

For verified information on the coronavirus (Covid-19) contact any of the following authorities

**Quarantine Unit**  
0112 112 705

**Epidemiology Unit**  
0112 695 112

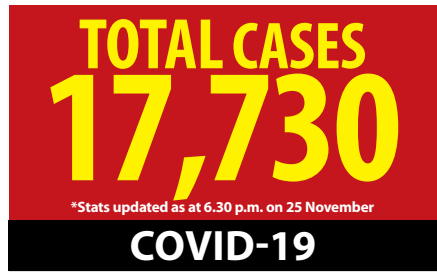
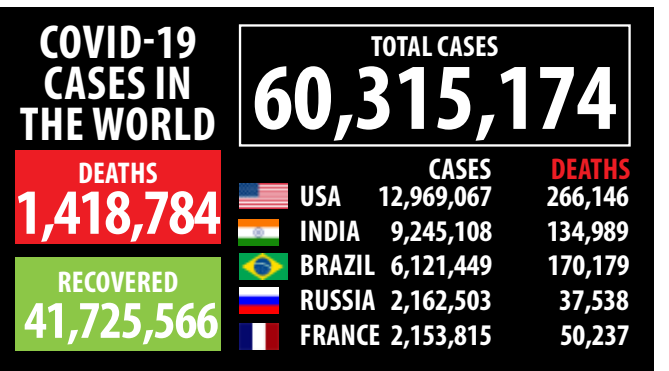
**Govt. coronavirus hotline**  
0113071073

**If showing symptoms**  
0117 966 366

**Health Promotion Bureau**  
1999

**Suwasariya Ambulance Service**  
1990

**PRESIDENTIAL SPECIAL TASK FORCE FOR ESSENTIAL SERVICES**  
Telephone 0114354854, 0114733600  
Fax 0112333066, 0114354882  
Hotline 0113456200-4  
Email ptf@pmoffice.gov.lk



# CEB predicts power shortage

**Emergency power purchase if necessary**

**Shortage due to lack of firm power**

BY MAHEESHA MUDUGAMUWA

**The Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) predicted that the country would be facing a power shortage of around 300 MW by February next year.**

Speaking to *The Morning*, CEB Chairman Eng. Vijitha Herath said the CEB would be purchasing 100 MW of emergency power early next year if necessary to meet the shortage by assessing the situation. "This year, due to the Covid situation, we did not have a shortage

as the demand dropped with most of the factories and offices in Colombo closed for nearly three months," he said, adding that next year, especially during the dry season starting from February, a shortfall of nearly 300 MW is expected.

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## Former CID Chief Shani tests positive

Former Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Director Shani Abeysekera, who is in remand custody at the Mahara Prison, has tested positive for Covid-19, health officials said.

## Lockdown on Colombo housing complexes extended

The current lockdown imposed on housing complexes in the Colombo District will continue until 6 December, stated the National Operations Centre for Prevention of Covid-19 Outbreak (NOCPKO).

## 'Be on alert for symptoms'

A significant number of Covid-19 deaths reported from the Minuwangoda and Peliyagoda Covid-19 clusters have occurred at home, said Chief Epidemiologist Dr. Sudath Samaraweera.

## Relatives urged to inform if infected are drug addicts

The Police yesterday (25) urged the family members of Covid-19 patients to inform the health and security officials if any patient is addicted to drugs.

## Travel restrictions in 2 areas in Akurana

Travel restrictions have been imposed on two grama niladhari (GN) divisions in Akurana after Covid-19 exposure.

## 45 Kandy schools closed

A total 45 schools within Kandy city limits will remain closed with effect from today (26), Central Province Governor Lalith U. Gamage announced.

## Isolated areas updated

Several grama niladhari divisions in the Kalutara and Kandy Districts have been declared as isolated areas with immediate effect.

## Arachchikattuwa Police Station temporarily closed

The National Operations Centre for Prevention of Covid-19 Outbreak (NOCPKO) yesterday (25) stated that the Chilaw Arachchikattuwa Police Station was temporarily closed for disinfection.

SEE FULL STORIES ON PAGE 2

## COVID-19 VACCINE

## Ready to act when released: Minister

Health Minister Pavithra Wanniarachchi said in Parliament yesterday (25) that Sri Lanka can get the Covid-19 vaccine from COVAX, the initiative of the Global Alliance on Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI), the World Health Organisation (WHO), and others.

