

*Signature of*

# THE EXECUTIVE

1<sup>ST</sup> VOLUME / NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2021





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**THE EXECUTIVE**

1ST VOLUME / NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2021



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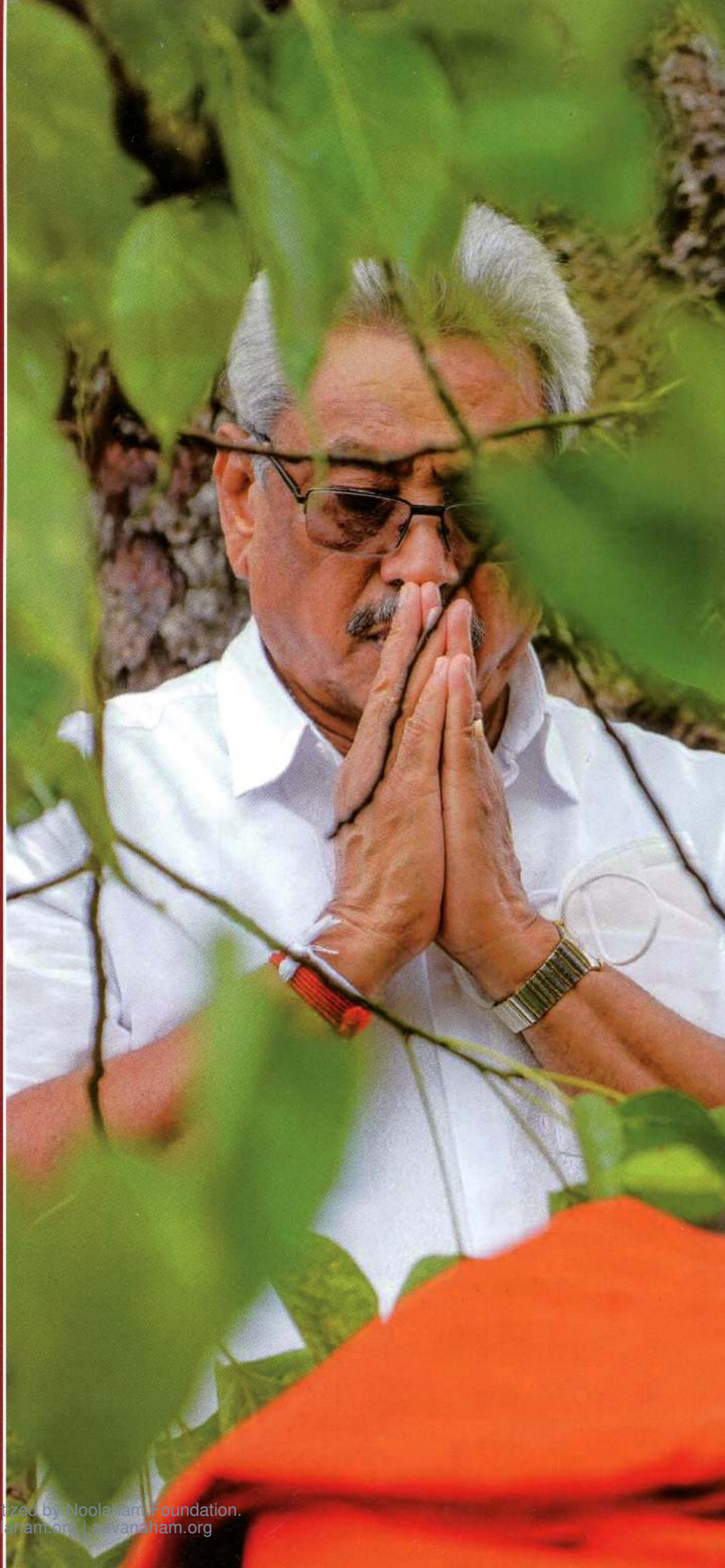
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## BANNING CHEMICAL FERTILIZERS; DIFFICULT DECISION FOR A VIRTUOUS OUTCOME

Protein is an essential nutrient to any living being. What plants need to grow are the plant nutrients (N,P,K), they could be supplied through chemical means and organic means. What the Sri Lankan government recently did was merely allow those plant nutrients with a natural origin to be imported to the country.

Of course, it would be carried out under close scrutiny by the authorities to avoid importing any harmful fertilizers into the country. The Government's decision to ban chemical fertilizers from being imported to the country was not, and most definitely will not be reversed.

Recent researches by many prestigious universities say that rulers are reluctant to make tough calls due to a number of reasons. In a 10 year research by Howard university states that "more than 2,700 leaders, 57% percent of newly appointed executives said that decisions were more complicated and difficult than they expected."

Throughout the history some wise decisions by rulers were not popular among their contemporaries. Some even were laughed upon and ridiculed at. But they were sometime later, or years later went down as historical decisions that made those who were resilient in taking them as the true humane and foreseeing leaders in the history of mankind.

African Americans in the US are forever indebted to Abraham Lincoln for his decision to abolish slavery, which was not popular back in





the day and he even ultimately had to pay with his life. That was only one of the wise decisions by a true leader to his people. In a nutshell, decisions that seem vague and hopeless, might not be for you, it could be for the future generations in the years to come.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's decision to suspend the import of chemical fertilizer to Sri Lanka could be startling, to some, even terrifying at a glance. This decision was no different from President's harsh decision to ban imports of Ethanol or Turmeric to Sri Lanka. Following the ban on Ethanol import, local sugar factories are earning a profit today.

When importing Turmeric was suspended, along with the scarcity in the market and with the astronomical prices for Turmeric, some foreign media outlets went even as far as to say "In Sri Lanka, turmeric is being exchanged for gold on the black market". Unfortunately they were true. In September 2020, four weeks after the ban, a Turmeric kilo was as expensive as Rs 4,500.

But today, with more local farmers encouraged to grow Turmeric, within less than a year of its ban, Sri Lanka is capable of meeting 75% of its domestic requirement locally.

Apparently, to some, President Rajapaksa's decision to ban

importation of chemical fertilizer is a sequel to the Turmeric import ban, or a futile and feeble attempt to discredit his administration.

Sri Lanka has been struggling to ban chemical fertilizers for decades. Chemical fertilizer usage in the country began 45 years ago and it has been a major social threat ever since.

The widespread use of these fertilizers has contaminated the soil and the water, and many experts believe that it has directly led to the increase in cancers and kidney diseases unarguably making it one of the major issues that needs to be addressed immediately.

Make no mistake, President's decision to ban chemical fertilizer





**LOCAL AS WELL AS FOREIGN EXPERTS BELIEVE THAT AS A COUNTRY, SRI LANKA CAN CERTAINLY EXPECT LONG-TERM BENEFITS FROM THE USE OF ORGANIC FERTILIZERS.**



was not a decision done in a hurry. It was planned from the very beginning of his administration. The decision was mentioned in the National Policy Framework "Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour".

Prior to the implementation of that decision, stocks of fertilizer

required for the forthcoming season had been imported. Already 300,000 metric tons of fertilizer required for 1 1/2 million hectares of cultivated land has been distributed. At the same time about 8,000 metric tons of organic fertilizer has been distributed. The Government

**Marise May:**  
Co-founder at  
Cha's Organics  
in Montreal,  
Quebec,  
Canada



**Ayubowan !**

*I'm Marise. I'm from Canada. I just want to give a message to Sri Lanka, to really encourage this transition towards less chemicals in agriculture. It's a wonderful initiative to grow more organic foods and I just want to say that as a Canadian importer and a member of Canada's Organic Trade Association, Canada and the World is ready for more organic food. So, I'm really proud of Sri Lanka, I'm proud to be a part of this transition and to be able to support the organic farmers. And I just want to thank everyone for trusting and going organic.*



guarantees that all organic fertilizer required for farming will be provided for the forthcoming Maha Season. With this policy decision, a large number of entrepreneurs and companies have come forward to produce organic fertilizer in the country.

Local as well as foreign experts believe that as a country, Sri Lanka can certainly expect long-term benefits from the use of organic fertilizers. Soil fertility, increased productivity and higher income earnings can be expected. More importantly, with 100% fresh produce harvested from organic fertilizer, Sri Lanka has the potential for a bigger market for agricultural products and a healthier population.

Even those who are of the opinion that agriculture cannot be developed



without chemical fertilizers will surely see the long-term economic benefits of this decision in the future. Today, there is a great demand around the world for the products produced utilizing organic fertilizers.

When Sri Lanka is internationally recognized as a country that does not use chemical fertilizers, a large market opens up for local produce. The Farmers and entrepreneurs can expect a profitable price for their produce from this. The demand for organic food in the world is immense. This is a unique opportunity for the country.

