaws, giving them enforceable weight.

Arguments in defence of poaching

Supporters argue that talented players gain access to better facilities, coaching, and exposure when moving to top schools. Stronger teams can raise standards across the board, and high-profile pathways often lead to national selection. For ambitious athletes, transfers can open doors otherwise closed.

The dark side

Yet, the cost is borne by schools that nurture raw talent only to lose it at its peak. St. John's Nugegoda, Piliyandala Central, Nugawela Central, and Prince of Wales are stark examples. Weakening even more established rugby schools like Science, Vidyartha, and Lumbini.

When feeder schools collapse, rugby development suffers nationally. The win-at-all-cost mentality encourages unethical practices, financial inducements, and manipulation of transfer rules. The result is a skewed league where wealth, not talent, decides outcomes.

At the crossroads

School rugby stands at a defining moment. Down one path lies unchecked commercialisation, where young players are traded assets and the sport becomes an arms race of resources. Down the other lies a return to values that made school rugby a cornerstone of Sri Lankan sporting culture: loyalty, integrity, and the patient nurturing of boys into leaders.

The old boys in the stands, the principals who sign NOCs, and the coaches under pressure all have a role in choosing which path to take. Without reform, school rugby risks becoming a hollow spectacle, divorced from the traditions that gave it life. With courage, transparency, and accountability, it can still preserve its soul, while adapting to modern realities.

The question is no longer whether poaching exists — it is whether schools, administrators, and regulators will act before the game's future is lost to the marketplace.

SPORTS TODAY

Athapaththu aiming high at Women's World Cup



Sri Lanka captain Chamari Athapaththu believes the fact that the upcoming ICC Women's Cricket World Cup played on the sub-continent will prove advantageous for her side and has high hopes for her side at the upcoming event given their affinity with the likely conditions teams will face.

The Asian team returns to the 50-over World Cup after missing the most recent edition in New Zealand in 2022 and Athapaththu thinks the side can be more than competitive at the eight-team tournament to be staged in India and Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka finished in fifth place - their highest ever position at a Women's World Cup - the last time the event was held in the sub-continent back in 2013 and Athapaththu believes that bodes well for her side ahead of the start of the tournament on 30 September.

"The sub-continent conditions are something we are used to, and I feel that will give us a secret advantage," Athapaththu told the ICC.

"Combined with the experience of our senior players, we have a strong balance of youth and maturity, and this year's World Cup is a real chance for us to shine.

"This tournament is also a chance for us to raise our standards to a new level.

"All the teams in this World Cup are here to win so we will not underestimate anyone. We will treat every opponent with equal respect and give our best in every single match, starting with the opener against India in Guwahati on 30 September."

Following that tournament opener, Sri Lanka will play five of their remaining six matches at the event in front of their home fans in Colombo and Athapaththu is hoping the crowd will come out and support the side.

"We are excited to be playing some matches in front of our own fans. It's a huge advantage and a good opportunity for us," she said.

"Sri Lankan cricket has come a long way since the 1990s and we have taken part in several World Cups since.

"In my own time, I can confidently say that we've grown so much as a team over the years.

"In 2013, we beat defending champions England as well as India and that was by far the best achievement we had in a World Cup up to that point.

"I feel we have only gotten better since and that we can compete against any side in the world."

Squad: Chamari Athapaththu (c), Hasini Perera, Vishmi Gunarathne, Harshitha Samarawickrama, Kaveesha Dilhari, Nilakshika Silva, Anushka Sanjeewani, Imesha Dulani, Dewmi Vihanga, Piumi Wathsala, Inoka Ranaweera, Sugandika Dasanayaka, Udeshika Prabodani, Malki Madara, Achini Kulasooriya.

SLC Under-23 Tournament

Bloomfield and CCC enter final



Nisala Abeyrathne

Bloomfield C & AC and CCC entered the final of the SLC Under-23 Inter Clubs Two Day cricket tournament conducted by Sri Lanka Cricket on Friday.

In the semi-final, Bloomfield won on the first inning against Negombo CC at NCC and CCC won on the first inning against Nugegoda S & WC at SSC. Nisala Abeyrathne of Bloomfield C & AC claimed 5 wickets for 24 runs against Negombo CC at NCC. Many overs lost both match due to rain and ground wet conditions.

Bloomfield will meet CCC in the final next week.