Contd. on page 2



Mayorress of Colombo Rosy Senanayake and Colombo Municipal Council officials yesterday (25) distributed free rations at the Railway Ground in Dematagoda for those under isolation

PHOTO PRADEEP DAMBARAGE

## COLOMBO MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

# 100,000 families to receive dry rations

Random sample collections continue for PCR testing

BY SARAH HANNAN

The Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) has made provisions to distribute dry ration packs worth Rs. 3,000 to about 70,000 families that reside within the CMC limits.

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## SANITARY NAPKINS

# No tax increase says Govt.

State Minister Shehan Semainghe said taxation on sanitary towels has not been increased and remains unchanged.

The State Minister said: "Pre-budget, a 30% Custom Import Duty (CID) was charged. Post-budget, the CID is reduced

to 15% and a CESS of 15% is introduced. Therefore, taxation remains the same.

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## ASSAULT ON FEMALE OFFICIAL

# RDA officer granted bail

The engineer of the Western Provincial Road Development Authority (RDA) office in Udugampola, who was arrested for assaulting a female management assistant, was granted bail by the Gampaha Magistrate's Court yesterday (25).

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## MT NEW DIAMOND

# AG, MEPA officials discuss final claim

The Attorney General (AG) met with the officials of the Marine Environmental Protection Authority (MEPA) yesterday (25), it is learnt.

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MT New Diamond

## POLLUTERS IN MUTHURAJAWELA WETLANDS

# CEA revokes EPL of steel company

The Central Environment Authority (CEA) Gampaha District office on Monday (23) revoked the Environmental Protection License (EPL) of S.R. Steel Ltd. after observing that the company

was found to have violated the conditions listed in the license.

In a letter addressed to S.R. Steel Ltd, CEA Gampaha District office Director M.M.C.S.K. Malwana had stated that

the EPL that was issued to the company for the period from 8 February 2020 to 7 February 2021 was to be cancelled from 23 November onwards.

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## PCR TESTS

# Varying prices at pvt. hospitals

**Prices vary due to operational costs: APHNP**

Despite a maximum price of Rs. 6,500 being set for the PCR tests, four approved private hospitals have exceeded the relevant prices, it is revealed.

Nevertheless, as learnt by *The Morning*, the price of a PCR test in different private hospitals varied between Rs. 6,500 and Rs. 8,800.

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## COLOMBO PORT CITY

# Court dismisses writ application

The Court of Appeal yesterday (25) dismissed the writ application filed by the Centre for Environmental Justice (CEJ) challenging the China-funded Colombo Port City project.

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## COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ENTERPRISES

# First online meeting today

The Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE) of Parliament is scheduled to meet online today (26) for the

first time, the Communication Department of Parliament said yesterday (25).

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## FORMER PRESIDENTIAL CHIEF OF STAFF

# Bail application rejected

The Permanent High Court Trial-at-Bar has rejected a bail application submitted by former Presidential Chief of Staff Dr. I.H.K. Mahanama,

who is serving a 20-year prison sentence after being found guilty in a massive bribery case.

Contd. on page 2

# Rishad granted bail

Parliamentarian Rishad Bathiudeen, who was remanded over the alleged misuse of buses belonging to the state-owned Sri

Lanka Transport Board (SLTB) during the presidential election last year, has been granted bail.

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## MAHAVIRU COMMEMORATIONS

# Prohibited in Mullaitivu and Jaffna

The Mullaitivu and Jaffna Magistrate's Courts have upheld the Attorney General's (AG's) submissions on Mahaviru

commemorations, AG's Co-ordinating Officer State Counsel Nishara Jayaratne said.

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# Free period products for all in Scotland

Scotland has become the first country in the world to provide free and universal access to period products after a four-year campaign that has fundamentally shifted the public discourse around menstruation, *The Guardian* reported on Tuesday (25).

The Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act, which passed unanimously through its final stage on Tuesday evening, will place a legal duty on local authorities to make period products available for all those who need them, building on the work of councils like North Ayrshire, which has been providing free tampons and sanitary towels in its public buildings since 2018.

