

Trichy...
Rs. 7,750/=

Rs. 15,300/=

300/2286

The Island

Mental retardation a danger to mankind!
page 10

Cézanne: the greatest realist
Mid week

Dubai...
Rs. 15,750/=

Rs. 31,100/=

300/2286

Vol. 28 No. 111 Wednesday 25th March, 2009. 32 Pages Rs. 20 Registered in Sri Lanka as a Newspaper - Late City Edition

The Island
Published by Upali Newspapers Ltd.
223, Bloomfield Road, Colombo 13.
Tel: 2497574, Fax: 2497543
E-mail: prabath@uni.upali.lk
Wednesday 25th March, 2009.

Let the guilty pay dearly

The tragic death of 12-year-old Peshala Hanshini caused by Rubella vaccination recently has triggered a war of words between doctors and the Health Ministry. They are, true to form, trading charges in a bid to absolve themselves of the responsibility for the accident and their blame game has obscured the main issue.

The Government Medical Officers' Association (GMOA) has promptly pinned the blame for Peshala's death and the hospitalisation of 26 other students of St. Thomas' Girls' School, Matara, on the Health Ministry and called for the resignation of Minister of Health Nimal Siripala de Silva, Health Secretary Dr. Athula Kahandallanage and Director General of Health Services Dr. Ajith Mendis. The All Ceylon Government Medical Officers' Association (ACGMOA) aligned to the JIP has attributed the child's death to the 'inferior quality' of the Rubella vaccine which it says was close to the date of expiry.

The Health Ministry has laid the blame for the tragedy at the doorstep of the medical team that administered the vaccine to Peshala, whose mother had sent a letter to doctors that the child was prone to some allergies. The GMOA has, *inter alia*, faulted the health authorities for detailing a medical person who, it claims, was not capable of running a vaccination programme. This claim has been disputed by the Society of Registered and Assistant Medical Officers (SRAMO).

One is intrigued. If the Rubella vaccination is so serious to require special precautionary measures and administration only by graduate doctors, why on earth was it that neither the doctors' unions on the warpath nor the Health Ministry cautioned the public, especially the parents of schoolgirls to be inoculated, against possible side effects and ensured that everything was in order before the commencement of the vaccination programme?

ACGMOA spokesman Dr. Geshantha Dissanayake has pointed out that Peshala's death is not just a one-off. Yesterday, we quoted him as saying that 13 children had died in 2008 after receiving Pentavalent vaccine. What was wrong with that vaccination programme? Could the deaths of those hapless children also be blamed on the medical personnel who administered the vaccine? Or, was there something wrong with the vaccine?

JIP MP Anura Kumara Dissanayake told Parliament last week that the Health Ministry had been in an inordinate hurry to dispose of the old stocks of Rubella vaccine close to the date of expiry for auditing purposes at the expense of schoolchildren. Is there any truth in this allegation which is very serious? This view has found resonance in the country, given the Health Ministry's notoriety for malpractice.

Doctors and politicians must stop playing politics with the issue, finding scapegoats and trying to pull the wool over the eyes of the public. Something has gone wrong somewhere and it is their duty to put their heads together and figure out what it is and how it has happened.

Sadly, the Rubella controversy has led to a huge loss of public confidence in the national immunisation programmes. The onus is on doctors and the Health Ministry to allay public concerns and fears about the safety of their precious children as regards inoculation, which, at this rate, might come to be feared more than the diseases they are aimed at warding off.

It is incumbent upon President Mahinda Rajapaksa to order a high-level independent probe, besides the WHO investigation now underway, into the Rubella disaster and get to the bottom of it. Anyone found to have been remiss in his or her duty must be severely dealt with.

The public must be reassured that there will be no repetition.

Blake burns brighter!

The current United States Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Robert O. Blake is to become the Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, a media report said.

According to the report, his nomination to the post will be formally announced and submitted in the near future.

Continued on page 6

Ranil - Sajith deal ended UNP's leadership battle

by Zacki Jabbar

A last minute deal between Ranil Wickremesinghe and Sajith Premadasa resulted in the tussle for the UNP leadership at Monday's Working Committee meeting, petering out, informed sources said.

They told *The Island* that Premadasa loyalists had signed a motion rejecting an eight-member committee report, recommending the creation of a senior leader post, in addition to that of leader, after Premadasa had been assured by Wickremesinghe that two new positions, namely Additional Deputy Leader and Additional Assistant Leader, would be created and the former given to Premadasa and the latter to S. B. Dissanayake.