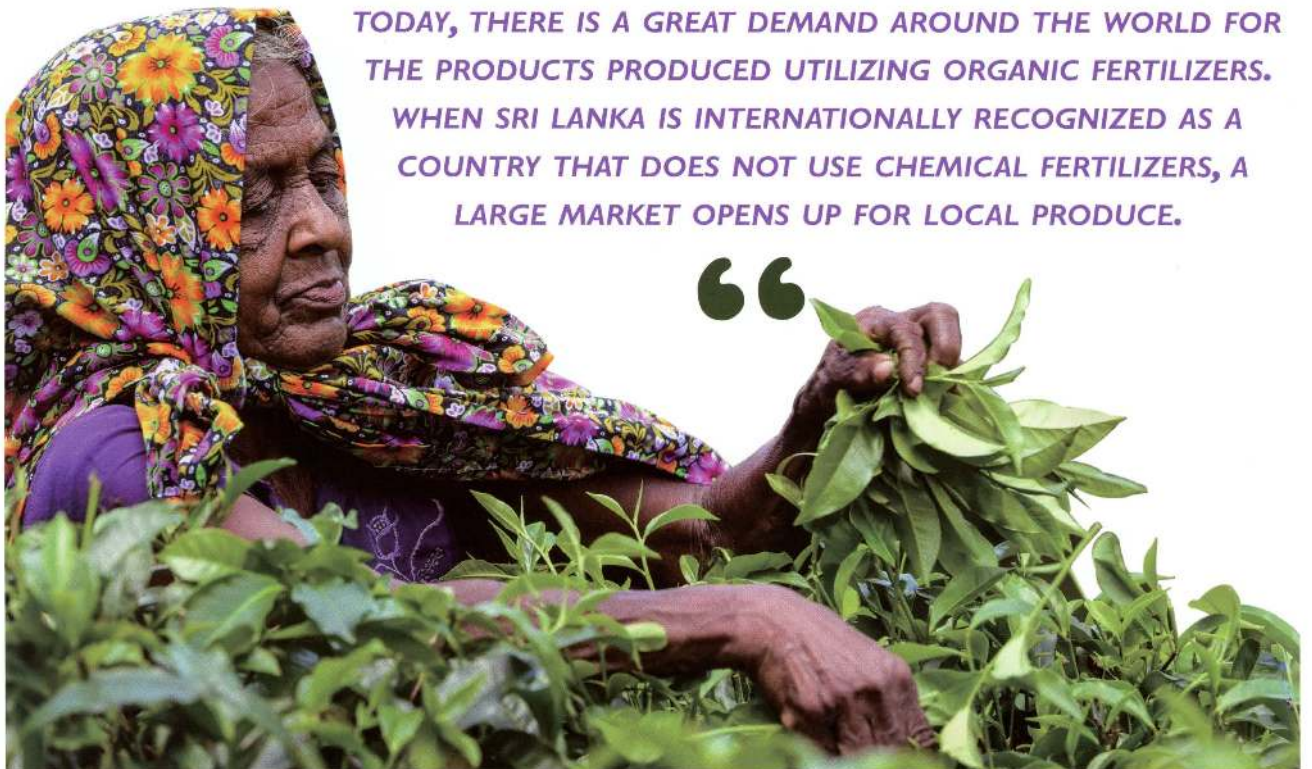
Therefore, foreseeing entrepreneurs should be prepared to reap the benefits of a prosperous future, instead of hanging on to petty grievances in this seemingly impossible yet achievable endeavour. Remember, it always gets worse before it gets better.

 Supun Marasinghe

”

**TODAY, THERE IS A GREAT DEMAND AROUND THE WORLD FOR THE PRODUCTS PRODUCED UTILIZING ORGANIC FERTILIZERS. WHEN SRI LANKA IS INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED AS A COUNTRY THAT DOES NOT USE CHEMICAL FERTILIZERS, A LARGE MARKET OPENS UP FOR LOCAL PRODUCE.**

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# BIMSTEC

## PUSH FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION UNDER 'NEW NORMAL'

Sri Lanka, as the Chair of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) has a special responsibility of ensuring the speedy cooperation of the Member States of the Bay region. Foreign Secretary Jayanath Colombage, chairing the 21st Session of the Senior Officials' Meeting (SoM), urged BIMSTEC Member States to embrace the "new normal, and adapt fast".

The BIMSTEC ministerial meetings and expert group dialogues will lay the groundwork for major policy decisions required for a giant leap in regional cooperation at the 5th BIMSTEC Summit to be chaired by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2022.

The Bay of Bengal is increasingly gaining salience as a strategic maritime space. The geographical area of the Bay of Bengal region is more than two million square kilometres, and the Bay is situated between vital sea routes and stretches from Sri Lanka, up the coast of eastern India, curving under Bangladesh and Myanmar, and heading south along Thailand and Malaysia, until it reaches the northern coast of Sumatra in Indonesia.



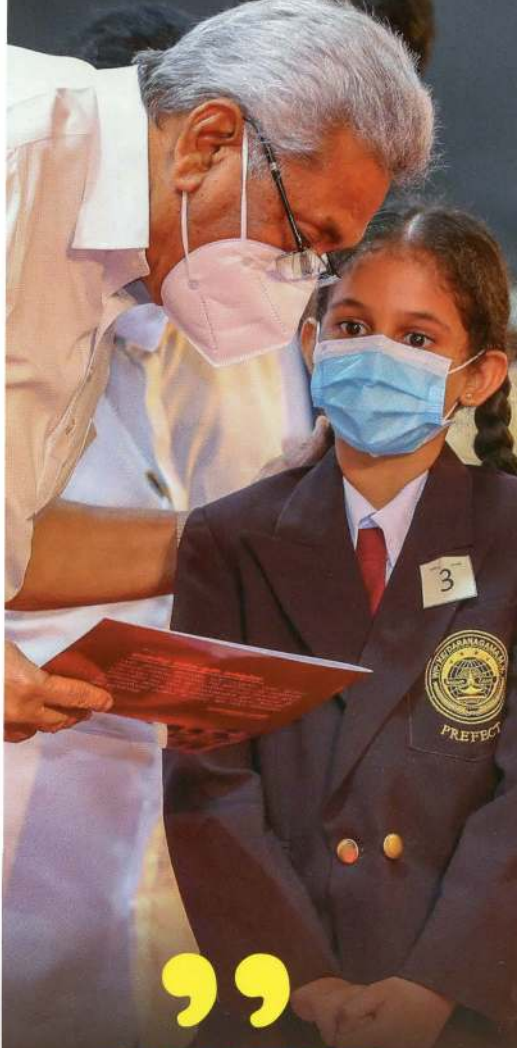




Foreign Secretary Colombage, in his inaugural remarks at the first virtual meeting of BIMSTEC senior officers stated that global dynamics will not be the same after the COVID-19 pandemic as it has affected all States, in various degrees, as it transformed from a health crisis to an economic and human crisis as described by the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres.

This is a reflection of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's call for support of global solidarity, unity and renewed multi-lateral cooperation in overcoming COVID -19. In his address to virtual Non-Aligned Summit he urged the member states to support collective global action in combating this deadly virus and sharing best practices and lessons learnt. "It is essential to ensure that all countries have unrestricted access to vital medical resources required to respond to this virus and do not face impediments in their procurement.





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**THE PROPOSED  
SETTING UP OF  
THE BIMSTEC  
TECHNOLOGY  
TRANSFER FACILITY  
IN COLOMBO  
WOULD FURTHER  
AUGMENT THE  
WORK SRI LANKA  
PROPOSES TO  
UNDERTAKE IN  
THE SECTOR.**  
“

As Sri Lanka notes with deep concern that developing countries are facing an unprecedented economic and debt crisis due to the pandemic, the need for debt relief and financial stimulus for these countries must be duly recognized,” the President said and added, “in this regard, Sri Lanka re-iterates its call and joins global appeals for international financial institutions and donors to provide debt relief and greater financial assistance to vulnerable countries.”

Given that the region is home to 23% of the world population, the devastating effects affecting the vulnerable sections can only cripple economies and divert resources that were once used for upward mobility in Member States. The sector driven organization should collectively promote trade and investment cooperation, strengthen energy cooperation, increase connectivity and people-to-people contact, focus on disaster management and public health, combat terrorism and extremism, deal with the adverse effects of climate change and work towards poverty alleviation.

As the lead country for Information, Technology and Innovation sector in BIMSTEC, Sri Lanka informed that it will put forward proposals that would enhance the use of technological tools in daily life to

address post COVID-19 effects and also cater to the demand for internet based economic activities and that the proposed setting up of the BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility in Colombo would further augment the work Sri Lanka proposes to undertake in the sector.

For the success of a regional organization in this region, the commitment of the economic giant, India is a prerequisite. The BIMSTEC could take a giant leap with the unstinted support of its biggest member, India. Now it is for the new BIMSTEC Chair, Sri Lanka to work in cooperation with India to take the initiative for BIMSTEC to perform successfully. To start with, there should be a strong management mechanism as nothing will progress unless the BIMSTEC secretariat is significantly empowered. Regions often lead to multilateral organizations, but strong organizations can also make or revive regions.

The Bay of Bengal has a common history and shared cultural heritage, which is the backbone of multilateral understanding and respect. Hence, it is the responsibility of BIMSTEC leaders to further strengthen cooperation among member countries through regional integration, creating a prosperous Bay of Bengal region.





## FAR-REACHING MEASURES TO BUTTRESS FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES AND ATTRACT INVESTMENTS

The Government announced several far-reaching measures to prop up foreign exchange reserves and curb outflows recently following the agreement reached at the Meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers. Several innovative non-debt creating measures have been introduced to woo more foreign investments and funds.

The Cabinet decision was in line with the policy outlined by

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in his address to the nation on June 25. Referring to the recent international conference on investment opportunities in Sri Lanka via Zoom, he said, "The enthusiasm shown by local and foreign investors sends a positive message about the potential for investments in our future development. If we can achieve success in terms of foreign investment which would be on par with the other rapidly

developing countries in the region, it will be a great help to strengthen our country's foreign reserves.

The people of our country can expect many direct and indirect benefits through this. We hope to open up these investments to the general public in our country by giving them the opportunity to be listed on the Sri Lankan stock market," he said.



