

## BUSINESS

A screen (right), showing the falling values of the Luna is seen at a cryptocurrency exchange in Seoul, South Korea on May 27, 2022. South Korean prosecutors have announced on June 22, 2022, that they have barred dozens of people connected to Terraform Labs from leaving the country as they expand an investigation into a \$40 billion collapse of the company's cryptocurrency that devastated traders around the world. (AP)



## SKorea hits dozens with travel bans amid crypto probe

South Korean prosecutors have barred dozens of people connected to Terraform Labs from leaving the country as they expand an investigation into a \$40 billion collapse of the company's cryptocurrency that devastated traders around the world.

The Seoul Southern District Prosecutor's Office said Wednesday it plans to summon them for questioning as it tries to determine whether the company committed fraud or violated financial regulations before the implosion of its

digital currencies, TerraUSD and Luna, in May.

The office didn't specify the number of people placed under the monthlong travel ban or who they are, although they may include current and former staff members and developers. Prosecutors refused to provide more details, saying the investigation was ongoing.

Daniel Hong, a former Terraform developer, tweeted a government notice showing that he was banned from leav-

ing the country through July 19. Hong tweeted: "stop asking me why i couldn't make it to NYC frens, this is why: the Korean government imposed an exit ban for all ex-@terra\_money employees today."

The collapse of TerraUSD and Luna, developed by Terraform Lab's Stanford-educated co-founder Do Kwon, affected an estimated 280,000 South Korean investors while causing broader turmoil in the global cryptocurrency market. (AP)

Families struggling to manage three meals a day

# Sri Lanka's crisis cripples its middle class

**COLOMBO, Sri Lanka, June 22, (AP):** Miraj Madushanka never thought he'd need government rations to ensure his family could eat two meals a day, but Sri Lanka's economic crisis, the worst in its history, has recast his life and those of many others in its burgeoning middle class.

Families that never had to think twice about fuel or food are struggling to manage three meals a day, cutting back on portions. Days are spent waiting in lines to buy scarce fuel. The crisis has derailed years of progress toward relatively comfortable lifestyles aspired to across South Asia.

An island nation of 22 million, Sri Lanka is hurtling towards bankruptcy after amassing \$51 billion in foreign debt. There is hardly any money to import items like gasoline, milk, cooking gas and toilet paper.

Before things began unraveling, Madushanka, a 27-year-old accountant, studied in Japan and hoped to work there. He moved back home in 2018 after his father died, to look after his mother and sister.

Madushanka finished his studies and found a job in tourism, but lost it in the shadow of 2019 terror attacks that rattled the country and its economy.

The next job evaporated during the pandemic. He's now working for a management company, his fourth job in four years. But even with a reliable paycheck, he can barely manage to support his family.

Food prices have tripled in recent weeks, forcing the family to seek out government handouts of rice and donations from nearby Buddhist temples and mosques. Madushanka's savings are finished.

"Right now, there is only enough to survive -- if there are months where we don't get extra benefits from outside, we have to just hold on somehow," he said.

Even past crises, like Sri Lanka's nearly 30-year long civil war that ended in 2009 or the devastating 2004 tsunami, did not cause this degree of pain or anguish for those outside of the affected areas, experts say. The prime minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, said Wednesday the economy has "completely collapsed."

## Protests

Until recently, Sri Lanka's middle class, estimated by experts to be between 15 to 20% of the country's urban population, generally enjoyed economic security and comfort.

"The crisis has really shocked the middle class -- it has forced them into hardships they were never exposed to before, like getting basic items, not knowing whether they could get fuel despite spending hours in line," said Bhavani Fonseka, a senior researcher at the Centre for Policy Alternatives in Colombo, Sri Lanka's capital.

"They have really been jolted like no other time in the last three decades," Fonseka said.

Sri Lanka's middle class began to swell in the 1970s after the country's economy opened up to more trade and investment. It has grown steadily since, with Sri Lanka's GDP per capita surging higher than those of many of its neighbors.

"The ambition was to own a home and car, be able to send your kids to a good school, eat out every few weeks and afford a vacation here and there," said economist Chayu Damsinghe. "But now it feels like the middle class has lost its dream," he added.

"If the middle class is struggling like this, imagine how hard hit the more vulnerable are," Fonseka said.

Protests have raged since April, with demonstrators blaming President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his government for



Sri Lanka's new Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe gestures during an interview with The Associated Press in Colombo, Sri Lanka, June 11, 2022. Wickremesinghe told the Parliament on June 22, that the country's economy is facing the prospect of falling into the very bottom beyond the food, fuel and electricity shortages that had plagued the country for several months, its prime minister said on Wednesday. (AP)

## Government unable to buy oil

# Sri Lanka PM says economy 'has collapsed'

**COLOMBO, Sri Lanka, June 22, (AP):** Sri Lanka's debt-laden economy has "collapsed" after months of shortages of food, fuel and electricity, its prime minister told lawmakers Wednesday, in comments underscoring the country's dire situation as it seeks help from international lenders.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe told Parliament the South Asian country is "facing a far more serious situation beyond the mere shortages of fuel, gas, electricity and food. Our economy has completely collapsed."

While Sri Lanka's crisis is considered its worst in recent memory, Wickremesinghe's assertion that the economy has collapsed did not cite any specific new developments. It appeared intended to emphasize to his critics and opposition lawmakers that he has inherited a difficult task that can't be

fixed quickly, as the economy founders under the weight of heavy debts, lost tourism revenue and other impacts from the pandemic, as well as surging costs for commodities.