"At the same time, S. B. Dissanayake's supporters were made to believe that Dissanayake would be appointed Additional Deputy Leader while Premadasa would be made Additional Assistant Leader."

The sources, said that while Wickremesinghe was winning over Premadasa, his confidante and staunch defender Vajira Abeywardena had obtained the signatures of 28 Working Committee members, expressing confidence in Wickremesinghe's leadership and also rejecting the creation of a senior leader post, on the grounds that it would make the party laughing stock.

Continued on page 6

Trees fall on house killing two by Jayakody Ratnayaka

Our Niwara Elyia corr

Two youth were killed at Lindula in the Thalawakale area when five trees collapsed on the house in which they took refuge on Tuesday afternoon, police said.

The incident took place during heavy rains in the area.

The police identified the victims as Sathasivam Naguwaraj (17) and Selvaraja Chandramohan (18).

Govt. urged to save Ceylinco Sussex Colleges

by Shamindra Ferdinando

The troubled Ceylinco managed Sussex College network, too, is experiencing severe difficulties with K. A. S. Jayatissa, Deputy Chairman.

The financial turmoil at the Ceylinco Group had caused immense problems at its schools. In some instances, parents had refused to make payments until the management provided major facilities promised to the students.

A group of parents of students studying at the Sussex branch at Wakkwella, Galle has sought a meeting with Education Minister Susil Premajayanth to apprise him of.

Continued on page 6

TNA undecided on President's invitation

by Ranil Dharmasena

The Tamil National Alliance was yet to decide whether they would meet President Mahinda Rajapaksa to discuss the prevailing political situation and a possible political solution to the conflict, TNA MP T. Kanagasabay said yesterday.

The meeting is to take place at Temple Trees at 6.30 p.m. tomorrow (26) and President Mahinda Rajapaksa has invited all TNA MPs to talk.

A letter prepared by President's Secretary Lalith Weeraratna

Continued on page 6



Children affected by food poisoning await treatment. Pic by Saman Mallawarachchi, Trincomalee Cor.

One dead, 270 warded after eating bakery products

● Students and teachers affected: All schools in Trinco town closed

by Norman Paliwardane and Saman Mallawarachchi, Trinco Cor.

One person died and 270 poisoning hospitalised due to food poisoning in Trincomalee yesterday.

Among those admitted to the Hospital were 202 children from all the schools in the Trincomalee town area. They were taken ill after eating buns and bread from a bakery at King's Street, Trincomalee.

Naresingham (60) of King's Street, Trincomalee. Around 50 had been discharged after treatment, hospital sources said.

Those who consumed food products of the bakery had complained that they felt faint and nauseous. Schools in the Trincomalee urban area were closed with many teachers and students being rushed to hospital.

Trincomalee police have recorded statements from the workers at the bakery, which was immediately sealed.

Secretly burying friend's body

Five Lankans jailed in Qatar

Five Sri Lankan men have been convicted of secretly burying the body of a compatriot who died after a drinking bout in December 2007, the Gulf Times reported yesterday.

The GT story filed from Qatar said: "While three of them who appeared in the Court were handed down a year's imprisonment, two of the accused who had left the country were sentenced to three years jail in absentia.

According to Court sources, the deceased, in his late 20's, was buried by his friends in a deserted area in Wuikar on December 20, 2007.

The accused said the victim died after drinking a large quantity of undiluted whiskey. "Soon after, he started vomiting and lost consciousness. We tried to revive him but in vain."

The matter was exposed when the brother of the deceased filed a case on January 2, 2008, saying that he had not seen him since December 19,

2007 and that his mobile was switched off. He also told the police about his brother's friends.

The main accused told the police that he along with two of his friends transported the body to the Wuikar area where it was buried in a shallow grave. He led the police to the scene from where the body was recovered.

A forensic report showed that the man was a regular user of amphetamine. There were no injury marks on the body.

The Court found that the three of them were guilty of hiding the body and based on their confessions sentenced them to one year imprisonment and subsequent deportation.

SMART Pre Paid Rates

08:00 - 18:00	Rs. 1.50	08:00 - 18:00	Rs. 1.50
18:00 - 08:00	Rs. 2.00	18:00 - 08:00	Rs. 2.00
08:00 - 18:00	Rs. 1.50	08:00 - 18:00	Rs. 1.50

ALL UNLIMITED

"You can always count on Mobitel, our National Mobile Services provider"

www.mobitel.lk
Hotline 011 798 777

Mobitel