One of the new measure was to allow companies incorporated in Sri Lanka to invest in the Government's International Sovereign Bonds (ISBs) and facilitate local listed companies to raise foreign funds. To stem the outflow of foreign exchange, the Government extended the ban on import of non-essential products by a further six months from July 2021.

It was reported that some licensed commercial banks and registered companies in Sri Lanka had expressed interest in obtaining overseas loans to invest in Sri Lankan Government ISBs. Sri Lanka's interbank forex market saw some isolated outright trades over the past week and market based swap deals but activity had largely dried up after outright trades were banned by the central bank above 199.90 to the US dollar.

Banks are also not expected to quote over 203 to the US dollar to import customers or buy from exporters below the level. To finance the outflows some banks had bought above the cartel-like agreement supposedly existing among banks not to pay a higher rate to exporters following informal requests.

Meanwhile the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) urged for calm and the avoidance of undue speculation over the country's financial capacity and debt servicing capability. A government statement said, "Taking into account the overall benefits available to the country, the Monetary Board of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka has agreed to allow licensed commercial banks, National Savings Banks and appropriate non-finance companies registered under the Companies Act No. 7 of 2007, to

purchase ISBs and Sri Lanka Development Bonds, subject to certain conditions."

The Monetary Board had recommended the implementation of the proposal submitted by the CSE considering several factors, such as increasing the interest of foreign investors in Sri Lankan listed companies, attracting foreign currency into the country and increasing its participation, reducing the pressure on the Sri Lankan rupee, and making an alternative instead of Lankan companies going to foreign stock markets for funds.

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**THE ENTHUSIASM  
SHOWN BY  
LOCAL AND  
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INVESTORS  
SENDS A POSITIVE  
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ABOUT THE  
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INVESTMENTS  
IN OUR FUTURE  
DEVELOPMENT.**  
“

Explaining the reason for recent regulations, CBSL Governor Prof. W.D. Lakshman said that some of these restrictions have been gradually removed, although the Central Bank is of the view that there is further space to curtail non-essential and non-urgent imports, given the continued challenges emanating from multiple waves of COVID-19. He added that to enable Sri Lanka to successfully service its foreign debt commitment amidst reduced foreign currency inflows and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government rationalized selected non-essential imports.





## MILITARY ROLE IN SRI LANKA'S BATTLE AGAINST COVID-19

As of November 04<sup>th</sup> of 2021, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases reported in Sri Lanka stood at 542,793. Out of the total, over 510,000 patients have been discharged from the hospitals after being

recovered. According to the Epidemiology Unit at the Health Ministry, 13,791 patients were still under medical care. It is safe to say that unlike many countries, Sri Lanka's approach to contain the COVID-19

pandemic has been proactive, systematic and holistic. One of the main reasons for this approach to be systematic and efficient is unarguably the role the military played in the fight against the deadly virus.

The very first move Sri Lanka took in relation to fight the pandemic was the establishment of the National Operation Center for Prevention of COVID-19 Outbreak (NOCPCO) headed by Army Commander Shavendra Silva in early 2020 even before a single COVID-19 case was detected in the country.

Sri Lanka was among the very first countries that intervened to get the students and residents who were in China's Wuhan where the COVID-19 pandemic broke out. Accordingly, 33 students were flown back to Sri Lanka in late January 2020.

The task to set up the very first quarantine centre was entrusted with the Army. The 33 students were housed at a special quarantine facility at the Diyatalawa Army Base Hospital in the Uva Province.

Kasun Wickramage, 28, one of the students returned from China hailed the treatment they received at the military hospital. "When we heard that the military was going to take care of us, we were all overjoyed. We knew about their exemplary conduct and professionalism, and that guarantee was itself sufficient," he was quoted as having said.



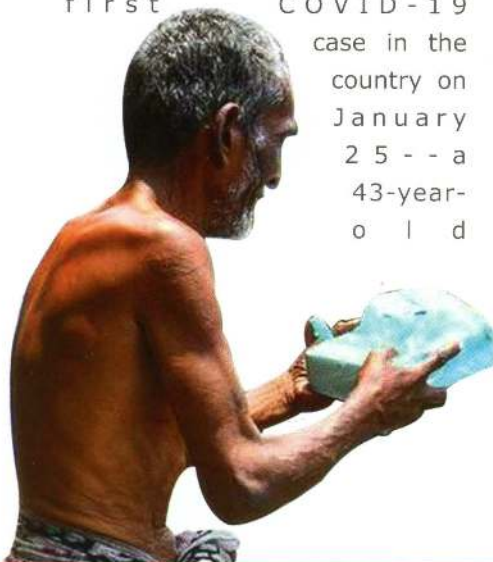
Subsequently, the Government took measures to direct the arrivals from selected countries where higher number of Covid 19 cases were reported to undergo mandatory quarantine.

The Army, the Navy and the Airforce efficiently converted some of their camps and other selected facilities into quarantine centres to house foreign arrivals.

According to the Army Commander, at the onset of the outbreak, 2,000 beds, 4,000 mattresses, 4,000 pillows and bed sheets that were used by Army personnel were lent to quarantine centers showing the selfless quality of the military personnel of Sri Lanka.

"With our small economy, we would do maximum to give the best of everything to our Sri Lankan expatriates taken to quarantine centers for this short period. Although we are now sleeping with a pillow, we are an Army who used to sleep in jungles under trees and stones for days and weeks," he said.

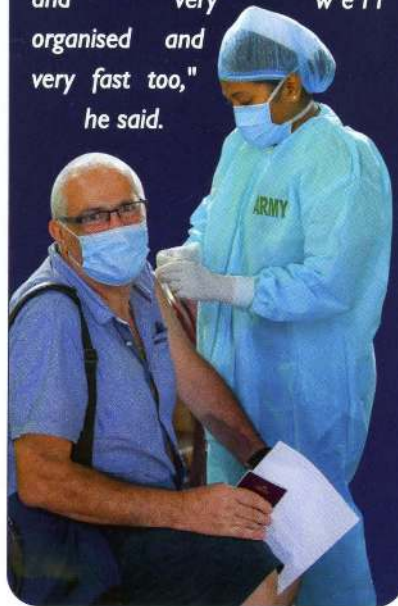
Following the detection of very first COVID - 19 case in the country on January 25 - - a 43-year-old



*Mr. Pascal from France, currently residing in Sri Lanka, visited the Army-run vaccination centre at the Viharamahadevi Park to receive his 2nd jab.*

*Sharing his thoughts with us, he said he was impressed by how well the Sri Lankan security forces have organized the vaccination drive.*

*"This is super good, incredible! and very well organised and very fast too," he said.*



Chinese national visiting here--and then the first Sri Lankan national who tested positive for the virus in Sri Lanka on March 11, things unfurled rapidly.

More quarantine centres were put up. In collaboration with the Health Ministry, the Ministry of Defence and other stakeholders



including the Police, the military have set up 15 quarantine centres as of mid March 2020.

Meanwhile, at the end of March 2019, the 'Ranaviru Apparels' garment factory of the Sri Lanka Army joined the fight against the fatal virus. The factory commenced producing disposable microfiber suits with shoe covers which can be used by medical teams while treating/ quarantining infected individuals.

Showcasing their efficiency, the 1 Corps of Engineer Services (CES) converted the former Voice of America building into a 50-bed quarantine facility within five days.

The military, unanimously and unopposed became the force that kept the covid-19 preventive measures implemented under the instructions of the health authorities.

Ensuring the transparency of all the processes, the Army Commander maintained constant dialogues with Defence Attaches and Advisers from foreign missions in Sri Lanka and updated on the measures taken to combat the virus spread.

One of the major setbacks the military and the nation at large suffered was the Emergence of a covid-19 cluster within the Sri Lanka Navy.



The Navy Camp at Welisara, in suburbs of Colombo, was isolated after a sailor engaged in quarantining work of drug addicts tested positive for COVID-19 in late April, 2020.

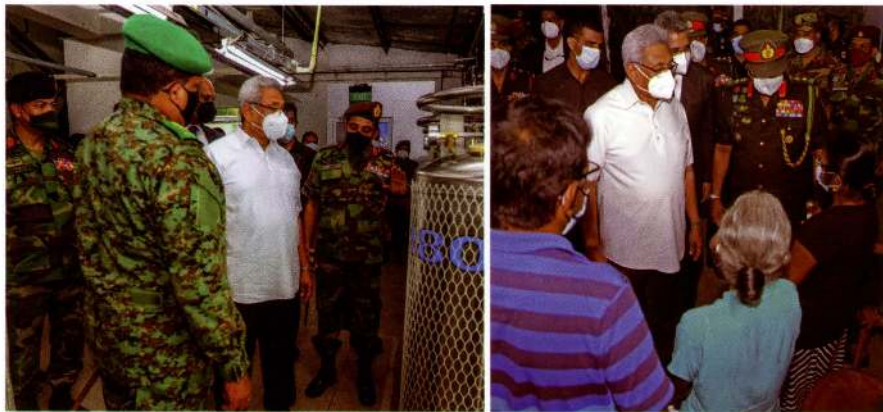
This resulted in a massive covid-19 spread within the Navy. A total of 906 sailors contracted the virus from the cluster which ended in late July 2020.

The military also helped the COVID-19 containing process by developing innovations. At one occasion, the Research & Development Branch of the Army and the Directorate of Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (DEME) developed 29 innovations covering the medical field.

