

the morning brunch

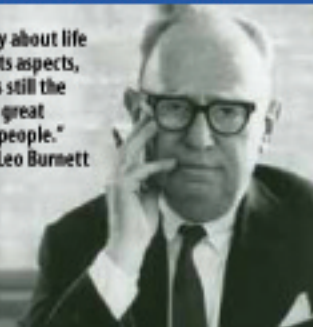
Tom Cruise returns his Golden Globes amid HFPA controversy



Criticism of the Hollywood Foreign Press Association (HFPA), which puts on the Golden Globes and has been denounced for ethical improprieties and a lack of diversity, reached such a pitch on Monday (10) that the 58-year-old actor Tom Cruise returned his three Globes to the press association's headquarters, a person — who was granted anonymity because they weren't authorised to speak publicly about the decision — told the Associated Press.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

"Curiosity about life in all of its aspects, I think, is still the secret of great creative people."
— Leo Burnett



Soapy Island brings soapy football games to Sri Lanka

BY DIMITHRI WUJESINGHE

Soapy Island brings Sri Lankan sporting enthusiasts the concept of "Soap Football" — a game where you play soccer on a padded field, covered in soapy water. The game is designed for just about anyone to have a good time, there are no age restrictions and no prerequisites, and even if you have zero experience in soccer you're good to go.

Soapy Island allows a maximum of 20 players to enter the court, however, at a rate of Rs. 450 per person, there is a minimum charge. Even if you have a smaller group, you must pay the base charge for six players per hour. The venue provides soccer balls and they advise that participants play barefoot and preferably in shorts. It's a hilariously enjoyable activity, particularly if you choose to do it with a close group of friends, side splitting laughter is a given.

Speaking with Founder Shenudd Hirusha Goonerathna, he shared that he started Soapy Island back in 2017 when he was looking for a unique concept in sports to launch in Sri Lanka. "While looking into it, I came across this game of soccer to play with soap water. It makes the soccer game fun and entertaining



Soapy Island Founder Shenudd Hirusha Goonerathna



to watch," he said. Goonerathna commented that as soon as they launched Soapy Island, there was an influx of people who began to come and experience the game, many of them really having the time of their life slipping around, despite not having any previous athletic training. He said that many of the participants really enjoy the idea of playing a sport like soccer in this particular, relatively safe setting.

He shared that considering that there's really not many similar opportunities

in the island, where you are allowed to engage in physical games like this without access to a professional court or pitch, this was an attractive draw for a lot of people. "Since there are less games like these in Sri Lanka, most of the people are looking into unique ways to have a good time with a bunch of friends. Once our customers started experiencing soap football, it began to spread through word-of-mouth rapidly. This game is designed for anyone to come and play, even with zero experience in soccer. I think by opening Soapy Island, our customers are able to have a great time and also to enjoy a soccer game with entertainment," said Goonerathna.

While Soapy Island originally started out in 2017 with a regular-sized stadium, with the standard dimensions, they have since gone on to expand the venue, and have recently installed a newer, bigger arena. He said that they opted for this new space because it is far more spacious, and much unlike a regular soccer game, soapy soccer requires a lot more moving around to slip around freely and so they have far more features available in this newly installed space. He also added that due to the nature of the sport, as the service provider, their primary objective is to ensure their customers' safety. The new stadium with its padded spongy floor is placed



Participants during a game of soap football at the Soapy Island venue

outdoors, however as it has a roof it is possible for the players to enjoy a game at any time of the day, whether it be sunny or even if it is raining.

He also spoke of the challenges they have had to face as a result of the pandemic, considering that theirs is a contact sport after all and requires the gathering of a group of people. He said that the current situation has been challenging to their business, however, they have continued to operate while maintaining all required health guidelines, adding that they

clean our stadium after each game while ensuring that their staff are thoroughly following all recommended guidelines as well.

As for the future of Soapy Island, Goonerathna shared that they are already working on opening their next Soapy Island venue in Kandy. He said that they have plans to expand their business throughout the country and have a Soapy Island venue in every city so that Sri Lankans anywhere on the island will have the opportunity to experience it.



Sarvodaya launched their emergency relief hotline on 1 May. The hotline has four lines — two Sinhala, one Tamil, and one English

made attempts to contact their local PHIs (public health inspectors) once they feel they are showing symptoms of Covid but they are also very busy, so they respond whenever they can, but sometimes, it is not possible to get a response." It is very fair that people are afraid — sometimes the PHIs do reassure them that they will come and look into the matter, but oftentimes, it takes a few days. This time period of waiting, when one's mind is taken over by anxious thoughts, is very taxing on one's mind; so the helpline offers reassurance and whenever possible, attempts to speed up the process. "We call their local PHIs and inform them of these people, explaining that they are in deep discomfort and try to keep them in the loop."

