

Rohana to act for Dinesh

Parliamentarian Rohana Kumara Dissanayake, was yesterday sworn in as acting Urban Development and Sacred Areas Development Minister before Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayake.

Urban Development and Sacred Areas Development Minister Dinesh Gunawardane is on a three day visit to India.

Treasure hunters arrested

by Sarath Eraminigama

Dambulla Police on Saturday night, arrested four men who were digging the Bathalawatte Forest Reserve for treasure.

When the Police reached the scene, the suspects had dug an area three feet deep and were taken into custody with the implements used for digging.

Police said the suspects were residents of Dehiattakandiya and Lenadora.

They were due to be produced before the Dambulla Magistrate.

The raid was conducted by a team of offices under the supervision of OIC Dambulla Police, Lal de Silva.

Dambara Amila's driver arrested

by Hemantha Randunu

Police arrested the driver of Ven. Dambara Amila there, who is alleged to have fraudulently obtained money from persons by promising employment overseas.

The suspect was hiding in a temple in Neluwa.

The accused Vishan Janith is being interrogated by the CID.

Earlier police arrested Ven. Amila and released him on bail.

His driver is a former monk, police said.

To mark National Day Lankan artistes honoured in New York

The Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations, Dr. Palitha Kohona and the Sri Lanka Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York hosted a gala concert on February 5th for 350 guests at the prestigious Asia Society on Park Avenue to mark the National Day featuring some of Sri Lanka's best talent in America.

The concert featured Rohan De Silva, Pianist and Maestro of Chamber Music who has played at the White House and at Carnegie Hall, young Soprano Ms Tharanga Goonetillake who is a gem in the New York's Opera Circuit, Veteran Jazz Vocalist Yolande Bawan dubbed as the new Ella Fitzgerald, Pradeep Ratnayake, Sri Lanka's outstanding Sitarist, Jazz Pianist Prodigy Dinuk Wijeratne. The Channa Upuli Dance Troupe added lustre to the event with its splendid dance display.

Dr. Kohona, in his welcoming address said "It is doubly a joy to host this event as we as a nation emerge from our long nightmare of internal conflict and as we congratulate President Mahinda Rajapaksa on his emphatic victory at last week's Presidential elections. Against the backdrop of a long awaited peace, the nation's pent up dreams and aspirations of a better future for all its citizens are reflected in the music of the artistes performing today."

Ambassador Kohona who hosted this first time event for New York's Diplomatic Corps, the United Nations Community and New York's leading lights in business and travel hosted a well attended reception with a fine array of Sri Lankan cuisine in the Asia Society's Banquet Hall following the Concert. The diplomatic community and the UN were well represented.

Fonseka... From page 1

The others would also be given similar assistance. "Mahinda was globe trotting while innocent families are being harassed and made to suffer, just because they did their legitimate duty," Fonseka said.

He said that the President was going around kissing babies as a political stunt but did not care about the children of the 30 ex army officers, who were being detained under Emergency Regulations.

"All the ex-army personnel who protected me during the Presidential Poll had retired from service. They have all the right to engage in any other legal profession in this country," Fonseka said. "But Gothabaya and Wimal Weerawansa are saying that former security forces personnel cannot be involved in politics. This proves that what we have in Sri Lanka is a dictatorship. No where in the world do you find such obnoxious laws."

"We booked the entire second floor of a hotel to thwart the Rajapaksa's attempt to assassinate me and other Opposition leaders. Twenty rooms on the lower floor were occupied by my security personnel. The whole world saw how they got the hotel surrounded by armed men and prevented us from leaving."

The "Gorilla" was now trying to frame me for the murder of Sunday Leader Editor Lasantha Wickrematunga but every one knew who the murderer was, he said.