Meanwhile, at the end of 2020, the Presidential Secretariat appointed 25 Senior Army Officers for all districts to enhance island-wide coordination for COVID-19 control work effective from 01 January 2021.

The new Chief Coordinating Officers would facilitate smooth conduct of district-wise Quarantine Centres, Transportation of Individuals for Quarantining and Treatment and Supply of Medicine among other responsibilities.

The military was also involved in transforming selected wards at identified hospitals as Intermediate Care Centres

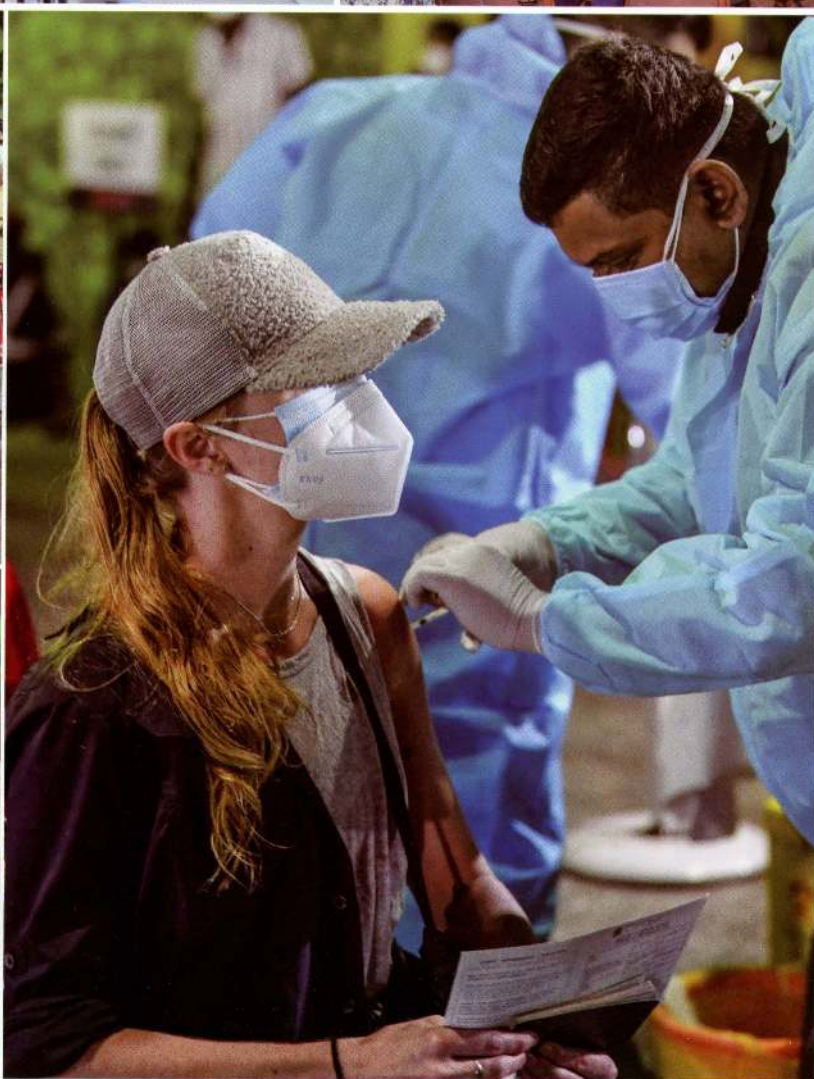
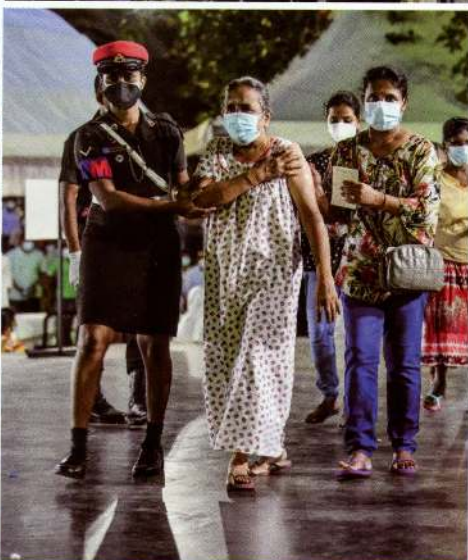
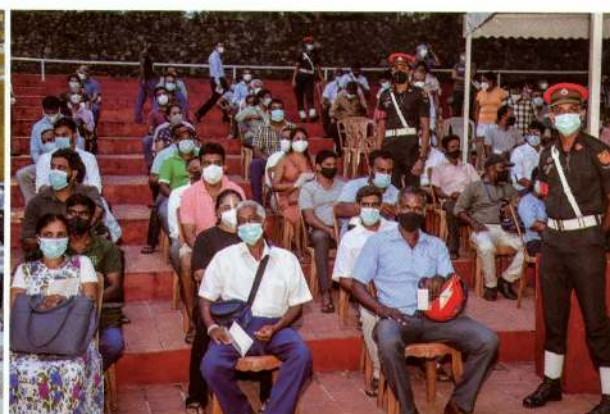


(ICC) to ease congestion of covid patients at hospitals. In May, one ward at the Tangalle Base Hospital was converted as an ICC.

One of the most significant

milestone of the military role in Sri Lanka's covid-19 campaign was the soldiers-improvised new ICC / Hospital with 1,200 beds for COVID-19 patients in Seeduwa--a city in the outskirts of Colombo.





Within mere 10 days, the army personnel were able to convert a facility offered by the Brandix Company into a fully pledged and state-of-the-art ICC with the sponsorship of Army Seva Vanitha Unit.

As many Sri Lankans know and praise, the military is the first to step up in any disaster be it natural disasters like landslides and floods or a global virus pandemic.

The Sri Lanka military, with its ability to utilize the limited number of resources, has so far successfully helped in the battle against the COVID-19 in the country in a systematic manner.

 Lahiru Pothmulla





# TOWARDS ERADICATING DIGITAL POVERTY

## LAPTOPS ON CONCESSIONARY TERMS TO STUDENTS

It is a universally accepted fact that use of information technological tools for education would vastly improve students'

capacity to gather knowledge. Although current levels of access to laptops, computers and Internet connections among

schoolchildren are very high in affluent countries, access is not evenly distributed across countries or across the population within countries. Less than one fifth of schoolchildren in Sri Lanka have access to a computer at home that they can use for schoolwork.





According to computer literacy statistics for 2019, issued by the Department of Census and Statistics, at least one computer is available in 22 percent of households in the country. That is about one out of every five households owns either a desktop or a laptop computer. This percentage is 38 percent in urban sector, but in rural and estate sectors show 19.7 percent and 4.6 percent respectively.

There is a vast gap between the developed and underdeveloped regions. When the provinces are considered the highest availability is in the Western province (34.3%) while the lowest availability is reported from the Uva (11.8%).

The disparities in access to home computers and the internet are known as the Digital Divide. A substantial

amount of money is spent on technology by the government and families in developing countries with the hope of improving educational outcomes of the young generation. Despite that, the developing countries are faced with "Digital poverty" which is a common problem due to heavy expenses required to fortify the young population with IT capacity. Although, it exists





all over the world, in advanced countries it is at a manageable level.

When in the United Kingdom it was decided to close schools and commence online education, it was found out that 24% of the students did not have computers or laptops at their homes. Matt Morden, Co-Head Teacher of Surrey Square primary school, in south London told media that in his school, 24% of pupils are effectively offline, in terms of being able to study from home.

"Their families might have mobile phones with internet connections, but for those in low-paid, insecure jobs, data is expensive. If families are struggling, the priority is going to be food, not data," he said. Furthermore, in addition to missing out on learning, those students without online connections, miss the sense of belonging from staying in touch with their friends and teachers when they do not attend school, Mr Morden says.

"The lockdown and the closure of schools has brought the digital divide to the forefront", he added.

This revelation clearly shows the gravity of the issue for a developing nation, when affluent countries are also faced with a similar issue, though at a lower magnitude.

Recently, Sri Lanka took a significant forward step to assist the new batch of university students to obtain much-needed laptops in order to be equipped with knowledge at par with their compatriots in affluent world.

The program to provide laptops on a concessionary payment scheme to the students who are qualified to enter universities commenced under the patronage of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The program has been formulated by the University Grants Commission in collaboration with the People's Bank, to digitalize the entire education system to meet current needs as envisioned in the national policy framework of "Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour".

"The 21st Century is known as the knowledge-centric century. In order to remain competitive globally, it is imperative that technology be integrated with every sector of the economy,





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**THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ARE FACED WITH "DIGITAL POVERTY" WHICH IS A COMMON PROBLEM DUE TO HEAVY EXPENSES REQUIRED TO FORTIFY THE YOUNG POPULATION WITH IT CAPACITY. ALTHOUGH, IT EXISTS ALL OVER THE WORLD, IN ADVANCED COUNTRIES IT IS AT A MANAGEABLE LEVEL.**

“

be it agriculture, industry or the service sector. It is imperative that we invest strategically in new technologies and integrate such innovations with our education system, and economy. In order

to enhance the quality of life of our people, we must launch a massive social transformation and create a Culture of Technological Innovation.” – Vistas of Prosperity & Splendour.

The newly-introduced loan scheme gives students the opportunity to buy a laptop, which will be equipped with an internet connection, software package and a 4 year warranty period.