Dodangoda explained that a lot of these callers simply need psychosocial support; they are all scared and mentally affected, so counselling eases their minds. He suggested that if home quarantine was an option for patients who are asymptomatic, that would be great for an individual's mental health. Although, he added, that there are people stuck at home, with no information on whether they will be sent to quarantine or not, who call them and beg them to take them to a quarantine centre; maybe to keep their family safe, or for other reasons, they do not wish to be stuck at home.

"We had one family call from hospital, afraid for their lives, as they were kept in a casual ward. It is normal for patients to be kept there, as usually, the next day they will be sent to a quarantine centre, but it is not surprising that the uncertainty of the situation would cause them mental distress. We reassured them that they are safe and in the best place that will take care of them," Dodangoda commented. Another notable feature of the hotline is that they take the time to follow up on the patient's issues. Once they followed up

on the aforementioned call, they found out that the family had been taken to the Pinnawala Quarantine Centre and that they had happily settled in. While the helpline has tried their very best to solve everyone's issues, it is simply not feasible for them to have a solution to every problem. Dodangoda described a tough call that they got, that he requested we keep to ourselves; it was clear that some callers have issues that just don't have a solution. Dodangoda added that in this particular case, if they pushed hard enough, they could have found a solution, but more and more people would call with similar issues and it is not possible to constantly pull their trump cards out, so they had to let it go. "When receiving calls asking for dry rations or psychosocial help, we have never turned them away, but some problems are just beyond us."

We asked Dodangoda what the patients commonly requested, to which he commented that it was inquiries on PCR tests and ambulances. "At the moment, we don't have a big ambulance service; we tried contacting private organisations, to ask for help, sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. We had hopes to build our own quarantine centre. Dr. Vinya has personally written letters to the relevant authorities to grant permission to build such a centre, but to no avail as of yet."

They also commonly get calls where people request for dry rations. "A family of five called us recently, explaining that they had no way to eat, as no one had checked up on them and that they are desperate for help. In such cases, we distribute dry rations." He added that there was also a case where a lady called and lamented that because of the quarantine board on her wall, travelling vendors tend to cross the street to avoid the area, leaving her with a serious lack of food; Sarvodaya provided rations for her to survive. This led to the question of whether they receive fake calls requesting for rations, to which Dodangoda commented: "We first ask the caller for details, but we don't go too in depth. It's very difficult to go too deep because we will then have to make calls to their PHIs and other authorities to confirm, which will make it harder for us to handle and manage the calls we receive." He also thinks that it is unnecessary to dig too deep because if someone did call asking for rations, then that would only be because they are finding it difficult to source food. "Food is something we all need to survive, so if someone is in such a need, we will try our best to provide."

On whether they have any plans to further develop this hotline, Dodangoda commented: "We have no way of knowing whether an islandwide lockdown will be imposed or not, but we have hopes that we will be able to partner up with some organisations for this project to be carried forward on a bigger scale. We also have only a limited supply of dry rations, so if anyone would like to help out in that way, they are welcome to contact us." He requested anyone that is willing to partner up with or aid them, to get in touch, and help supply a good cause.

HOTLINE 0720 101 010



A small measure of peace in difficult times

Sarvodaya's latest emergency relief hotline

BY VENESSA ANTHONY

Sarvodaya, in an initiative to provide some aspect of relief for Covid-19 victims, launched their emergency relief hotline on 1 May. With their social media presence and connections to the grassroots network, the hotline soon became well known amongst patients, and they currently receive over 60-100 calls a day. Since it is almost always Covid victims that call from the quarantine centres, through word of mouth, the existence of this hotline spreads.

We, at *Brunch*, called the hotline to understand what they offer and the challenges this line is facing. The hotline has four lines — two Sinhala, one Tamil,

and one English. Our three attempts were to try the English line, but unfortunately, they seemed to have poor connection; upon trying the Sinhala line, we were connected to Project Co-ordinator and Call Centre Manager Lahiru Dodangoda.

They had the idea to conduct such a hotline, with the suggestion of Sarvodaya General Secretary Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne, who is also their medical specialist. He had received many requests from Covid quarantine centres and other doctors for such an initiative as well. Dodangoda explained: "The situation in the country

worsens everyday. Each day we find more and more cases. Sometimes people, after testing positive (for Covid), are taken to centres without them even knowing where they will be taken." They receive calls from these centres telling them that there are patients with no phones nor any way to contact their loved ones, so the people behind the hotline make attempts to reassure their friends and family that they are safe. Dodangoda also added that they receive most calls to their Sinhala and Tamil lines from people of the Vavuniya, Trincomalee, and Colombo Districts.

Another service they offer help with is preparing ambulances for once a patient is done with their quarantine. They also co-ordinated their way home.

Speaking to us about the calls they received, Dodangoda commented: "We have had many requests for conducting PCR tests for Sri Lankan citizens. These people have