The campaign – bolstered by nationwide grassroots support – was spearheaded by Scottish Labour’s Health Spokeswoman Monica Lennon, who told *The Guardian* this was “a proud day for Scotland”.

Lennon said: “This will make a massive difference to the lives of women and girls and everyone who menstruates. There has already been

great progress at a community level and through local authorities in giving everyone the chance of period dignity.

“There has been a massive change in the way that periods are discussed in public life. A few years ago there had never been an open discussion of menstruation in the Holyrood Chamber and now it is mainstream. MSPs (Members of the Scottish

Parliament) have enjoyed being a part of that, and it has encompassed the menopause, endometriosis, as well as the types of products we use and their sustainability.”

*The Guardian* said “Period Poverty” – the struggle to pay for basic sanitary products on a monthly basis – has surged during the coronavirus pandemic, according to charities.

Earlier research by the grassroots group Women for Independence revealed that nearly one in five women had experienced period poverty, which has a significant impact on their hygiene, health, and wellbeing.

Women are estimated to spend an average of £ 13 a month on period products and several thousand pounds over a lifetime.

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## CEB predicts...

As he explained, the shortfall is a prediction and with the addition of solar and wind power, the shortfall might be little less than 300 MW.

The reason for the power shortfall is the lack of firm power plants.

When asked how the emergency power would be purchased, Eng. Herath said there were two contracts which have already received Cabinet approval and those two contracts would be signed early next year, if there is a necessity.

## Former CID...

They said Abeysekera would be transferred to the Kandakadu Rehabilitation Centre via Welikada Prison. So far, 16 personnel at the Mahara Prison have tested positive for Covid-19.

## Lockdown on...

The lockdown on housing complexes was extended for two weeks with effect from 23 November.

Five housing complexes in the Colombo Divisional Secretariat area, three in the Thimbrigasyaya Division, and one in Moratuwa remain under isolation accordingly, stated the Colombo District Secretariat.

The lockdown was extended due to the detection of more Covid-19 cases from areas concerned.

## Be on alert...

He pointed out that the elderly and individuals with chronic diseases in high-risk areas should be more alert about new illnesses.

“Elderly people in high-risk areas and people with chronic illnesses need to seek medical attention immediately if they develop any new symptoms. It can be a fever, cough, cold, sore throat, or difficulty in breathing.

“It could also be symptoms such as weakness, loss of appetite, or inability to taste or smell. If such a condition persists, seek medical attention immediately. Alternatively, you can call 1999 for advice.

“Do not wait until such a condition worsens. Since the identification of the Covid-19 clusters in Minuwangoda and Peliyagoda on 4 October, a significant number of the 81 Covid-19-related deaths have occurred at home.”

## Relatives urged...

Police Spokesman DIG Ajith Rohana said five Covid-19 patients, all of whom are either addicted to drugs or remanded over the possession of drugs, have either escaped or attempted to escape the treatment centres.

The latest incident was reported on Tuesday (24) night when a 28-year-old from Rajanganaya being treated at the Welikanda Covid-19 Treatment Centre escaped.

“However, he was captured within half an hour. It was found he was addicted to drugs. Since 5 October, there have been five cases of Covid-19 patients escaping treatment centres,” he said.

He said there was a tendency of those addicted to drugs to escape treatment centres.

“The parents, relatives, and friends of Covid-19 patients have a responsibility and a liability to inform the health and police authorities if the patient is addicted to drugs. Accordingly,

we can place them at a protected treatment centre where they can get the care they need,” DIG Rohana said.

## Travel...

Accordingly, the Gurugothenna and Thelambugahawatte GN divisions will be under isolation until further notice.

In addition, a part of the Mahaiyawa area in Kandy was also isolated on Tuesday (24).

Meanwhile, 15 Covid-19 infections have been identified from the Atulgama area on Tuesday, following the rapid antigen tests performed on the residents.

The De Mel Watte area located within Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) limits also confirmed 10 infections after 75 rapid antigen tests.

In the meantime, a member of the Beruwala Pradeshiya Sabha (PS) was tested positive for the virus yesterday (25).

Subsequently, the first-degree contacts of its Chairman and several other members of the PS were placed under self-isolation.

## 45 Kandy...

Accordingly, the closure of the schools will continue till 4 December 2020.