A laptop is valued at Rs 80,000. During their university education the students are required to pay a sum of Rs. 500 monthly. This is an affordable amount as university students get a government grant under the Mahapola Scholarship Scheme introduced by late minister, Lalith Athulathmudali. The loan scheme gives students the opportunity to settle the payment within 6 years following their employment.





People's Bank has allocated Rs 3 billion for this project.

President Rajapaksa symbolically handed over relevant documents to six new students who will be enrolled to Universities for the academic year 2021 at the Presidential Secretariat on (Feb. 09).

This marked a significant milestone in the march towards Information Age which is also known as Computer Age associated with the Digital Revolution, just as the Industrial Revolution marked the birth of the Industrial Age. The Digital and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) revolutions are twin revolutions. The rapid developments in ICT have

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**THE NEWLY - INTRODUCED LOAN SCHEME GIVES STUDENTS THE OPPORTUNITY TO BUY A LAPTOP, WHICH WILL BE EQUIPPED WITH AN INTERNET CONNECTION, SOFTWARE PACKAGE AND A 4-YEAR WARRANTY PERIOD.**

greatly contributed in enhancing human living standards worldwide.

When the impacts of technology on educational outcomes is discussed, it is necessary to study two primary contexts in

which technology may be used for educational purposes. Those are classroom use in schools, and home use by students. Theoretically, computer use by schools and the use of computers at home have ambiguous implications for educational





achievement as expenditures devoted to technology necessarily offset inputs that may be more or less efficient, and time allocated to using technology may displace traditional classroom instruction and educational activities at home.

Families also spend a substantial amount of money on computers, software, and Internet connections each year. In the United States, for example, 86 percent of schoolchildren have access to a computer at home, while in some developing countries it is below 10%. These disparities in access to home computers and the Internet has created a yawning gap known as the Digital Divide. A better understanding of how computer technology affects educational outcomes is critical because it sheds light on whether such

technology is an important input in the educational production process and whether disparities in access will translate into educational inequality. The new scheme will ensure all the students, irrespective of their place of origin, will get a laptop and access to online education.

It is a fact that a substantial number of university students come from rural areas and now they will have equal educational opportunities. In developed world, most of the key economically effective environments are increasingly ICT dominant. Timely and accurate information on use of ICT itself is essential for justification and proper direction of the Government efforts, private sector investments, to study the changing pattern of the

demand for internet services and for continuous progress monitoring on ICT achievements.

For this, computer literacy data can contribute immensely to an understanding of the demand and supply of skills in the global knowledge based economy. Also statistics on the availability of a computer/laptop in households and usage of internet and email can be used to assess digital divide.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa fulfilled the new scheme as promised in his election manifesto to 'convert all universities to Smart Learning Universities' and to provide 'necessary technical support to students'. As he said, now the expectation from the universities is to 'produce technocrats to meet the demands of the 21st Century.'



# MEETING FOREIGN LEADERS AND VISITING MINISTERS



With Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi



Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan



Former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo



Chinese State Councilor and Defence Minister  
General Wei Fenghe



Indian External Affairs Minister  
Dr. S. Jaishankar





**US Ambassador Alaina B. Teplitz**



**Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu**



**Envoys of Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar, Vietnam and Malaysia**



**Former Swiss Ambassador Hanspeter Mock**



**High Commissioner of Bangladesh Tareq Md. Ariful Islam**



**British High Commissioner Sarah Hulton**



**Former New Zealand Ambassador Joanna Kempfers**

# CREDENTIALS & FAREWELLS

## HIGH COMMISSIONERS AND AMBASSADORS



**Iranian Ambassador Mohammad Zaeri Amirani**



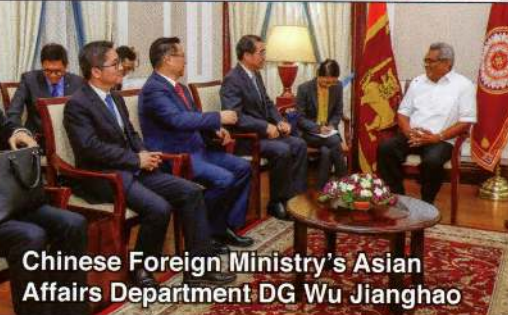
**Japanese Ambassador Akira Sugiyama**



**Canadian High Commissioner David McKinnon**



**Maldives High Commissioner Omar Abdul Razzak**



**Chinese Foreign Ministry's Asian Affairs Department DG Wu Jianghao**



**Former Ambassador of the UAE Ahmad Ali Al Mualla**



**Norwegian Ambassador Trine Joranli Eskedal**

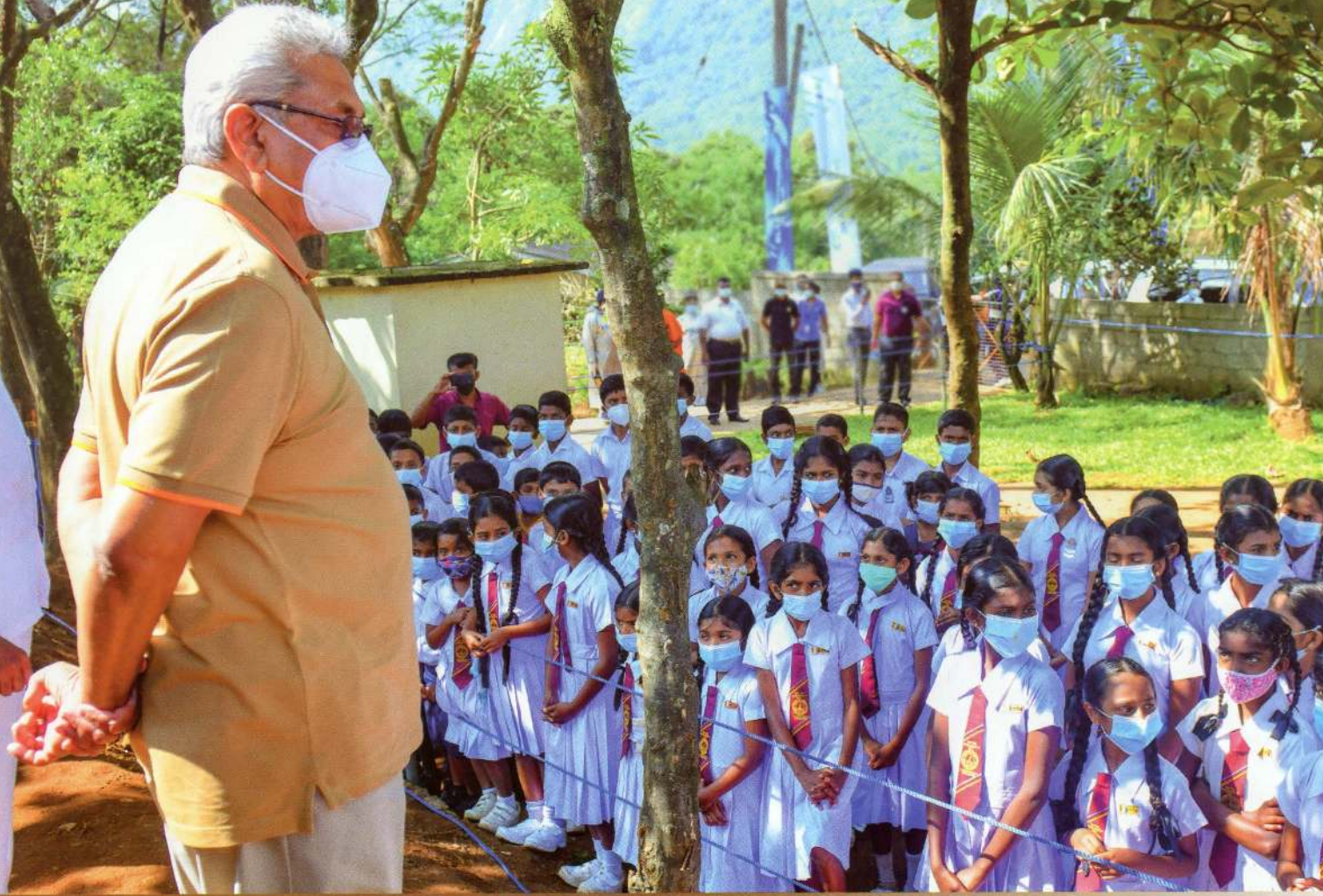


**Afghan Ambassador M. Ashraf Haidari**



**Australian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka David Holly**





# TOP PRIORITY

## FOR LONG - FELT

### EDUCATIONAL REFORMS

Sri Lanka, currently struggling to cope with severe socioeconomic challenges, has taken many short-term and long-term steps to solve them. It has been identified that education is the long-term solution to the problems that confront Sri Lankan society in building a dynamic, vibrant and a cohesive nation.

In considering the future of higher education in Sri Lanka, it

must be said that there are several issues which need to be addressed, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa pointed out at the Convocation of General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University recently.

The world is currently in the midst of what has been called the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Building on the digital revolution that took place in the second half of the twentieth century.

The changes are taking place at exponential speed, and are impacting almost every single industry in every single country. The ongoing global pandemic has only accelerated the pace of these changes further. Every country, every government, and every institution involved in education should therefore take note of these evolving changes.

Currently, required educational reforms are being examined on the basis of representations made by experts for the improvement of education reflecting the country's political options, its traditional values, priorities and vision of the future.



A study by National Institute of Education (NIE) stated that education stands at the crossroads today and the present structure of education, pace and nature of improvement cannot meet the needs of the present situation. Social life is passing through a phase which predicts a multifaceted crisis and the danger of erosion of long accepted values and the goal of democracy and professional ethics are being subjected to increasing strain.

