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Delta Takes You to a Delicious World

The Island

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Noballing chuckers

It looks as if the Supreme Court were the only institution available in this country for people to have their grievances redressed and the plunder of public assets halted. This is a damning indictment of the legislature, the executive and the other state apparatuses.

On Friday, the Supreme Court (SC) delivered a massive gavel blow to a pacie and his political boss much to the relief of the public bowled over by them; and a disastrous hedging agreement the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation had entered into at their behest was suspended. But for the SC intervention invoked by a group of civic-conscious people, the CPC would have continued to haemorrhage whopping sums of precious forex in the name of hedging.

The SC order that de Mel be suspended as CPC chairman and Minister Fowzie be stripped of his portfolio came as a blessing. Both of them have proved themselves to be total misfits capable only of busting CPC (read public) funds. The hapless people are fervently hoping that the tax revision the SC ordered will lead to a substantial reduction in fuel prices.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with hedging considered a standard practice. What went wrong for the CPC as well as this country was that the authority of the CPC bigwigs to decide on hedging or any other deal was not properly hedged around. The hedging disaster has exposed a severe lack of institutional safeguards to prevent arbitrary decisions being made as per whims and fancies of top guns of the public institutions. They must be made to refer the drafts of all vital agreements to experts at the Attorney General's Department, the Treasury, the Central Bank etc., and obtain approval before making any irrevocable commitment so as to ensure that the small print does not contain anything unfavourable to the State.

However, it is not only de Mel and Fowzie who must be blamed for the hedging crisis. Its genesis is in de Mel's appointment as CPC chairman. He is a former fast bowler whose appointment the CPC unions opposed tooth and nail. For once, trade unions did something sensible! But, the government routed their efforts to noball the pacie with right political connections and, true to form, bulldozed its way through.

Even a sanitary labourer in the state sector is required to have certain basic qualifications. Does de Mel's have any? He is only a cricketer and managing an ailing venture like the CPC is a different ball game! He epitomised the proverbial square peg in a round hole. The government must take the full responsibility for his appointment and the attendant crisis.

Successive governments have treated the state ventures as *ambalamas* for their failed cronies and party men. They have a gala time at public expense and give an impetus to those institutions' journey down a slippery slope. Little surprise that state corporations–CPC included– have come to resemble ships with pirates on board.

Someone should explore the possibility of moving the Bribery Commission against all those responsible for the hedging debacle to see if any palms were oiled.

Narayanan, Patil quit over Mumbai terror

India's national security adviser M. K. Narayanan and Home Minister Shivraj Patil have resigned following the terror attacks in Mumbai last week, according to Indian news channels. The announcement of M K Narayanan's offer to resign came close on the heels of the Congress-led government making public Patil's resignation.

In the wake of the Mumbai terror strikes the Centre drew a lot of flak from an irate public for serious security lapses on the part of the government, which, they said, had enabled the attackers to wrongfoot the security establishment in spite of a number of precedents.

Patil

Narayanan

The fallout of the terror strikes has led to tensions between India and Pakistan with some members of the Indian government pointing a finger at Pakistan.

Meanwhile AP reported: A day after the siege ended, corpses were still being brought out of the ritzy Taj Mahal hotel where three suspected Muslim militants made a last stand before Indian commandos killed them in a blaze of gunfire and explosions.

On Sunday, the landmark waterfront hotel, popular among foreign tourists and Indian society, was surrounded by metal barricades, its shattered windows boarded over. At the famous Gateway of India basalt arch nearby, a shrine of candles, flowers and messages commemorated victims.

"We have been to two funerals already," Mumbai resident Karin Dutta said as she placed a small bouquet of white flowers for several friends killed in the hotel. "We're going to another one now."

The rampage was carried out by gunmen at 10 sites across Mumbai starting Wednesday night.

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Highest rainfall after 9 decades in Jaffna: 9 killed

by Lakshmi de Silva

Heavy rains during the past few days have claimed 11 lives, 9 in the North and 2 in the South. That is the highest rainfall recorded since 1918 in Jaffna with 520.1 millimetres.

Wednesday's rainfall in Jaffna was 389.8 millimetres, the highest after nine decades, Meteorology Department Chairman, Chaminda de Silva told '*The Island*' yesterday (30).

Two deaths reported from Amunugamuwa in the Thihagoda Division were caused due to an earthslip in which a house was buried killing I. P. Jayarathna (55) and his wife Chandra Piyadeva (44), Disaster Management Centre Deputy Director D. A. Gunapala said.