## Ready to...

Responding to Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa, Minister Wanniarachchi said the country has already joined the COVAX programme and that the vaccine can be distributed among 20% of the country’s population during the first phase.

She said the Health Ministry stands ready to act once the Covid-19 vaccine is released as a National Co-ordination Committee for Covid-19 Vaccine has been established at the Ministry.

“Three sub-committees have been set up under the National Committee to identify the people whom the vaccine should be released to first and to co-ordinate logistics. However, there is no final date on the issuance of the vaccine. Once it is released, we can distribute it successfully through our existing vaccine co-ordination mechanisms,” she said.

## Isolated areas...

Three grama niladhari divisions in the Bandaragama police area of the Kalutara District and two grama niladhari divisions in the Alawathugoda police area of the Kandy District have been isolated in this manner. Accordingly, the following areas will be under isolation until further notice.

### Kalutara District (Bandaragama police area):

- Y Atulgama East Grama Niladhari Division
- Y Epitamulla Grama Niladhari Division
- Y Kolamediriya Grama Niladhari Division

### Kandy District (Alawathugoda police area):

- Y Bulugahatenna Grama Niladhari Division
- Y Thelambugahawatta Grama Niladhari Division

Meanwhile, the isolation orders on the Kirimanthudawa Grama Niladhari Division in the Bandaragama police area of the Kalutara

District will be lifted immediately.

## Varying prices...

It is also learnt that some PCR tests are conducted for those who are returning to Sri Lanka from a foreign country at a cost of nearly Rs. 19,000. The reason for the variation of these prices from one hospital to another is mainly due to the addition of the cost for the other services along with the test that they provide for the patient, it is learnt. In May, the Ministry of Health gave permission for five private hospitals to conduct PCR tests under strict guidelines. In addition, strict guidelines have also been issued by the Ministry, including informing about the patient prior to the test and the results of each test.

Hospitals should follow all Covid-19-related guidelines and they were not allowed to give publicity for Covid-19-related activities at hospitals. In addition, the hospitals should also follow a mechanism to trace the history of all patients. However, it issued guidelines, capping the cost of sample testing by private labs at Rs. 6,000, but the cost cap is yet to be gazetted. The price was decided after discussing with the private hospitals but it was merely a verbal agreement.

When contacted by *The Morning*, Association of Private Hospitals and Nursing Homes (APHNH) President Dr. Lakith Peiris said the reason for the cost variation was mainly the varying operational costs of different hospitals. The operating costs of different machines vary and the operating cost is dependent on the type, size, and various other conditions of the machine, he stressed.

“If you have a large capacity machine and you want to generate reports quickly, but you don’t feed the machine with its full capacity, then the operating cost naturally goes up. As an example, if the machine can do 300 in one go and there are only 50 samples, the operating cost will be more. That can be one reason,” Dr. Peiris noted.

– Maheesha Mudugamuwa

## Court dismisses...

The CEJ had put forward the writ application against the project company developing the Port City, the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA), Board of Investment (BOI), and the Government of Sri Lanka back in 2015.

Senior State Counsel Suren Gnanaraj had appeared for the Government and Attorney-at-Law Dr. Asanga Gunawansa with Dilshan Jayasuriya and Shenella Fonseka represented the project company. Attorney-at-Law Ravindranath Dabar represented the petitioner Hemantha Withanage of the CEJ when the writ application was taken up yesterday.

The petitioner had sought a Writ of Mandamus against actions of the respondents, alleging that the construction of the Port City reclaims an extent of 575 acres pertaining to the sea and that it is in violation of environmental laws.

When the case was heard last year, it was fixed for judgment on 31 January this year. However, the verdict had not been delivered on that day.

## First online...

COPE Chairman Prof. Charitha Herath said the Environmental Audit Report on water pollution of the Kelani River is scheduled to be discussed online today.

Ministry of Health Secretary Dr. H.S. Munasinghe, Ministry of Industries Secretary W.A. Chulananda Perera, and Ministry of Public Services, Provincial Councils, and Local Government Secretary J.J. Ratnasiri are to be contacted online at this meeting.