The Constitution of Sri Lanka, in the Chapter on Directive Principles of State Policy and Fundamental Duties states that the government is pledged to achieve the objective of "complete eradication of illiteracy and the assurance to all persons of the right to universal and equal access to education at all levels".

The farsighted policy of free education pioneered by C W W Kannangara had given an equal opportunity to youths from remote parts of the country to get higher education and produced a capable national knowledge bank which understood the aspirations of the people, and social ethics and values of the country. However, with the rapid advances in the world, the need for educational reforms was recognized in the last few decades, but in spite of several national dialogues, a practical solution failed to be formulated so far.

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**THE CONSTITUTION OF SRI LANKA, IN THE CHAPTER ON DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLES OF STATE POLICY AND FUNDAMENTAL DUTIES STATES THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS PLEDGED TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVE OF “COMPLETE ERADICATION OF ILLITERACY AND THE ASSURANCE TO ALL PERSONS OF THE RIGHT TO UNIVERSAL AND EQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION AT ALL LEVELS”.**

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Every child has the right to education and other fundamental human rights are dependent upon the realization of the right to education. Though we have achieved a high level of enrolment and participation, yet a policy adjustment will need to consider the removal of disparities and provide equality of educational opportunities by meeting the needs of those who have been denied an opportunity so far.

Addressing the new KDU graduates recently, President Rajapaksa emphasized the need to reform the country's education system in order to create a citizen who can optimally contribute to the future world, the economy and development.

The Universities should not simply be degree-awarding institutions. The President points out that the country, the economy as well as the graduates themselves should benefit from this. He urged the education authorities to introduce a new curriculum as soon as possible, giving priority to practical needs.

By improving local education system, it will be possible to educate many Sri Lankan youths now go abroad for higher education. They migrate seeking foreign education because higher education in Sri Lanka has insufficient capacity to address student demand, especially at the undergraduate level.





According to a University World News report, Sri Lanka's 15 state universities admit only 23,000 students in 2018, out of the 240,000 who sit the university entrance (A-Level) examination. In the same year, some 12,000 Sri Lankan students reportedly sought university education abroad.

Two major decisions the government took last year was to give jobs to all unemployed graduates and to increase the

university intake. The university enrolment has been increased from 31,000 to 41,000. Open University will enroll an additional 10,000 students to their branches. The plans have been devised to register 10,000 individuals to follow degrees in Information Technology.

President Rajapaksa advised the officials to expedite the review process of the already drafted National Education Policy and implement it accordingly. He said

that the current labour market discrepancies have occurred due to the fact that educational reforms that suit the country have not taken place for many years.

"We cannot afford to lag behind. Our higher education system must adapt swiftly. It has to offer our students an education that will remain relevant despite fast changing circumstances and help them find gainful employment in future," the President said.





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‘Enhancing focus on research and development will also have a beneficial impact on the rankings of Sri Lankan universities internationally. Improving these rankings is important if we are to attract more foreign students as well as attract and retain talented faculty members at our universities’, the President added.

New reforms should create a background to facilitate access to education for the children who were left behind to reach their expected academic destination without age restrictions. Former NIE Director General Dr. Upali Sedere pointed out in a research paper that disparities were evident across the provinces, districts, and communities.

Regional income inequality has been increasing in Sri Lanka during the past few decades. The Western Province represented 5.7 percent of the total land area and 28 percent of the total population but the Western Province contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased from 43 percent to almost 50 percent in a decade.

Meanwhile, contribution made by three other provinces together, namely Sabaragamuwa, Central, and Uva to the total GDP decreased from 24 percent to 19 percent. The Western Province alone contributed to 2/3 of the service sector in Sri Lanka.

President emphasized that it is every child’s right to have an equal opportunity in education irrespective of their ethnic and religious differences.

New reforms should create a background to facilitate access to education for the children who were left behind to reach their expected academic destination without age restrictions. President proposed the practical implementation of a student-centric education system instead of the exam centric education.

Technology will play a key role in every single economic sector in the future, the President said and told the new graduates that, at minimum, all graduates from our university system need to have some knowledge about new technologies.

“That is why I have requested all the Vice Chancellors to immediately introduce IT and Computer Studies as subjects for all of their students, irrespective of their field of study. This will give them much better prospects of finding lucrative employment or succeeding in their own businesses after they graduate. Alongside familiarity with technology, possessing a knowledge of English is another critical requirement for our youth. If any young person has a sound knowledge of English and has access to the internet, there is no limitation on what they can learn because there are so many resources available to them online, free of charge.”





# NEW VISTAS OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Seeking new avenues of investments and economic cooperation, Sri Lanka ventured into new horizons and made an appeal to members of high profile Boao Forum for Asia, which focuses on investment cooperation, science and technology and innovations. Boao Forum for Asia (BFA), a brain-child of three eminent leaders - Fidel V. Ramos, former President of the Philippines, Bob Hawke, former Prime

Minister of Australia, and Morihiro Hosokawa, former Prime Minister of Japan - is a non profit international organization which has become a platform for dialogs among leaders of national governments, industrial and business circles, and academic circles of countries in Asia and other continents about the important issues in Asia and the world.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa utilized his virtual address on April 20 to seek the support of the Governments of member countries of the Boao Forum to encourage more businesses from their countries to consider Sri Lanka as a destination for their investments. "We particularly seek to attract investments in export-oriented industries that will have a beneficial impact on our economy. We seek the contributions of our international partners to aid this process. We do not seek to borrow, but to encourage investments. We have developed attractive policies for Foreign Direct Investments, including a favourable tax structure and other incentives," he said.

The Boao Forum, headquartered in Boao, in China's Hainan Province has many governments as well as leading international business corporates as members. Hence, it is an ideal platform to seek investment partnerships. It was jointly initiated by 29 member states. The founding purpose of BFA was to promote economic integration in Asia. Its mission now is to pool positive energy for the development of Asia and the world.

President Rajapaksa, in his virtual address on Monday, expressed trust that the BFA Annual Conference 2021 will make a beneficial contribution at this globally challenging time to countries within the region and between the region and other parts of the world.



Chinese President Xi Jinping said in his address that Boao Forum exerted a significant influence on boosting development in Asia and beyond. "As an important member of the Asian family, China has kept deepening reform and opening-up while promoting regional cooperation. The principles of equality, mutual respect and mutual trust must be put front and center in state-to-state relations. Bossing others around or meddling in others' internal affairs would not get one any support," he said.

"We must advocate peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom, which are common values of humanity, and encourage exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations to promote the progress of human civilization," President Xi stressed.

International media stressed the importance of high-profile Boao Forum and described it as 'China's version of the World Economic Forum in Davos'. The Bloomberg says China is signaling it's open for business with the resumption of Boao Forum for Asia, an opportunity for the governments to make a renewed effort to lure foreign investors in a post-pandemic world. Over 2,000 people attended Boao 2021 Session, making it the first major meeting held offline this year in the world. "China used

this opportunity to improve the understanding of its position, that China is friendly, and it welcomes all investment into the country," Chris Leung, chief China economist at DBS Group Holdings Ltd. in Hong Kong told Bloomberg.

Leaders downplayed competition with the U.S. and emphasized cooperation opportunities in areas from climate change to overcoming the pandemic, Bloomberg reported and pointed out that several U.S. business leaders, including Apple Inc.'s Tim Cook, Tesla Inc.'s Elon Musk, Blackstone Group Inc's Stephen Schwarzman and Bridgewater Associates' Ray Dalio participated in the conference. According to US trade specialists, Boao Forum has given an opportunity for the Chinese government to help mend ties with American investors amid heightened economic tensions between the two countries.

This year's Boao forum has played a special role in pushing for dialog and cooperation among Asian countries, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Zhao Lijian, said in a press briefing. The Forum was useful for potential investors to learn about new action plans from China to open up its economy and financial markets to attract foreign investment, given its promise to promote integration into the world under

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a “dual circulation” strategy. Officials in the past have announced major opening-up measures during the Boao conference, including the establishment and expansion of the stock connect program that links mainland exchanges with Hong Kong. President Rajapaksa congratulated the Boao forum for completing two decades of excellent work to bring countries together.

“I also take this opportunity to recognize the central role played by the People’s Republic of China in the Boao Forum for Asia. Through centuries of rich history, Sri Lanka and China share a strong strategic collaborative partnership based on mutual respect, trust, and cooperation. I appreciate the support rendered by His Excellency Xi Jinping and the Government of China to Sri Lanka, in vital areas of Sri Lanka’s well-being.”

Sri Lanka maintains a clear and vibrant foreign policy that seeks enhanced cooperation with all friendly nations, and in particular, its Asian neighbours, on equal and non-aligned terms. These principles are enshrined in our development policy framework, ‘Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour’.

The President said it was appropriate for the Forum to focus this year’s theme ‘A World in Change: Join Hands to Strengthen Global Governance and Advance Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Cooperation,’ to stress the importance of strengthening global governance and international cooperation.



"It is essential that we strive towards a more equitable and respectful foundation for international relations. We know that developing countries, irrespective of their contribution to the world economy, have to abide by a myriad rules, regulations, and governance structures, and yet cannot access the global rules formulation process," he regretted.

President Rajapaksa called for a fair balance between national policies and international shared policies, norms and rules. The sovereignty of independent states should in no way be undermined in the maintaining of this balance.

