

International

Shaman dies of COVID after touting 'blessed' water cure

White claimed he could end the pandemic in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO: A high-profile shaman who tried to end Sri Lanka's COVID-19 outbreak with "blessed" water has died of the virus, his family said yesterday. Eliyantha White, 48, who treated sports stars and top politicians including the country's prime minister, claimed in November he could end the pandemic in Sri Lanka and neighboring India by pouring pots of his "blessed" water into rivers. Health Minister Pavithra Waniarachchi endorsed the water treatment, but was infected two months later and ended up in a hospital intensive care unit. She was later demoted, and lost her portfolio, but remains in the cabinet.

White attracted international attention in 2010 when legendary Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar publicly thanked him for treating a knee injury, saying it helped him hit the first-ever one-day international double century against South Africa. In a 2010 interview with AFP, White claimed he had "special powers"

since the age of 12. He has since treated other Indian cricket stars, including Gautam Gambhir and Ashish Nehra. White's family said he had refused the COVID-19 vaccine. His body was cremated at Colombo's main cemetery yesterday in line with quarantine regulations.

Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, who was among politicians to have consulted White, said on Twitter: "His legacy will continue to live through all the lives, he touched and healed of various ailments." But mainstream doctors described White as a fraud and Ayurveda physicians rejected his claims - even though the shaman said he used methods from the 3,000-year-old Indian medical tradition. Sri Lanka's total coronavirus deaths exceeded 12,000 with more than half a million people infected so far. Doctors say the real toll is at least twice as high and authorities have resorted to mass cremations to clear bodies piling up at hospitals and morgues. — AFP



COLOMBO: A cemetery worker wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) prepares to place the coffin of Eliyantha White, a local shaman who claimed he had super natural powers to end the pandemic and died of the COVID-19 coronavirus, inside the furnace at the crematorium of the Colombo General Cemetery yesterday. — AFP

Myanmar faces 'alarming' risk of escalating civil war

GENEVA: Myanmar is facing the alarming prospect of an escalating civil war as an uprising against the military junta widens, the UN's human rights chief warned yesterday. Michelle Bachelet told the United Nations Human Rights Council that time was running out for other countries to step up efforts to restore democracy and prevent a broader conflict. Myanmar has been in turmoil since Aung San Suu Kyi's government was ousted by the military in February, sparking a nationwide uprising that the junta has tried to crush. Attacks on troops have increased since lawmakers ousted by the generals called for a "people's defensive war" earlier this month.

Bachelet said the human rights situation had deteriorated significantly as the effects of the coup "devastate lives and hopes across the country". "Conflict, poverty and the effects of the pandemic are sharply increasing, and the country faces a vortex of repression, vi-

olence and economic collapse," she said. Faced with the "overwhelming repression of fundamental rights", the armed resistance movement was growing. "These disturbing trends suggest the alarming possibility of an escalating civil war," she said.

Bachelet urged countries to support a political process that would engage all parties, saying the ASEAN regional bloc and influential powers should use incentives and disincentives "to reverse the military coup and desperate spiral of violence". "Myanmar's stability and path to democracy and prosperity have been sacrificed over these last months to advance the ambitions of a privileged and entrenched military elite," she said. "The national consequences are terrible and tragic — the regional consequences could also be profound. The international community must redouble its efforts to restore democracy and prevent wider conflict before it is too late."

Bachelet said more than 1,100 people had now reportedly died at the hands of the security forces since the coup, while over 8,000 others, including children, had been arrested and more than 4,700 still in detention. The former Chilean president urged all parties - but especially the military - to allow unrestricted access to humanitarian aid, and called for the immediate release of all political prisoners. She called for all armed forces to protect civilians and said the use of air strikes and artillery in residential areas must cease immediately. — AFP

Nigeria gunmen kill 2 policemen

ENUGU: Gunmen have killed two policemen in southeast Nigeria, police said yesterday, in the latest violence targeting security personnel and government facilities in the restive region. In the incident on Tuesday, gunmen attacked a police checkpoint at Nachi in Enugu state and shot dead two officers, state police spokesman Daniel Ndukwe told AFP. "I can confirm that we lost two personnel to an attack by yet unidentified gunmen," he said. "Full-scale investigation that will lead to fishing out the assailants has commenced," he added. Residents of Nachi community confirmed the attack and death toll.

No group has claimed responsibility for the assault, but police

often blame the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a banned separatist group demanding an independent state for the ethnic Igbo people. IPOB denies any involvement of its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network. Dozens of police officers and other security personnel have been killed since January in targeted attacks in the southeast. Raids on prisons have seen scores of inmates freed and weapons carted away. On Sunday, gunmen ambushed a police patrol in the commercial town of Onitsha in Anambra state and killed an inspector.

Also Sunday, an area office of the electoral agency INEC was set ablaze in Enugu state, but vital election materials and equipment were not affected. IPOB's leader Nnamdi Kanu has been in custody since he was arrested abroad in June and brought back to Nigeria to face treason charges. Calls for a separate state of Biafra are a sensitive subject in Nigeria, after a unilateral declaration of independence in 1967 sparked a brutal 30-month civil war. More than one million people died, most of them Igbos, from the impact of conflict, hunger and disease. — AFP

Indian man on bail must wash women's clothes for six months

PATNA: An Indian man accused of attempted rape has been given bail on condition that he wash and iron the clothes of all women in his village for six months. Lalan Kumar, 20, will have to buy detergent and other items needed to provide six months of free laundry services to about 2,000 women in the village of Majhor in Bihar state, under the ruling made Wednesday.

Kumar, who washes clothes for a living, was arrested in April on charges including attempted rape, Santosh Kumar Singh, a police officer in Bihar's Madhubani district, told AFP. No date has been set for his trial. "All the women in the village are happy with the court decision," Nasima Khatoun, the head of the village council, told AFP. "It is historic. It will boost respect for women and help to protect dignity," added Khatoun, one of the village dignitaries who will monitor Kumar.

Women in the village said the order had made a positive impact by making crime against women a subject of discussion in their community. "This is a remarkable step and a different kind of punishment that sends a message to society," said Anjum Perween. India's rape laws were overhauled after a 2012 gang rape in New Delhi but the number of offences remains high, with more than 28,000 rapes reported in 2020. Police have long been accused of not doing enough to prevent violent crime and failing to bring sexual assault cases to court. — AFP