

This month's highlights:

- New publication 'Shadow Education in Sri Lanka during COVID-19: Trends, Impacts, and Role in Relation to Mainstream Education' by Ashani Abayasekara, Usha Perera, and Thisali de Silva gives insights on issues related to the accessibility, quality, and affordability of private tutoring, during the pandemic.
- Talking Economics (TE) blog by IPS Research Officer Ruwan Samaraweera revisits the environmental impact of the X-Press Pearl disaster and discusses how Sri Lanka can utilise the Sendai Framework to prevent maritime environmental disasters.
- TE blog by IPS Research Fellow Dr Asanka Wijesinghe and Research Assistant Nilupulee Rathnayake explores the trade effect of a Sri Lanka-Thailand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and a way forward to maximise the gains from an FTA.
- In the global gathering of the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Food Security Policy Research, Capacity, and Influence (PRCI) programme, IPS Research Fellow Dr Manoj Thibbotuwawa stresses the importance of strengthening policy research and training for successful policy influencing.
- In an IOM Assessment Report launching event, IPS Research Fellow Dr Bilesha Weeraratne highlights the importance of disparity in support for climate-related disasters in Sri Lanka.
- In the 'Inside IPS' segment, IPS Research Assistant Manisha Weeraddana speaks about informal remittances and remitting during times of crisis.

We hope you find this issue insightful. Your feedback is, as always, welcome!

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New Publication

Blogs

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Inside IPS

NEW RELEASE !

Shadow Education in Sri Lanka during COVID-19: Trends, Impacts, and Role in Relation to Mainstream Education

New IPS study finds that the demand for private tutoring or "shadow education" has risen in the context of dysfunctional school classes due to the pandemic and teacher strikes. As shadow education plays a crucial role in facilitating mainstream education, the study suggests how it could help mitigate educational setbacks and improve the overall education system.

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Building Resilience at Sea: How Sri Lanka Can Utilise the Sendai Framework to Prevent Maritime Environmental Disasters.
By Ruwan Samaraweera

Sri Lanka's ecological disaster related to the MV X-Press Pearl, a container ship carrying hazardous chemicals that caught fire off its coast on 20 May 2021, is back in the news as the country attempts to claim damages. The ecological disaster washed up tons of plastic pellets and other pollutants on the country's beaches and harmed its marine ecosystem. It is a stark reminder of the risks associated with transporting hazardous materials and the urgent need for governments and companies to take proactive measures to prevent such disasters in the future. This blog revisits the environmental impact of the X-Press Pearl disaster and discusses how Sri Lanka can use the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) to develop strategies and policies to prevent similar disasters from happening near its shores again.

See more >>>

Overcoming Obstacles: The Economic Case for a Sri Lanka-Thailand FTA
By Dr Asanka Wijesinghe and Nilupulee Rathnayake

In 2019, only 6% of tea imported by Thailand was from Sri Lanka. This low percentage can be attributed to the difference in preferences and Thailand's high tariffs of 90% on imported tea, which act as barriers to Sri Lanka's tea exports. Additionally, Thailand imposes up to 30% tariffs on nearly 120 product lines of wearing apparel. These high tariffs for products with a comparative advantage are not exclusive to Sri Lanka. Thailand also faces higher tariffs for vehicles, rubber, and light-electronics exports which Thailand exports competitively. This tariff structure hampers the bilateral trade of products with a higher comparative advantage for both countries. Despite these challenges, Sri Lanka and Thailand have expedited the process of signing a free trade agreement (FTA) to boost bilateral trade by threefold to USD 1.5 billion. This blog discusses the trade effect of an FTA and a way forward to maximise the gains from an FTA.

See more >>>

Dr Manoj Thibbotuwawa Highlights the Importance of Strengthening Policy Research and Training for Successful Policy Influencing

In the global gathering of the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Food Security Policy Research, Capacity, and Influence (PRCI) programme held in Accra, Ghana, IPS Research Fellow Dr Manoj Thibbotuwawa highlighted the importance of undertaking more collaborative research and training for strengthening the capacity of the research institutes to influence policy. The three-day event was organised to celebrate the programme's accomplishments and plan for its final year, with participants from institutional partners across the Global South, international policy research institutes, and universities.

See more >>>

Dr Bilesha Weeraratne Discusses Disparity in Support for Climate-Related Disasters in Sri Lanka

In the IOM assessment report launching event, IPS Research Fellow Dr Bilesha Weeraratne highlighted that there is an overall disparity in the support provided by the state and other stakeholders between rapid-onset and slow-onset disasters. She further stated that by recognising the complexities and dynamics of climate-related migration, Sri Lanka can work towards sustainable solutions that protect the livelihoods and well-being of its vulnerable populations. The IOM report emphasised the importance of understanding the coping strategies used by affected communities and the impact of climate disasters on household income and livelihoods. These insights are crucial for the development of effective policies and support systems.

See more >>>

Special interview featuring:

Manisha Weeraddana
Research Assistant at IPS

Q: Tell us about yourself and your role at IPS:

I work as a Research Assistant in the Migration and Urbanisation unit led by Dr Bilesha Weeraratne at IPS. Currently, I am involved in multiple projects focused on migration in both local and global contexts. As a Research Assistant, my responsibilities include assisting my supervisor in research tasks, preparing policy briefings, researching the socio-economic dynamics within and outside the country, analysing the existing policy needs and disseminating research findings.

Q: What are you currently researching?

I am currently working on projects that deal with informal remittances, remitting during times of crisis and recent migration trends in South Asia. With a looming recession over the world, worker remittances, which are a major source of foreign exchange in South Asian economies, are likely to be negatively affected. This is a key area of focus in our current studies.

Additionally, I am also involved in a project related to social security networks. This study revolves around Sri Lanka's current economic challenges, including food security, poverty, and effective management of government expenditure to address these issues.

Q: As a researcher engaged in migration policy, what do you identify as the main factors that motivate people to send money through informal channels in Sri Lanka?

The convenience of informal remittances, such as the lack of documentation requirements, easy access, and their attractiveness to illegal migrants, are some of the driving forces that push remitters towards informal remittances. Additionally, thresholds imposed on formal remittances and a lack of knowledge about formal channels also drive individuals to opt for informal remittance methods. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an increase in

the use of informal channels due to difficulties in accessing banks or registered intermediaries. Moreover, some individuals resorted to sending money out of the country through informal channels when foreign transactions were restricted due to the foreign exchange crisis.

Q: What steps can be taken to encourage people to use formal remittance channels instead of informal remittance channels in Sri Lanka?

Given how desperately the economy and people need foreign remittances, it is important to build people's trust in the Sri Lankan banking system and the decision-making authorities. Remitters should have confidence that the foreign exchange they send will be utilised for the benefit of the public. Implementing measures to secure the remittances sent to Sri Lanka and improving financial literacy among migrant workers are essential in achieving this goal.

Q: What do you enjoy most in your work?

At IPS, I find great enjoyment in the mentally stimulating nature of my work. The diverse and challenging projects I am involved in contribute to this satisfaction.

Q: What are some challenging aspects of working as a researcher?

As a researcher, it is challenging to stay updated on current issues, and evolving theoretical concepts. All of this must be done while managing multiple deadlines which can be quite challenging, especially for newcomers in the field like us.

Q: What is the one book you recommend to an aspiring economist?

At the top of my head all I can think of is the book I'm reading right now. It's titled 'Capitalism: Competition, Conflict, Crises' by Anwar Shaikh.