Essential consumer items rising steeply

by Lal Gunesekera

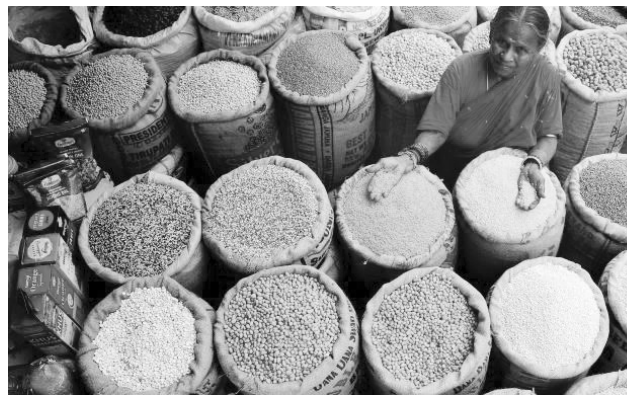
The steeply rising cost of living since last year, continues to be a big burden on the lives of the ordinary citizens of this country. They complain that the government does not show any interest in bringing down the prices of essential consumer items such as rice, vegetables, fish, chicken, etc.

Numerous consumers pose just one question. Who manipulates the prices of consumer goods in the open market? Is it the wholesale businessman or any other party? They complained to *The Island* that the government says one thing, but when they go to the market it's completely different.

"Minister of Trade, Consumer Affairs and Marketing Development, Bandula Gunawardene, continues to say that the prices of essential items have been reduced at Sathosa outlets and Economic Centres. We do not have vehicles to visit these places and do our marketing at retail outlets closest to our homes. Minister Gunawardene seems to be in a dream world. Why does he not visit the markets that the normal people frequent daily or weekly?" irate consumers, ask.

The prices at Sathosa outlets are - Rathu Kekulu at Rs. 60 a kilo, Sudu Kekulu Rs. 50, Samba Rs. 70 (not

always available and when it is, restricted to 5 kg per person), Kora Rs. 70, Basmathi Rs. 69.50, Sugar Rs. 94, Bombay Onions Rs. 83, Garlic Rs. 232, Dhal Rs. 158, Dried Sprats Rs. 260 and



Potatoes Rs. 54.

What about the prices in the open market? Rathu Kekulu is sold at Rs. 75, Sudu Kekulu also at Rs. 75, Rathu Samba Rs. 96, Samba at three different prices depending on the variety (Rs. 90, Rs. 100 and Rs. 130), Nadu at Rs. 85, Basmathi Rs. 100 and Sugar Rs. 110. The price of a kilo of chicken is Rs. 470 and beef Rs. 420.

"The prices of several vegetables are just astronomical. Fish prices are also very high despite the war on terrorism ending in May last year and government saying that plenty of fish is being transported to Colombo from the North and East. This is despite the country being surrounded

by the sea. The only prices to have come down are Eggs at Rs. 12," complain these poor consumers.

They (the consumers) say that the government must step in and bring

about a reduction in essential items. "The war on terrorism is over and so is Christmas, New Year and the Presidential Elections. We voted for President Rajapaksa hoping that he would be able to sort out this mess and we yet have confidence that he could and will reduce the prices. Various excuses trotted out by Minister Gunawardene like the world prices, drought, etc. are unacceptable," these irate consumers told *The Island*.

Meanwhile, the Minister of Agriculture Development and Agrarian Services, Maithripala Sirisena told *The Island* that the government has already allocated Rs. 4,060

million to purchase 140,000 metric tons of paddy from the March Maha season. This will be done through the Paddy Marketing Board (PMB).

"Storage facilities are being improved to stock the paddy. We have earmarked 50,000 mt to be purchased by the PMB from Polonnaruwa, 30,000 mt each from Anuradhapura and the Eastern Province, and 15,000 mt each from the Southern and North Western Provinces. The PMB will pay Rs. 28 for a kilo of Samba to the farmers directly. There will be no third party involvement," Minister Sirisena said.

He said that the PMB will maintain a buffer stock and release 40,000 mt of rice to the market to control the fluctuation of prices. The government has decided not to purchase large stocks of rice from abroad this year.

Minister Bandula Gunawardene told *The Island* that people must learn to be patient. He said: "There is nothing to worry about. The price increases are due to various situations. We will do our utmost to give relief to the people and take every step possible to reduce prices of essential items. The government has no control over certain consumer items. These prices did not have any impact on the January 26 election."

WTPC... From page 1

secretariat would ensure Tamils living across the globe the rights to livelihood, land and politics. The meet condemned the

UN for its failure to act on incidents of war crimes and human rights violations. (Indian Express)

Fonseka arrested... From page 1

Military spokesman Major-General Samarasinghe further said the arrest was related to offences Fonseka had committed as the army commander and Chief of Defence Staff.

Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader Rauff Hakeem, who was at the scene, was quoted by foreign media agencies as saying, "He was dragged away in a very disgraceful manner in front of our

own eyes." Fonseka's media secretary Senaka de Silva was also arrested along with him, Opposition Member of Parliament Mano Ganesan told the media.

Fonseka was presiding over a meeting attended by three political party leaders Ganesan, Hakim and Somawansa Amarasinghe, when he was

arrested. Also present at the meeting were JVP MP Sunil Handunetti and several others.

President Rajapaksa was away in Russia on a three-day state visit and Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa was also overseas at the time of Fonseka's arrest, sources told *The Island*.

Elephant ... From page 1

symbol of the National Democratic Front (NDF), Fonseka and the JVP have decided to contest the parliamentary polls on the United Democratic Front (UDF) ticket under the Hare symbol.

The TNA and the SLMC will contest together in the North and the East.

The UNF offered to appoint Fonseka to Parliament through the National List, according to sources. But, he has decided to contest from the Galle District, where he hails from.

Although the UNF and the UDF are exploring the possibility of forging a no-contest pact, political observers point out that under the district-based Proportional Representation System, such an arrangement will not be possible unless one party forgoes an entire electoral district to prevent a split in the opposition vote.

However, it is not possible that the UNF will agree to such an agreement and grant some of its parliamentary seats to the UDF on a platter and place itself at the mercy of the JVP

and Fonseka, sources say.

UNP Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe has come under severe criticism from the party's rank and file and some senior leaders for the absence of the Elephant Symbol and the colour Green at the recently concluded presidential election.

The JVP contested the last parliamentary polls in 2004 on the UPFA ticket and won 39 seats. Within less than one year, it broke ranks and sat in the opposition threatening survival of the UPFA.

UK arms... From page 1

Sarig, 58, of Lauderdale Road, Maida Vale, west London, held his head in his hands before he was taken into custody by the two dock officers.

Turning to Freckleton, the judge said he had an earlier conviction for breaching export licences in 1987 for which he was sentenced to nine months in jail. The judge told him the "earlier conviction for a not entirely dissimilar matter" showed the "determination you had to ignore very important regulation".

Both Sarig and Freckleton, 64, of Mitchell Road, Enfield, north London, showed little emotion as they were jailed. They were both self-employed arms dealers based in London, with Sarig running MIA Trading and Freckleton running Lyon Brandfield in the UK. Sarig also ran Greemount Trading, which was registered in Panama but had no offices there, the court heard.

In all, the jury unanimously found

Sarig guilty of 12 counts of being knowingly concerned in the supply, delivery, transfer, acquisition or disposal of controlled goods with intent to evade prohibition thereon. But he was cleared of the deals involving the trade of 1,000 semi-automatic pistols from Turkey to Venezuela, and ammunition from Serbia and Montenegro to Sri Lanka. Freckleton was convicted of three counts of the same charge.

High-level... From page 1

The Secretary to the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights Professor Rajiva Wijesinghe told *The Island* yesterday that this sort of briefing was normally held in March in Geneva, but due to the April General Elections, Minister Samarasinghe had decided to leave for Geneva yesterday.

"He will brief 30 to 40 Ambassadors of countries represented in the UN Human Rights Council, including its Human Rights Commissioner Nawaneetham Pillai. There are 47 countries represented in the Human Rights Council," Professor Wijesinghe said.

He said that the previous discussions held since 2007, when Dayan Jayatilke was Sri Lanka's Ambassador in Geneva, had been "very successful" and

the techniques had worked very well.

He said: "They could ask any questions, and Minister Samarasinghe is ready to answer any question arising from General (ret.) Sarath Fonseka's allegations against Defence Secretary, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, made in an interview to *The Sunday Leader* and even accusations made about malpractices at the January 26 Presidential election.

Professor Wijesinghe told *The Island* that the Special Rapporteur for Extra Judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions of the UN Commission on Human Rights, Philip Alston, had given Sri Lanka notice and sent two letters on the wild allegations made by Gen. Fonseka and Channel 4.