The highest number of families affected (97,656) by the rains was reported from the Jaffna District while 21,200 people in the Mulaitivu District and 5,136 families in the Mannar District were also affected by the rains. The total number of families displaced was 125,636 families in eight districts, Jaffna, Mannar, Trincomalee, Mulaitivu, Monaragala,

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One million housing project a myth

by Wijitha Nakkawita and Lakshmi de Silva

The claim that a million houses were built during the period of President Ranasinghe Premadasa was based on facts as official records in the Ministry of Housing showed that during 16 years from 1977, only 718,000 houses had been built, Minister of Housing Geethanjana Gunwadena told Parliament last Thursday (27).

The Minister was responding to a speech made by UNP Hambantota District member Sajith Premadasa,

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Newton to Myanmar as SL envoy

President Mahinda Rajapaksa has named Newton Gunarathne as Sri Lanka's next ambassador to Myanmar, political sources said the high post committee of Parliament has been informed of the appointment. Sources said that the former ITN chief would be taking up the new post shortly. **(SF)**

Army bags Otiyamalai, advance on Sea Tiger stronghold Alampil

With the army gradually stepping up operations on the Weli Oya front east of A9, the Sea Tiger stronghold at Alampil, Mullaitivu is coming under heavy pressure.

The 59 Division pushing towards Alampil from their positions east of Kumulamunai Saturday, repulsed an LTTE counter attack, army headquarters said. The army recovered bodies of four LTTE cadres. The army said that LTTE resistance east of Kumulamunai would collapse soon. "We are just a couple of kilometers away from Alampil," an army official based in Vavuniya told 'The Island'.

The Sea Tiger base at Alampil was one of the major launching pads for operations against the navy over a long period of time.

The 14 SR (Sinha Regiment) and 12 SLLI (Sri Lanka Light Infantry) Saturday afternoon moved into Otiyamalai, situated southwest of Tannimurippukulam.

Electricity at Rs. 14 per unit not possible – *CEB Engineers*

by Ifham Nizam

Ceylon Electricity Board senior engineers reject a recent claim by West Coast Project Managing Director U. D. Jayawardena that the Kerawalapitiya combined cycle power plant to be commissioned could provide electricity at Rs. 14 per unit from the first week of December.

"If a unit of electricity is to be supplied at Rs. 14, the new plant should be able to purchase a litre of furnace oil at Rs. 34 or less," a senior engineer said.

He said as per their invoice received for energy charges up to November 1, the Kerawalapitiya plant had claimed Rs. 636 million. They have generated 21 GWh. According to this invoice, the unit cost is Rs. 30/kWh – fuel cost only," he said.

He also said that the Kerawalapitiya power plant was using a special type of furnace fuel and the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation had imported a large stock of it.

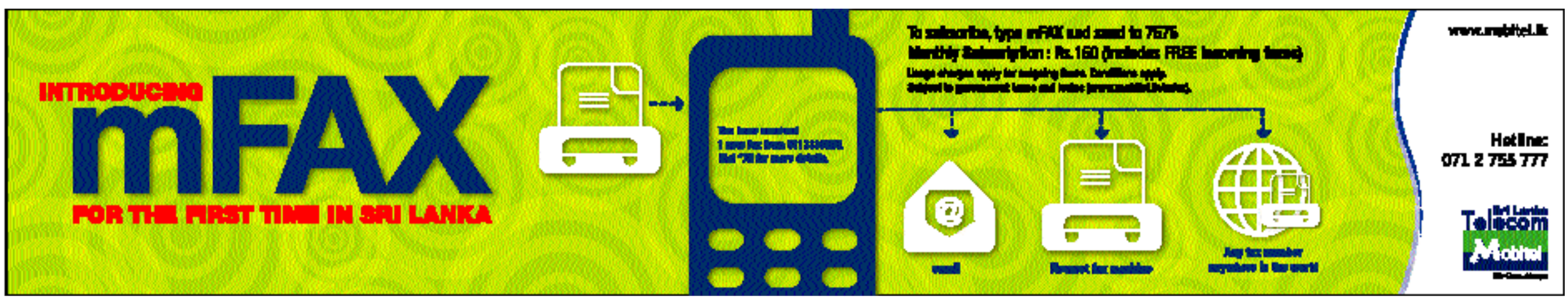
He added: "The price of fuel as per their last invoice is Rs. 88 a litre. That price will not change until they finish the whole consignment. At that rate, a unit from WCP will cost Rs. 32 kWh - fuel plus other variable costs."

However, he said fuel prices in the world market were coming down.

The latest furnace oil price was Rs. 51 per litre, another CEB official said. He said even if WCP was given fuel at that price, their unit cost price would be Rs. 19.90.

MI 24 helicopters destroy LTTE strong points

Air Force MI 24 helicopters carried out air strikes on several LTTE strong points located near Murukkandi junction, Kilinochchi around 7.00am yesterday (30), the Media Center for National Security said.

These air strikes were launched in support of the Army's 57 division troops advancing on the Kilinochchi front, the MCNS said.

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