In addition, officials from the Ministry of Irrigation, the Ministry of Water Supply and Drainage, the Board of Investment (BOI), the Central Environmental Authority (CEA), and the National Water Supply and Drainage Board (NWSDB) are scheduled to attend today. “The purpose of using online technology is to minimise the number of attendees and to make the committee more efficient, as it operates in accordance with the Covid-19 health regulations and safety measures,” the Department said.

## Prohibited...

She further stated that the two courts upheld the submission and ordered the prohibition of Mahaviru (Maaveerar) commemoration ceremonies being held in Mullaitivu and Jaffna.

Senior officers of the AG’s Department had appeared on behalf of the Police at the Mullaitivu Magistrate’s Court on Tuesday (24) and made

submissions in order to prevent Mahaviru commemorations from being held.

## Rishad...

The case was taken up before the Colombo Fort Magistrate’s Court yesterday (25).

MP Bathiudeen is accused of misusing 222 buses owned by the SLTB for transporting internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Puttalam to polling stations in Silavathurai, Mannar during the 2019 presidential election, along with Project Director Mohamed Yaseen Samsudeen and Project Accountant Alagarathnam Manoranjan.

They have allegedly violated Article 82 (1) of the Presidential Elections Act (No. 15 of 1981) by misappropriating public funds to the tune of Rs. 9.5 million.

Last month, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), upon the direction of the Attorney General, had sought the Colombo Fort Magistrate to issue a warrant to arrest MP Bathiudeen and the other two suspects on charges of criminal misappropriation of public funds and violation of election laws.

However, the Magistrate ruled that the Police can proceed to arrest the suspects without a warrant. Thereby, Attorney General Dappula de Livera directed the Police to arrest the three suspects according to the law.

On 14 October, the Colombo Fort Magistrate issued a travel ban on the parliamentarian after taking into account a request made by the CID. MP Bathiudeen was subsequently arrested at a housing complex located at Ebenezer Place in Dehiwala during the early hours of 19 October. He was then produced before the court and placed under remand custody. His bail application was also rejected by the Magistrate’s Court on several occasions.

## Bail...

The bail application was rejected by a bench comprising Justices Sampath Abeykoon, Sampath Wijeratne, and Champa Janaki Jayaratne, according to media reports.

Attorneys representing Dr. Mahanama informed the court that a large number of Covid-19-infected persons were identified within the Welikada Prison where their client is being held and that this could pose a threat to the life of their client who is a heart patient.

However, the judge bench delivering its decision said that the defendant has filed an appeal with the Court of Appeal challenging his prison sentence and that it is expected to be taken up in the future.

Therefore, the Trial-at-Bar decided to reject the bail application.

Former Chief of Staff to former President Maithripala Sirisena Dr. Mahanama was sentenced to 20 years of rigorous imprisonment, fined Rs. 65,000, and a penalty of Rs. 20 million on 19 December 2019 after being found guilty of soliciting a bribe of Rs. 100 million and accepting Rs. 20 million from that as an advance.

Former State Timber Corporation Chairman P. Dissanayake, who was also found guilty in the same bribery case, was sentenced to 12 years of rigorous imprisonment and levied a fine of Rs. 55,000.

They were arrested on 3 May 2018 while accepting Rs. 20 million in marked currency notes as gratification from an Indian citizen; a businessman and investor who had come to Sri Lanka over an investment in the Kanthale Sugar Factory.

## No tax...

“Furthermore, we are compelled to retain the CID as a measure to ensure the protection of local producers. As such, the Government has not taken any measures which results in an increase of sanitary towels prices.”

## 100,000 families...

The programme continued for the third day yesterday (25), when the CMC distributed dry ration packs in batches to families living in Dematagoda. During the first half of the day about 500 families received dry ration packs and the point of collection had been communicated to them; the Dematagoda Railway Station.

“With several areas continuing to remain under isolation for another two weeks, we have arranged for dry ration packs to be distributed to families that are trapped in these isolated areas. While the listed families in the said areas account for 70,000, we are also making arrangements to distribute dry ration packs to an additional 30,000 families that have been affected by the loss of their daily wages, given the present situation,”

Mayoress of Colombo Rosy Senanayake noted. In total, Mayoress Senanayake stated that 100,000 families will be eligible to receive the dry ration packs within this week.