At NCC

Negombo CC: 116 (39.3) (Kaveen Fernando 39, Thathsara Eshan 21, Nisala Abeyrathne 5/24, Mihiranga Silva 2/32, Dulaj Samuditha 2/35)

Bloomfield: 147/5 (49) (Asitha Wanninayake 69*, Pathum Rathnayake 22*, Tharindu Harshana 22, Hansaja Hiruna 3/66)

At SSC

CCC: 179 (40.3) (Sahan Kosala 41, Dulnith Sigera 38, Pawan Rathnayake 26, Inuka Karannagoda 22, Abdul Hakam 3/59, Abhishek Anandakumara 2/25, Nirmala Rathnayake 2/39) and 61/2 (12.1) (Arosha Sithumina 30, Abdul Hakam 2/9)

Nugegoda S & WC: 143 (48.2) (Akram Muthalib 69, Sadew Samarasinghe 20, Inuka Karannagoda 3/31, Duvindu Ranathunga 3/37)

(IR)



Asia Cup

WELLALAGE TO REJOIN NATIONAL TEAM AFTER MOURNING LOSS OF FATHER

BY MUSTAQ SYDEEN

Dunith Wellalage is expected to rejoin the national team on Saturday (20), following a brief departure from the Asia Cup squad after the passing of his father, Suranga Wellalage. The development was confirmed to *Ceylon Today* by Sri Lanka Team Manager Mahinda Halangoda.

Wellalage, 21, flew back to Colombo on Friday (19), accompanied by Halangoda, shortly after learning of his father's sudden demise in the aftermath of Sri Lanka's win over Afghanistan. His return was to be with family during the period of mourning.

While his absence was a significant emotional moment for the team, Wellalage is likely to return to the camp in time for Sri Lanka's Super Four clash against Bangladesh on Saturday. However, a final decision on his availability for the match is yet to be made.

The Sri Lankan squad remains focused on the task ahead, as they look to carry forward their momentum in the tournament despite the recent emotional setback.

Sri Lanka will take on Bangladesh on 20 September in what promises to be a crucial fixture in the Super Four stage of the Asia Cup.

Under-19 Limited Overs

Defending champs St. Joseph's record third win

Defending champions St. Joseph's College Colombo recorded their third win in the first round on Friday when they beat D.S. Senanayake College Colombo by 86 runs.

Dharmaraja Kandy (DLS method), Maliyadeva Model School Kurunegala, Sripalee Horana, Karandeniya Central, St. Thomas' Bandarawela and Nova Royal College Siyambalape also won their fixtures. Too matches ended without a result due to rain.

At Darley Road

St. Joseph's: 173 (41.5) (Rishma Amarasinghe 64, Dilpa Ruwandaka 27, Nimthaka Gunawardane 26, Mario Suraweera 22, Basuru Jayasena 2/44)

D.S.S: 87 (29.4) (Vishwa Peiris 3/22, Thisanga Perera 3/27, Mario Suraweera 2/11)

At Lake View Kandy Dharmaraja

Kandy: 169/6 (25) (Gavesh Poorna 36, Chanuth Jayasinghaarachchi 32, Sasith Bandara 27*, Tharindu Warnakulage 27, Kashyapa Dissanayaka 25, Sonal Ashvin 2/26, Dimath Abeysingha 2/40)

Maliyadeva: 132/6 (21.3) (Chenuja Anujaya 46, Dimath Abeysinghe 44*, Sasith Bandara 3/18, Chanuth Jayasinghaarachchi 2/10)

In Jaffna

St. Patrick's: 69 (33.3) (Oshan Thilakarathna 5/13, Vimukthi Kularathna 2/5)

Maliyadeva MS: 71/3 (11.5) (Sayuru Jayathilaka 21*)

In Karandeniya

Karandeniya CC: 169/8 (32) (Benuka Rehan 51, Lochana Ravindu 25, Ashen Rasindu 21, Sahas Abrew 3/21, Senul Koswatta 2/24)

St. Thomas Matale: 161/9 (32) (Ranud Karunarathne 50, Himeth Panditharathne 38, Chathura Rathnayake 20*, Matheesha Pradeeptha 4/37)

In Horana

Nalanda Boy's NS Minuwangoda: 72 (23) (Adeesha Weerasinghe 3/18, Shehan Kumara 2/14, Danuja Muller 2/17)

Sripalee: 75/2 (13) (Kasun Sandaruwan 45*)