Sri Lanka is a peaceful, politically stable state that has taken multiple steps to enhance domestic governance to meet its goals under its development framework. Ten policy areas have been identified to deliver the four-fold outcome of a productive citizenry, a happy family, a disciplined society and a prosperous nation, he said.

Sri Lanka told the Boao Forum that the government has well thought-out plans to lift low-income families out of poverty, improve rural infrastructure, enrich the quality of our education to meet future needs, and to enhance use of technology to improve efficacy throughout the nation.

We have ambitious plans to revive and strengthen our economy



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**PRESIDENT RAJAPAKSA CALLED FOR A FAIR BALANCE BETWEEN NATIONAL POLICIES AND INTERNATIONAL SHARED POLICIES, NORMS AND RULES. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF INDEPENDENT STATES SHOULD IN NO WAY BE UNDERMINED IN THE MAINTAINING OF THIS BALANCE.**

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significantly in the coming years, the President said.

The BFA annual report on the Asian economy, stated that under the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, Asian economies have experienced a sharp drop in growth rates, however, Asian

economic performance as a whole has been significantly better than the rest of the world.

The report also shows that the economic integration of all Asian economies is accelerating. By February 2021, there had been 186 regional trade agreements in



force inside and outside Asia, accounting for 54.9 percent of the total regional agreements around the world.

In particular, the signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP) in November 2020 has been injecting strong momentum into regional and global economic growth, which is expected to give renewed impetus to further accelerate the negotiation of free trade agreements in Asia.

The Global Times, quoting Sylvain Laurent, Executive Vice President of Dassault Systèmes, a French software corporation, said the Boao Forum has become an important bridge connecting China and the world, and an international exchange platform with global influence. "Through this year's BFA, we expect to have a deeper understanding of the needs of enterprises in China and Asia during the intelligent transformation period," he said.

Erik Solheim, Convener of the BRI International Green Development Coalition Advisory Committee and former Executive Director of the UN Environment Program (UNEP), said he hopes China will introduce more of its experience regarding environmental technology to



the world during the BFA." China is the number one provider of environmental technology in the world. More than half of all solar energy comes from China. China is number one on electric vehicles, on building hydrogen energy. Therefore, China should use the Boao Forum to expose all these practices and ideas to the world," Solheim said.

As the Forum was meeting in Boao, Hainan, Sri Lanka Embassy in Beijing hosted an investment and tourism event, in which Ambassador Dr. Palitha Kohona

listed opportunities available in Sri Lanka, for trade, for potential investors and for educational and cultural exchanges. He highlighted the tourism potential in detail.

Sri Lanka proposes to attract more investors into the Colombo Port City, Hambantota Industrial Zone and the Eravoor Fabric Park from around the globe. Dr. Kohona invited Chinese investors to grab the openings available in Sri Lanka in these locations with the attractive concessions, especially tax concessions.





# PRESIDENTIAL MEDIA CENTER; TO ELEVATE GOVT-MEDIA INTERACTION TO A NEW HIGH

A long felt need for quick dissemination of accurate information on the progress of implementation of policies and programmes of the government of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa was fulfilled on July 29 with the inauguration of the Presidential Media Center (PMC).

Addressing the journalists, Director General Sudewa Hettiarachchi sought fullest cooperation of the media to convey accurate information about the government policies to the people. "This is a coordinated effort and for the success we urge you to extend your cooperation," he said.

President's Spokesman Kingsley Rathnayake pointed out establishment of PMC is a positive step towards strengthening the public's right to know the Government's plans and it would strengthen accountability and transparency on the part of the Government, especially the President. Most importantly, this would prevent the President's words from being communicated erroneously, as there are no middlemen involved.

Through the center we can provide more information to the people about a particular subject, especially about the President in this instance and the basic

information about the major development projects he initiates as the people often do not receive basic information because there are certain limitations, the Spokesman said.

Rathnayaka said the new President's Media Center has been established to inform people



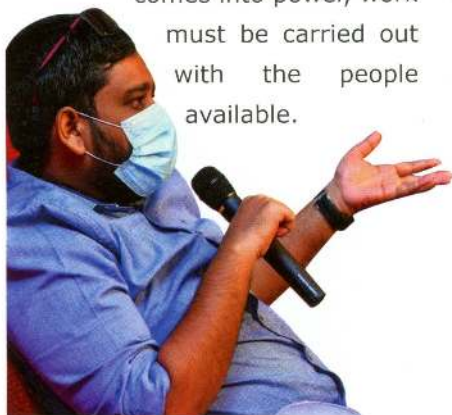




about the President, the various development projects, results of important international meetings and discussions as well as the real situation in the country.

Journalists will be invited to the center, they will be able to ask questions of the general public and assist in disseminating and explaining correct information back to the people. "This is why I said it will be a good way to also counter misinformation."

The PMC is not a short-term project and no matter which government comes into power, work must be carried out with the people available.



### COVID 19 VACCINATION; GREAT SUCCESS DESPITE ODDS

In line with the policy of prioritizing the most important issue concerning the public interest, President's Senior Advisor Lalith Weeratunga gave a comprehensive explanation about the COVID19 vaccination process at the inaugural address of the Presidential Media Center (PMC) in Colombo.

He said that according to an international survey Sri Lanka is among the top countries in the

daily average of administering vaccinations. 'Our World In Data' (<https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations>) listed Ecuador at top until recently.

However, with wide expansion of the vaccination programme recently, Sri Lanka pushed Ecuador to the second place and emerged as the country with the highest daily number of COVID-19 vaccination doses administered per 100 people.

Sri Lanka made this achievement despite heavy



odds. He pointed out that Sri Lanka could be well contended over the vaccination programme considering that the developing countries could get only 5% of the vaccines while the affluent nations have grabbed more than 90%.

President Rajapaksa took special efforts in the recent past to bring down vaccines to Sri Lanka. He personally spoke to the Heads of State in some countries. He sent written requests to several heads of government. Health officials held discussions with vaccine-producing countries. The Foreign Ministry held discussions with foreign governments through the Ambassadors and High Commissioners. In addition, health officials coordinated with vaccine manufacturing companies. All these efforts were made because the government wanted to vaccinate all the people in the country.

As a result of these efforts, the country is now receiving a large number of vaccines that we need on a monthly basis. We only use the vaccines approved by the World Health Organization (WHO). Weeratunga, who is also the Chairman of the Presidential Task Force for National Deployment and Vaccination Plan for COVID-19 Vaccine, said as the supplies are regular,

roll out would be easy due to the country's excellent health infrastructure.

President's Spokesman Kingsley Rathnayaka said that Sri Lanka received the first consignment of 500,000 doses of Astra-Zeneca vaccine as a gift from India and China gifted 2.7 million doses of Sinopharm vaccine. Another four million doses of Sinopharm vaccines, were purchased from the Chinese manufacturer in the first week of August.

Senior Advisor announced Japan has agreed to provide Astrazeneca vaccines under COVAX facility after a direct request was made by President Rajapaksa to Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga.

By end of September, it was planned to vaccinate nearly 8 million people, thus covering two thirds of the target 12 million. Subsequently the age groups below 30 also would be covered and by the end of the year 15 million would be vaccinated. At present, the vaccination drive is being carried out successfully in all provinces of the country.







# CITY OF THE FUTURE

While the ongoing Covid-19 crisis is first and foremost a public health threat, it is also, and increasingly, an economic threat. Even though Sri Lanka has been successfully containing and controlling the COVID 19 pandemic, the economic fall out from the pandemic would be significant. According to

the Central Bank's Recent Economic Developments report 'Sri Lankan economy is projected to record a negative growth of around 1.7 per cent in 2020 compared to 2.3 per cent growth recorded in 2019. In this context, it is vital to transform our economy into the next phase of its development.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa assured that each and every promise in his National Policy Framework, "Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour" will be honored in the coming years. It places much importance on our economic planning process.

The Colombo's Port City project can play a vital role in transforming our economy into more advanced one.





As evidenced by the economic development history of mankind, evolution from an agricultural to an industrial and finally to a service economy is a natural and inevitable process for a specific country and even for the whole world.

Sri Lanka is situated strategically at the crossroads of major shipping routes to South Asia, the Far East and the continents of Europe and America, making the country a convenient port of call for shipping lines and airfreight

services. Further, Sri Lanka's proximity to the Indian sub-continent positions the country as a gateway to a market of 1.3 billion people. These factors have combined to generate keen interest in the country's logistics sector, as well as from manufacturers looking for opportunities in the South Asian region.

Port City Colombo is a master planned city to be built on sustainable principles, incorporating state-of-the-art, future-ready infrastructure and smart city concepts; the first of its kind in South Asia. An extension of the Sri Lanka's central business district, Port City is the country's first-ever Special Economic Zone.

The Port City is an area of 660 acres of reclaimed land located in Colombo within the Western Province of Sri Lanka and is a part of the administrative District of Colombo.

The intention is for this zone to be an international business and service hub with specialized infrastructure to promote key economic activities especially; international trade, shipping logistic operations, offshore banking and financial services, information technology and business process outsourcing, corporate headquarter operations, regional distribution operations and tourism & entertainment.

Speaking at the inauguration of the Sri Lanka Investment Forum 2021, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa stated that the government expects to attract at least \$15bn into the Port City Colombo Project over the next 5 years.

This project would have a significant impact on the national economy, in terms of employment generation, attracting FDIs, GDP contribution, BOP, and government revenue when it progress as envisaged.