Last week, the Colombo Mayoress had clarified her decision to place the CMC limits under lockdown for at least a period of two weeks, noting that she would request the area to be placed under strict quarantine lockdown after looking into arranging the necessary provisions to ensure that the people are facilitated with the basic requirements to survive the said two weeks.

“I firmly believe we will be able to stop the spread of this virus if we follow strict travel restrictions within the city limits at least. We have to take extra precaution at this point and consider as if every person we come across is a Covid-19-positive person. Therefore, we have to follow all the health guidelines that have been communicated to us by the healthcare services,” Mayoress Senanayake elaborated.

In addition to that, the respective Medical Officers of Health have been instructed to collect nasopharyngeal swab samples for PCR testing from localities where Covid-19-positive persons are detected and where Covid-19 deaths are reported. “Rs. 5,000 was distributed to a section of our area at the beginning of this month, but later we got to know that the officials who were here to distribute the Rs. 5,000 relief too had contracted Covid-19. So only a section of our area received the Rs. 5,000. They said dry ration packs will be distributed, but we are yet to receive any. People are asked to get tested voluntarily and are not forced to give swab samples for PCR tests,” Lalitha, a resident from Maradana noted.

## RDA officer...

Prior to the granting of bail, a special inquiry was launched in this regard yesterday on the instructions of the General Manager of the RDA of the Western Province. The incident had occurred following a delay by the managing assistant in carrying out instructions.

## CEA revokes...

“The company wrote to us on 19 November; however, the causes they had presented for the presence of the scrap metal in their compound was unsatisfactory, and proved that they had violated the conditions of the EPL. They are allowed to make a further appeal 30 days from the date the license cancellation announcement was made to the Ministry of Environment directly,” Malwana stated.

He added that should the company continue to operate after their EPL is revoked, they will be charged under the National Environmental Act for violation of regulations.

According to Malwana, S.R. Steel had violated Subsection 6.2 and 6.3 under the licensing conditions of the EPL bearing no. 16000 (R1). Firstly, it was observed that the steel company had dumped off waste metal slugs that were generated during the industrial process in an informal manner, using the waste to fill the marshland, and the scrap metal was stored without a shelter. These activities have caused the solid waste materials to be disposed off into the waterway and enter the waterbody.

The second violation was not removing the solid waste matter in an environment-friendly manner in consultation with the Wattala Pradeshiya Sabha.

In October, Minister of Environment Mahinda Amaraweera, during an inspection visit to the Muthurajawela wetlands, had made observations to investigate all companies that are found to be polluting the wetland. The Minister was joined by the ministry officials, CEA officials, and Provincial Council Environment Unit officials during the visit, and had advised the Provincial Council Environment Unit officials to conduct an investigation into all these companies and submit a report.

– Sarah Hannan

## AG, MEPA...

This was to finalise the marine pollution claim regarding the oil spill caused by the fire in the crude oil tanker MT New Diamond, Co-ordinating Officer of the AG State Counsel Nishara Jayaratne said.

Along with MEPA officials, a panel of experts joined in the discussion, she added.

## Arachchikattuwa...

It was stated that this measure was taken after a police officer attached to the Arachchikattuwa Police Station tested positive for Covid-19.

## Cartoon of the day





BY NAVEED ROZAIS

**One of the best things about art is how it allows people to express their creativity and emotions in almost any situation. Well-known Sri Lankan artist Vajira Gunawardena understands and embraces this emotional aspect of art, presenting his newest exhibition at Paradise Road The Gallery Cafe from 24 November to 15 December.**

Gunawardena holds a BFA from the Institute of Aesthetic Studies, University of Kelaniya. He has held a number of solo and group exhibitions here in Sri Lanka as well as internationally. His works have been exhibited abroad and the foreign exposure of his works include group shows in the UN House in Switzerland, the UK, Germany, Netherlands, Austria, Cuba, Tanzania, Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, China, India, and Bangladesh.

Gunawardena's work addresses issues and questions about culture and identity, exploring human imperfections or unseen aspects of humanity. His figurative abstract art explores the furthest extremes of the human psyche. Throughout Vajira's works, abstract shapes are placed in balance and dialogue with one another, expressing an essential impetus towards human connection.

