Decisions taken by the Cabinet of Ministers on 27.02.2023

01. Proposed Preferential Trade Agreement with Bangladesh

It is expected to strengthen relationships with key trade stakeholders at the regional level to develop market access opportunities for Sri Lankan exporters by removing market barriers and to achieve the objectives of attracting investment as well as to further enhance economic cooperation as a remedy for the existing problems related to domestic supply. Simultaneously, cabinet approval was given on 14.06.2021 for entering into a Preferential Trade Agreement between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. It has been identified that a preferential trade agreement with Bangladesh can further boost bilateral trade over existing trade agreements. Accordingly, the proposal made by the Hon. President to speed up negotiations on the proposed preferential trade agreement with Bangladesh under the guidance of the International Trade Office was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers.

02. Expediting the inspections and investigations in relation to goods detained by Sri Lanka Customs

It has been observed that it takes a long time to complete the inspections, investigations and other related procedures carried out by the Sri Lanka Customs on the goods detained by it. As a result, there are many economic losses including damages to and decay of the goods, so the existing procedures followed by the customs concerning the said goods should be expedited. Accordingly, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the measures taken by the Hon. President to appoint a ministerial committee with the following composition to study the issues and identify the amendments to be made to the Customs Ordinance if necessary and make recommendations thereon.

- Hon. Nimal Siripala de Silva
  Minister Ports, Shipping and Aviation
- Hon.(Dr) Ramesha Pathirana
  Minister of Plantation Industry and Industries
- Hon. Ranjith Siyambalapitiya
  State Minister of Finance
- Hon. Dilum Amunugama
  State Minister of Investment Promotions
- Hon. Shehan Samarasinghe
  State Minister of Finance

03. National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security

In 2000, the United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution entitled Women, Peace and Security and many developed and undeveloped countries in the world have introduced National Action Plans to implement the resolution. Accordingly the Cabinet of Ministers approved the proposal presented by the Hon. President in his capacity as the Minister of Women, Child affairs and Social Empowerment to implement the "National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2023-2027" which has been drafted with the participation and agreement of all parties

04. National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Cabinet approval was granted on 05.09.2022 to formulate a National Policy for Women's Empowerment to minimiz the existing gender imbalances. Accordingly the Cabinet of Ministers approved the proposal presented by the Hon. President in his capacity as the Minister of Women, Child affairs and Social Empowerment to implement the "National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment" under 8 main areas with the contribution of all relevant parties.

05. Agreement between the Australian Community Project Institute "Sight for All" and the Ministry of Health

The Australian Community Projects Institute "Sight for All" has agreed to donate medical and surgical ophthalmic equipment to eye units in selected hospitals in Sri Lanka and to provide a grant to develop health staff skills of the under this, it is expected to provide the necessary modern facilities for eye surgeries in Badulla Provincial Hospital, Ratnapura Batticaloa and Kalubowila Teaching Hospitals and Tangalle Base Hospital and to develop the skills of eye health workers and improve equipment in the eye units of Divisional hospitals. A grant of 99.42 million rupees is to be received under this project. Accordingly, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the proposal presented by the Minister of Health to enter in to an agreement with the Australian Community Project Institute "Sight for All" to accept the grant.

06. Sri Lanka to become a party to two major international conventions on nuclear oblighations

Earlier Cabinet approval was given to consider nuclear energy as an alternative to meet Sri Lanka's future energy needs. In accordance with that decision, a steering committee and 09 action committees have been appointed to study matters related to electricity generation using nuclear energy. The International Atomic Energy Agency has given its recommendations regarding the self-assessment report prepared by the working groups and it is possible to proceed with the nuclear power generation project in line with the recommendations. Accordingly, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the combined proposal presented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Power and Energy to proceed to become a party to those conventions above.

07. Pilot project to operate Battery powered Electric Busses

It has been recognized that it is appropriate to introduce buses that run using solar energy, a renewable energy source, as a measure to reduce the cost of importing fossil fuels, to face the international energy crisis. Taking in to account the resolution of the Minister of Transport and Highways presented regarding the implementation of a public-private partnership project for the operation of battery powered electric buses by the Sri Lanka Transport Board covering the Western Province centered on the commercial city of Colombo and Gampaha district, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the implementation of a pilot project based on a formal feasibility study.