In Veyangoda

Bandaranayake MMV: 93 (27) (Hesara Duleena 35, Dinuwan Dewsara 2/8, Gavindu Ranasinghe 2/14, Sadew Nimsara 2/24)

Nova Royal: 94/5 (16.5) (Geeth Pahansilu 41, Uvindu Pahan 26*, Vihanga Vidodha 3/17, Chamath Pathiraja 2/17)

In Kalutara (No result)

Vidyaloka Galle: 155 (37.2) (S. Anuhas 25, Lidula Nuwanga 23, Abhilash Alankara 20, Taruka Saminijith 3/32, Hashen Imsara 2/9, Rinush Rashmika 2/41)

Tissa Central: 93/4 (19.3) (Nethsara Yasmitha 40*, Lidula Nuwanga 3/10)

In Badulla

St. Thomas' B'wela: 128 (48.4) (Samodh Kethaka 30, Dineth Pahasara 22, Kaveesha Geeth 3/21, Savinu Mendis 3/33, Pahan Damsara 2/20)

Sri Rahula Katugastota: 121 (38) (Nilanga Pathum 25, Thaveesha Shenal 22, Adeesha Anjana 2/20, Tharun Wanasinghe 2/22, Kethaka Kodithuwakku 2/23)

(IR)

Asia Cup 2025

Sri Lanka seal Super 4 spot with clinical win over Afghanistan

Asalanka hails near-perfect performance; Kusal Mendis shines in chase

BY MUSTAQ SYDEEN

Sri Lanka continued their impressive run in the Asia Cup, sealing a spot in the Super 4 with a dominant six-wicket victory over Afghanistan. The win, which came in the final match of Group B, ensured Sri Lanka maintained a perfect record in the tournament, having won all three of their group-stage encounters.

Afghanistan, who posted a challenging total of 170, were left to rue missed opportunities as Sri Lanka chased the target with relative ease. Kusal Mendis was the star of the show, remaining unbeaten on 74 off 52 balls. His composed innings anchored the chase, with valuable contributions from Kusal Perera (28) and Kamindu Mendis (26).

On the bowling front, it was Nuwan Thushara who led the charge, claiming 4-18 with the ball. His early breakthroughs, including the dismissals of Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Sediqullah Atal, and Karim Janat, put Afghanistan on the back foot. Despite a blistering knock from Mohammad Nabi, who scored 60 from 22 balls, Afghanistan finished with 169-7, setting Sri Lanka a target they would comfortably surpass.

Sri Lanka's response was clinical, and though they faced a brief flurry of late wickets, the total of 171-4 was enough to secure a spot in the Super 4. Captain Charith Asalanka praised his team's performance, calling it 'almost perfect.'

"We did a good job, especially with the ball early on," Asalanka said. "The only hiccup came in the last over, but overall, the team executed the plan well."



All set for SLB Novices Championship 2025 in Ratnapura



All arrangements have been made in place to host the Sri Lanka Badminton Novices Championship 2025 between 28 September and 2 October at three selected venues in Ratnapura. The five-day grand competition for novice shuttlers has already drawn a large number of young and aspiring shuttlers from all parts of Sri Lanka, where the next generation of badminton stars are expected to compete under exciting surroundings.

The organisers, Sri Lanka Badminton (SLB), have been fully supported by the Regional Development Committee, Sabaragamuwa Province Badminton, the entity who have taken the onus to conduct the event. Events will be held simultaneously at the Deshabandhu Lt. Col. W. Wimaladasa Indoor Stadium in Kuruwita, the Sabaragamuwa Province Indoor Sports Complex and the Seevali College Indoor Stadium, both situated in Ratnapura.

The five-day event includes competitions for shuttlers of the age categories of Under-19, Under-17, Under-15, Under-13 and Under-11.

The vast number of shuttlers will compete under Boy's and Girl's in Singles as well as Doubles under Junior Events. The Open Event for shuttlers of 14-years and above, includes Singles and Doubles events for Men and Women and Mixed categories. The entire tournament will be conducted in accordance with the BWF Laws of Badminton.

The competition will officially take off at all three venues with the preliminary round matches on 28 September, and will proceed until 30 September before the knockout stages. The quarter-finals and semi-finals have been slotted to take place on 1 October, followed by selected semi-finals and finals of all age categories on 2 October, followed by the awards ceremony.

The main draw of the tournament will take place on 24 September at the SLB Headquarters at No. 28, Maitland Place, Colombo 7.

The tournament is sponsored by Mobil, Sunquick and LiNing.

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