In his work, Gunawardena looks to create a new language of art, mixing bright colours, rhythmic patterns, expressive imagery, and experimental techniques to create a new visual



Vajira Gunawardena

format that seeks to communicate to a fully expressionistic borderless painting. Drawing inspiration from many renowned artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring, Jean Dubuffet, and George Condo to name a few, Gunawardena uses these many influences to set about inventing a child-like vocabulary of lines and forms, graffiti and street art,



primitive and tribal art, pop and contemporary images to make emotionally involved paintings. Gunawardena's newest exhibition "Panic World" is years in the making, with painstaking research into psychoanalysis referencing the work of George Condo, and attempting to capture what people

# PANIC WORLD

## An exhibition by Vajira Gunawardena



are thinking. Inspired in part by the Covid-19 pandemic, Gunawardena's Panic World also attempts to capture the panic that most people felt during the three-month lockdown which took place earlier this year.

Speaking on the process behind Panic World, Gunawardena shared that while Covid-19 was an influence, he had started working on the series much before the pandemic. "I experiment with ideas and form a lot before finalising a painting. I also spend a lot of time creating the right textures and trying out different techniques. The idea behind Panic World is not only Covid-19; it was more about human unseen effects and feelings. That was the main idea. Covid-19 came in as an influence on top of everything because of how it affected psyches and how people were dealing with it."

Panic World is Gunawardena's first exhibition created solely with acrylic paint. Gunawardena



explained that normally he works with oil paints and various other media, but this time around, given the restricted availability of art supplies, he has chosen to focus on acrylic paint on canvas as a medium.

Panic World's colour palette works with earth colours, a departure from Gunawardena's previous work which favours bright, almost luminous colours. Gunawardena has also explored and experimented with his technique, mixing drawing as well as experimentation with his palette knife and stickers to create arresting paintings that capture a rarely seen side of the human psyche while provoking us to think about our own psyche and how we see the world around us.

Panic World is being exhibited at Paradise Road The Gallery from 24 November to 15 December and will be open from 10 a.m. to midnight daily. The exhibition may also be viewed virtually at <https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=xrAsTXFLcXG>.

## TOWARDS A MORE COMPREHENSIVE FORM OF PROTECTION

# The leopards of Wilpattu National Park

BY NAVEED ROZAIS

The Wildlife and Nature Protection Society of Sri Lanka (WNPS) held their monthly lecture consulting with Wildlife Research and Nature Conservation Foundation Founder Dinal Samarasinghe on leopard populations in the Wilpattu National Park.

Over the last 10 years, Samarasinghe has conducted research on amphibians and on the taxonomy of the water monitor complex in South Asia. His current research focuses on human-wildlife conflict mitigation and carnivore/apex predator population ecology – the saltwater crocodile and the Sri Lankan leopard. He is a member of the amphibian, water monitor, and crocodile specialist groups of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Species Survival Commission.

### The background of the Sri Lankan leopard

Samarasinghe shared that the Sri Lankan leopard is one of eight subspecies of leopards in the world, and is endemic to Sri Lanka. They are one of the most adaptable big cats in the world and are found from Africa right across Asia and into Java, with Java being the only other island in the world to have a leopard population. What makes leopards so adaptable is that they have evolved to become perfectly medium-sized big cats who require less protein to survive, and can feed on anything from dung beetles to giant elands.

Sri Lankan leopards are found all around the country and thrive in habitats like scrub forests and monsoon forests. Sri Lanka's total leopard population is estimated to be approximately 1,000 individuals. Research into leopards over the last 30 years has been hindered greatly by the Civil War, as many areas inhabited by leopards are war-torn areas.

The Wilpattu National Park, which is inhabited by a significant portion of Sri Lanka's leopard population, is itself in a

war-torn area and was closed for much of the Civil War, being closed from 1988 to 2003, and again from 2007 to 2010, and was reopened to the public after being thoroughly determined by the Army. The Wilpattu National Park is Sri Lanka's largest national park and is also one of Asia's oldest parks.

Samarasinghe spoke about a study on leopards that he conducted in 2018 at the Wilpattu National Park, sharing his results and observations with the audience, highlighting the importance of protecting these cats and their habitats.