08. Expanding market opportunities for Jet A-1Aviation Fuel

The Jet A-1 Aviation Fuel is currently supplied by the Sri Lanka Petroleum Corporation. Due to the foreign exchange crisis that the country is currently facing, the operations of Sapugaskanda Oil Refinery, where Jet A-1 fuel is produced, has been disrupted and the import of Jet A-1 fuel has also become a challenge for Ceylon Petroleum Corporation. Due to this, the supply of Jet A-1 fuel required for the cargo and passenger flights arriving at the airport has been disrupted and has to focus on alternative measures to supply the required Jet A-1 fuel for those aircraft. It has been accepted that it is appropriate to give the opportunity to supply Jet-A fuel to Sri Lanka under the maximum supply limits to the parties who supply Jet A-1 aviation fuel to the other countries so as not to hinder the supply of fuel produced at Sapugaskanda Refinery of Ceylon Petroleum Corporation. As such, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the proposal presented by the Minister of Power and Energy to give that opportunity to other parties who are capable of supplying jet A-1 fuel to the country.

09. Establishment of National Contributory Pension Fund

It has been recognized that is appropriate to establish a fund named National Contributory Pension Fund to ensure an appropriate environment to spend their retired life without being a burden to the country as well as to provide a pension with a certain profit for the retired life of the state sector pensioners. Accordingly, 8% from the basic salary of the employee and 12% from the employer should be credited to the proposed fund when a state employee is recruited in the state service. An independent entity governed by a board of management to manage the proposed contributory pension fund will be established and a fund manager with special skills will be appointed for management of the funds. The proposed national contributory pension scheme will be applicable to the individuals newly recruited to the government service. Whereas, those recruited to government service after the month of January 2016 can contribute to the proposed national contributory pension scheme as per their consent. Accordingly, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the proposal furnished by the Hon. President to direct the Legal Draftsman to prepare a draft bill so that required provisions can be made available.

10. Submission of the regulation imposed under Sri Lanka Export Development Act No. 40 of 1979 to the Parliament for its approval.

Considering the impact of the depreciation of the rupee as well as the value / cost of the global market, the value of insurance, and shipping charges, the CESS tax have been revised on the sub quantities of precise units on selected goods under 677 combined classification codes (HS Codes) and the relevant regulation for that has been published by the extraordinary gazette notification dated 14.11.2022 under section 14 of Sri Lanka Export Development Act No. 40 of 1979. Such regulations imposed as per the provisions of the said act should be forwarded to the Parliament for its concurrence within 04 months from the date of publishing such regulations. Accordingly, the Cabinet of Ministers granted approval to the resolution furnished by the Hon. President as the Minister of Investment Promotion to submit the said regulation published in the extraordinary gazette notification dated 14.11.2022.

11. Removing the social security tax on the purchase of paddy, production of rice and marketing.

Approval of the Cabinet of Ministers was granted to implement a programme to distribute Naadu rice that has been purchased by the Government for Rs. 100/- per kilogram with the objective of ensuring a fair price for the paddy farmer, among low income earners free of charge. In addition to the amount paid to the farmer per kilo of paddy, the paddy producers pointed out that an amount of approximately Rs. 6.00 / 7.00 has to be spent over a kilogram of rice as social security tax apart from the additional cost that has to be borne for water, electricity, storing, transport etc until the final product of one kilogram of paddy is produced and handed over to the customer within the process of rice production. They further pointed out that the farmers could be provided with a higher price is a certain concession can be granted to minimize the said cost. Considering those facts, the Cabinet of Ministers granted approval to the proposal tabled by the Hon. President as the Minister of Finance, Economic Stabilization and National Policies for revising the Social Security Contribution Levy Act No 25 of 2022 to release the purchase of paddy, production of rice and marketing so that the paddy farmers will be ensured of a higher price more than rupees 100/- per one kilogram of Naadu rice, sustaining the maximum price of rice existing within the market at present.

12. Introduction of the new act for assisting and protecting the victims and witnesses of a crime.

Approval of the Cabinet of Ministers was granted at their meeting held on 08.03.2021 to introduce a new act with proper provisions so that best internationally recognized standards and practices can be followed instead of the act for assisting and protecting the victims and witnesses of a crime which is in force at present. Therefore, the clearance of the Attorney General has been granted for the bill drafted by the Legal Draftsman. Accordingly, approval of the Cabinet of Ministers was granted to the resolution submitted by the Minister of Justice, Prison Affairs and Constitutional Reforms for publishing the said draft bill in the government gazette notification and forward to the Parliament.

13. Prevention of terrorism draft bill

Approval of the Cabinet of Ministers has been granted to introduce a new act to re - impose the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act No. 48 of 1979 which is already in force. Therefore, the clearance of the Attorney General has been granted for the bill drafted by the Legal Draftsman. Accordingly, approval of the Cabinet of Ministers was granted to the resolution submitted by the Minister of Justice, Prison Affairs and Constitutional Reforms for publishing the said draft bill in the government gazette notification and forward to the Parliament.