"We are prepared and ready to face

any sort of questions posed to us and we are confident that our delegation led by Minister Samarasinghe will do the country proud in Geneva during these discussions," Professor Wijesinghe said.

He told *The Island* that Minister Samarasinghe would spend about four days in Geneva for "high level segment" discussions, but on this occasion, the Minister would be meeting "social groups" or involved in private briefings, too.

Minister Samarasinghe and the Sri Lanka delegation are scheduled to return to the country on Thursday (January 11).

He may also deliver a speech at a session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva scheduled for March 1.

Maj. Gen. Prasad Samarasinghe new military spokesman



Major General Prasad Samarasinghe assumed office as Military Spokesman and Director, Directorate of Media in the Army yesterday (8) during a brief ceremony held at Media Centre for National Security (MCNS).

Major General Samarasinghe as Military Spokesman had the rare opportunity of contributing to the initial phase of the onset of the Humanitarian Operations that started off from Mavil Aru in the East during the years 2006-2007. He was incidentally promoted to the rank of Major General from a Brigadier yesterday (8) just a couple of hours after he took office as Military Spokesman.

His predecessor, Brigadier V. Udaya B. Nanayakkara, former Military Spokesman and Director, Directorate of Media took office as Chief Field Engineer, Chief Field Engineer's Office a few days ago after serving the Military as spokesman in the most turbulent times of the Eelam War for over two years when the Wanni Humanitarian Operations were at their peak.

Major General Samarasinghe who is also the Chief Signal Officer (CSO) of the Army and Chief Controller, Centre for Research and Development at Ministry of Defence will continue his functions, in addition to his appointment as Military Spokesman.

Major General Samarasinghe initialed an official document to signify the assumption of duties after he lit the traditional oil lamp in the MCNS office. Later on, he spoke to a gathering of Officers attached to the MCNS.

Major General Samarasinghe who also previously served as Military Spokesman and Director, Directorate of Media (December 2005-September 2007) was later appointed as Defence Advisor at High Commission for Sri Lanka in the UK.

The newly appointed Military Spokesman Major General Samarasinghe, as one of the Senior Signal Officers in the Army holds a service record spanning over 30 years. He has held a number of prestigious appointments after he was enlisted to the Army in 1980. He is an MSc (Defence Studies) graduate from Sir John Kotelawala Defence University.

To his credit, he also held a number of other important staff appointments such as Commander for three separate Brigades in Jaffna, Wanni and Trincomalee, Colonel General Staff, 22 Division Headquarters, Trincomalee, Colonel General Staff, Directorate of Operations, Army Headquarters, Assistant Military Secretary, Army Headquarters and the Centre Commandant, Sri Lanka Signal Corps, to name a few.

Thyroxin to be produced locally

by Don Asoka Wijewardena

Healthcare and Nutrition Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva says that from April 2010 the import of thyroxin tablets will be done away with as he has already instructed the State Pharmaceuticals Manufacturing Corporation to produce the drug locally.

It is estimated that the Health Ministry spends Rs. 120 million to import 26 million thyroxin tablets annually.

Minister de Silva said that due to thyroxin deficiency, women developed goiters and as a result the thyroid gland had to be removed surgically. Medical experts were of the view that iodine deficiency could be the cause of swelling of the thyroid gland.

He said that when patients underwent thyroid gland removal they must be treated with thyroxin tablets immediately after the operation.

SPMC Chairman M. A. P. Hemachandra said that Minister de Silva had instructed his institution to manufacture thyroxin tablets and the feasibility study had been completed. The SPMC was in the process of getting itself registered with the Cosmetics Devices and Drug Authority, which would have to approve the manufacturing process. The SPMC would import necessary raw material.

He said that the Health Ministry had been importing the thyroxin tablets from the United Kingdom and Argentina. The imported thyroxin tablet costs Rs.6 to Rs. 12 to while the locally manufactured tablets would cost only Rs. 2. The SPMC would also ensure that the drug would conform to the international drug standards.

530 SIs become IPs

by Hemantha Randunu

Police Department has promoted 530 sub inspectors to the rank of inspectors.

The promotions will be effective from 2007.

Those promotions are based on seniority as well as merit.

Some others have been given promotions in keeping with a Supreme Court ruling.