### Studying the Sri Lankan leopard

Samarasinghe shared that the main focus of the study was to provide reliable data on the leopard population within the Wilpattu National Park and the population's dynamics within the park and surrounding areas. The study's aim was to collect data that could be used to support conservation managers and help develop effective management plans for the future.

The primary tools used in the study were camera traps, where posts with cameras were set up to capture photographs of wildlife passing by using thermal motion sensors. Over the course of the study, Samarasinghe placed 85 traps covering 750 sq. km. of the Wilpattu National Park in areas known to have leopards present.

The study captured visuals of not just leopards but various wildlife. In total, the study captured 133 individual leopards (each leopard has unique spot patterns that make them identifiable to a large degree). Using the data found, the overall leopard population at the Wilpattu National Park was estimated to be approximately 355 leopards, with a female-male ratio of 1.5:1.

### The key issues Sri Lankan leopards face

Using his research, Samarasinghe outlined some of the key issues that Sri Lankan leopard populations have to deal with.



Poaching is a major issue that leopards deal with, though this doesn't mean that poachers are necessarily hunting leopards specifically. Samarasinghe explained that poachers are mostly after sambar deer and spotted deer and that in the process of stalking these deer, leopards sometimes get in the way and are hurt or killed. Samarasinghe urged the general public to forgo bushmeat in an effort to curb this demand and reduce poaching.

Communities around the park and their own respective development also pose a problem, Samarasinghe noted. The nearby fishing villages of Pukkulama and Palugahathurai, for instance, sometimes see conflict with leopards because of their proximity to the park.

Post-war development is also affecting the habitats of leopards and increasing the potential for leopard-human conflict. Samarasinghe spoke about the Pallenkandal Church and how it was expanding and increasing its festive activities shortly after the Civil War which had the potential to create all sorts of problems and bring unnecessary external pressure on the park in terms of potential human-animal conflict, pollution, noise pollution, and retaliatory animal killings when a loved one is harmed by an animal.

Another aspect of post-war development that affects leopards and national parks, in general, is the reclamation of land for developing communities, like when chunks of the Wilpattu National Park were cleared out to place IDPs (internally displaced persons). Other aspects of development like illegal roads being built through the parks also have a negative impact on animal populations and behaviour because of the disruption caused to animal travel patterns.

Another issue is buffer zones around the park being encroached on to build shops, houses, and villages and even to cultivate crops. Samarasinghe explained that there are strict laws to control activity in these zones, but these laws are not always followed.

### How can we protect leopards and their habitats better?

Samarasinghe recommended long-term monitoring of leopard populations within the Wilpattu National Park and bordering protected areas and engaging different stakeholders, for example those involved in tourism, to contribute data that they capture like images of wildlife to allow detailed studying, not just of leopards but their prey

as well. Samarasinghe also noted that the majority of research done is mostly conducted by private individuals who have a genuine passion for wildlife and that it would be good to see the State conduct more research into things like prey distribution in protected areas. Samarasinghe also shared that there needs to be a way of centralising and collating all the independent private research done so that more informed actions can be taken to protect habitats and wildlife.

Samarasinghe also noted that it was important to study the dynamics of human-leopard interaction in and around the park, looking at the different communities in these areas and their respective knowledge, attitudes, and practices because not all communities view leopards the same way.

Samarasinghe stressed the importance of eliminating poaching in and around the park, noting that there were 12 reported leopard deaths last year because of poaching activities. Samarasinghe noted that the Park Warden had taken drastic and commendable steps to curb poaching, getting the special forces and commandos involved in controlling the borders of the park and that now poachers can no longer enter the park from the south. Samarasinghe hopes this will extend elsewhere soon too.

### Hope for the future

Samarasinghe shared that while we are in a bad position at the moment, there is lots of hope for the future. He noted that it is high time politicians and officials pay attention and reset. On a positive note, Samarasinghe discussed the landmark ruling in the Wilpattu case when Justice Janak De Silva ruled that the State has a responsibility to preserve and protect the environment for the benefit of the common Sri Lankan, highlighting that the judiciary has this responsibility as well. Samarasinghe noted that this sends a strong message to the executive and legislature communities that the Constitution needs to be followed when it comes to environmental matters.

Dinal Samarasinghe's lecture on the leopards of the Wilpattu National Park can be viewed in its entirety on the WNPS Facebook page.