 Diana Vandort





**TREAT ALL SOVEREIGN STATES  
EQUITABLY AND  
WITH DUE RESPECT IRRESPECTIVE OF  
SIZE OR STRENGTH,  
PRESIDENT URGES UN**

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa told the global community that a meaningful reconciliation with the Tamil community through domestic institutions is essential to achieve lasting peace in Sri Lanka and stressed that the government is ready to engage with all stakeholders and to obtain the support of its international partners in the process.

Addressing the high-level UN General Debate in New York on September 22, the President said that until 2009, the country had suffered from a separatist

terrorist war for 30 years. He said that in 2019, Sri Lanka experienced the devastation wrought by extremist religious terrorists in the Easter Sunday attacks that had killed over 250 people.

"Terrorism is a global challenge that requires international cooperation, especially on matters such as intelligence sharing, if it is to be overcome," he said.

The President said fostering greater accountability,

restorative justice, and meaningful reconciliation through domestic institutions is essential to achieve lasting peace. "So too is ensuring more equitable participation in the fruits of economic development and my government's firm intention is to build a prosperous, stable and secure future for all Sri Lankans, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or gender.

He emphasized that Sri Lanka is ready to engage with all domestic stakeholders and to obtain the support of its international partners and the United Nations, in this process.

The President urged the United Nations and the international community to ensure the protection of the Buddhist heritage of Afghanistan under the Taliban, who had destroyed the ancient sandstone statues of Buddha at Bamiyan in 2001.

"If in keeping with the theme of our General Debate, we are to truly build resilience through hope, we must all strive towards the common good. It is the role of the United Nations to facilitate this by treating all sovereign states, irrespective of size or strength, equitably, and with due respect for their institutions and their heritage. I request the United Nations and the international community to ensure the protection of the Buddhist heritage of Afghanistan." President Rajapaksa recalled that violence had robbed Sri Lanka of thousands of lives and decades



of prosperity in the past half-century and he expressed the commitment of his government "to ensure that such violence never takes place in Sri Lanka again. We are therefore acting to address the core issues behind it."

"However, history has shown that lasting results can only be achieved through home-grown institutions reflecting the aspirations of the people. Sri Lanka's Parliament, Judiciary and its range of independent statutory bodies should have unrestricted scope to exercise their functions and responsibilities."

"We intend to make full use of geostrategic location and our robust institutions, strong social infrastructure, and skilled workforce, to attract investment and broaden trade relationships," he said adding that the government is focusing on extensive legal, regulatory, administrative and educational reforms to facilitate this, and to deliver prosperity to all its people. Underlining that the COVID19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on humanity, he said nations must recognise that the challenges surrounding production, distribution, deployment and acceptance of vaccines must be overcome urgently if the spread of dangerous new virus strains is to be prevented.

"Ensuring that everyone, everywhere, is vaccinated is the best way out of the pandemic," he said.

On the following day, addressing the UN Food Systems Summit in New York, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa stressed that it is essential to transform global food systems to be more sustainable and that all stakeholders should work together in this regard.

Sustainable food systems are part of Sri Lanka's rich sociocultural and economic heritage, the President said and added that the step taken by the Government to ban chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and weedicides that led to adverse health and environmental impacts, was a crucial point in the state policy on sustainable development.

The President appreciated the technical assistance of the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Food Programme provided to Sri Lanka, and thanked for the support of other global organisations and scientific bodies in this regard. President Rajapaksa said that it should be the aim of all state leaders to ensure a better future for our people and our planet, and that everyone must work together to find solutions to the universal challenges we will have to face in the future in this regard.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa pointed out that reducing Greenhouse Gas emissions and promoting sustainable energy solutions are essential to ensure the health of the planet. The President expressed these views while speaking at the UN High-Level Dialogue on Energy. The

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High-Level Dialogue on Energy commenced in New York in parallel to the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly under the theme "Ensuring everyone has access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy." Addressing the High-Level Dialogue, President Rajapaksa said the global community should give the highest priority to maintain the health of the planet while fulfilling human needs.

The President said transitioning to cleaner energy globally is essential if we are to mitigate this threat in the decades to come, and requested the countries that have the required capabilities to support developing nations as they attempt this transition to more sustainable energy generation and usage. Sustainable energy development continues to be a high priority for Sri Lanka.



# UN SECRETARY-GENERAL EXPRESSES SOLIDARITY WITH SRI LANKA

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa briefed United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres on the country's domestic issues, economic recovery in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and the reconciliation process.

Mr. Guterres expressed solidarity with Sri Lanka for the ongoing challenges related to the coronavirus and offered the UN's support. President Rajapaksa held discussions with UNSG when they met at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on September 19.

Mr. Guterres warmly welcomed President Rajapaksa and reminisced about his visits to Sri Lanka in 1978 representing the Inter-Parliamentary Union and his visits to Kandy, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Trincomalee.

Mr. Guterres also recalled his dealings with Sri Lanka during his tenure as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and his meeting with then President Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2006.

The Secretary-General expressed confidence that, as a country which plays

a more active role in social and economic spheres in the Indian Ocean region Sri Lanka would continue to do so in the future too, despite the crisis that has plagued it for nearly 30 years.

President Rajapaksa briefed the UNSG on the challenges facing a country like Sri Lanka with a small economy in the face of the COVID pandemic. President Rajapaksa

spoke at length on the impact of the COVID-19

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**THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT THE INTERNAL ISSUES OF SRI LANKA SHOULD BE RESOLVED THROUGH AN INTERNAL MECHANISM OF THE COUNTRY AND SAID THE TAMIL DIASPORA WOULD BE INVITED FOR DISCUSSIONS IN THIS REGARD.**

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epidemic on education and the economy of Sri Lanka and thanked the World Health Organization for its support to overcome the pandemic.

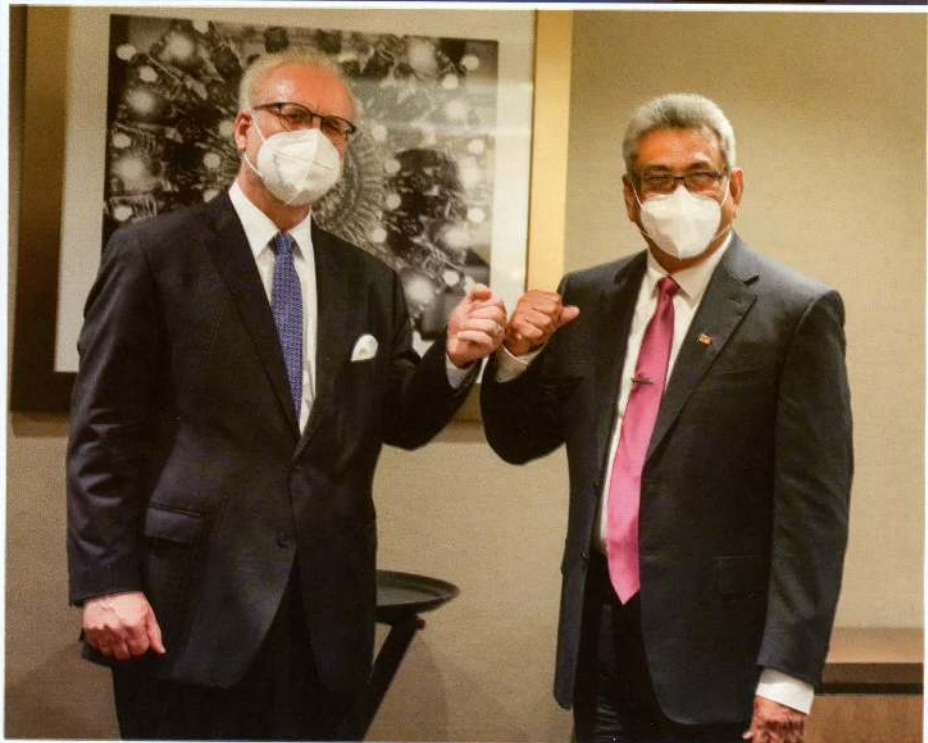
With regard to the reconciliation process, the President explained the compensation paid to the victims, the transfer of lands back to the owners and the massive development carried out in the North and East Provinces since 2009 under the guidance of President Mahinda Rajapaksa and the opportunity given to democratically elect the representatives to the Northern Provincial Council.

The President informed the Secretary-General that the government would take immediate action with regard to missing persons and expedite the efforts such as issuance of death certificates.

The President pointed out that many youths who were arrested as suspects over terrorist activities were released after he came to power.

The President said that the internal issues of Sri Lanka should be resolved through an internal mechanism of the country and said the Tamil Diaspora would be invited for discussions in this regard.

President Rajapaksa said that he was always ready to work closely with the United Nations and added that though he could assure that there is no room for separatism to re-emerge in Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka as a government as well as other states should be vigilant about religious extremism.











Sri Lanka is the proud custodian of two of the most sacred treasures venerated by the Buddhists world over, - the Sri Maha Bodhi, sole surviving tree grew from a branch of the Sri Maha Bodhi in Bodh Gaya, India, where Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment and became Buddha more than 25 centuries ago in Anuradhapura and the Buddha's Tooth Relic in Dalada Maligawa in Kandy.

The Sri Maha Bodhi is said to be the oldest and longest-surviving tree in the world. It was brought from India by Princess Sangamitta, the daughter of Indian emperor Dharmasoka from India and planted in 288 BC during the reign of King Devanampiyatissa.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa pays obeisance at Sri Maha Bodhi after taking oaths as President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.