Lawmakers of the country's two main opposition parties are boycotting Parliament this week to protest against Wickremesinghe, who became prime minister just over a month ago and is also finance minister, for not having delivered on his pledges to turn the economy around.

Wickremesinghe said Sri Lanka is unable to purchase imported fuel, even for cash, due to heavy debt owed by its petroleum corporation.

"Currently, the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation is \$700 million in debt," he told lawmakers. "As a result, no country or organization in the world is willing to provide fuel to us.

They are even reluctant to provide fuel for cash."

Wickremesinghe took office after days of violent protests over the country's economic crisis forced his predecessor to step down. In his comments Wednesday, he blamed the previous government for failing to act in time as Sri Lanka's foreign reserves dwindled.

The foreign currency crisis has crimped imports, creating severe shortages of food, fuel, electricity and other essentials such as medicines, forcing people to stand in long lines to obtain basic needs.

"If steps had at least been taken to slow down the collapse of the economy at the beginning, we would not be facing this difficult situation today. But we lost out on this opportunity. We are now seeing signs of a possible fall to rock bottom," he said.

policy blunders that torpedoed the economy and plunged the nation into chaos. In May, a wave of violent protests forced Rajapaksa's brother and then-prime minister Mahinda Raj-

apaksa to step down. His successor, Ranil Wickremesinghe, is banking on a bail-out package from the International Monetary Fund and help from friendly countries like India and China to keep the economy afloat.

In an interview with the Associated Press last week, Wickremesinghe said he feared food shortages might persist until 2024 as the war in Ukraine disrupts global supply chains, causing prices of some commodities to soar.

Sri Lanka's economic predicament was compounded by a ban last year on imported chemical fertilizers that angered farmers and hurt harvests. The ban was lifted after six months, but the damage was already done, leading to food shortages.

Government officials have been given every Friday off for three months to save on fuel and grow their own fruits and vegetables as food reserves run low. The inflation rate for food is 57%, according to official data, and 70% of Sri Lankan homes surveyed by UNICEF in May reported reduced food consumption.

On a recent afternoon, residents swarmed a busy vegetable market in Colombo, sweating under the sun's glare as they carefully compared prices of tomatoes and oranges with those at markets they had visited earlier.

Sriyani Kankanamge, 63, said she has stopped buying meat or fish and buys only a few kinds of vegetables.

Essentials  
"I am angry. Prices of every essential item are going up - rice, sugar, milk, chicken, fish. How can people eat?" she said bitterly.

Madushanka's family has opted to give up three daily meals for just a late breakfast and dinner.

On a recent Friday, his mother, Ambepitiyage Indrani, was grinding coconut and boiling a pot of water over a thin stack of firewood. When their gas cylinder ran empty in May, the thought of waiting in a queue with no guarantee of success seemed futile. The kitchen ceiling, once a gleaming white, is now streaked with soot from the cooking fire. An electric stove bought a few years ago has been sold.

## talabat celebrates MENA gaming achievements in newly launched regional awards show

talabat, the region's leading local tech platform, is partnering with GreatGamers Award to launch its first ever regional esports initiative in the Gulf region, Egypt, Iraq and Jordan. Recently, there has been rapid development in the gaming scene across the region, and talabat is determined to play a key role in further accelerating this growth. As the first initiative of many, the platform will celebrate gamers in MENA through one of the largest Gaming Awards Show in the region.

The 'talabat Great Gamers Awards' launched on June 13th, and highlights the best gamers, casters, and coaches of the year. Split over 5 categories representing players from the most popular game genres, people will be able to vote for the nominees - handpicked by a jury panel of local gaming experts in each of their categories. Voting will close on July 6th, 2022. During the show on July 16th 2022, which will be live streamed on multiple platforms, one deserving winner will be crowned the 'talabat Great Gamer of the year'

Commenting on the announcement, Thijs van Dam, Regional Director of Strategic Partnerships at talabat said, "We are thrilled to launch talabat's first ever Gaming Awards Show in the region. At talabat, we are always looking to recognize and celebrate great talents within the region, and one of the areas we've had a keen interest in is the eSports scene."

"Using the talabat app, people are able to get their meals, groceries or snacks whenever they want, and our data shows that this includes a lot of gamers who enjoy fueling up while they play. Players can place their orders on the app with a push of a button before their game begins, and have it delivered by the time they finish! We are very excited about this first eSports partnership and what it will bring, and to more future initiatives moving forward". Added van Dam.

Gaming enthusiasts in the region will be able to vote for their favorite gamers across 5 categories until July 6th, 2022.



talabat partners with Great Gamers to launch one of the largest gaming awards shows in the region to celebrate up-and-coming gamers in the MENA eSports scene.

In addition to Great Gamers, talabat has worked with a number of partners including Red Bull and Techxhub who have contributed to making the 'talabat Great Gamers Award' a reality.

Voting will open in July - and gaming enthusiasts will be able to follow the nominations for the 'talabat Great Gamer of the year Award' in the weeks to come on <https://talabat.greatgamers.net/>.

Hungry during an intense game? Don't want to miss a second of your favorite stream? Gamers can now order delicious meals with talabat - download our app now on the iOS App Store, Google Playstore and Huawei App Gallery.

Gaming enthusiasts in the region will be able to vote for their favorite gamers across 5 categories until July 6th, 2022.

## IKEA and KIB partner up to offer their customers flexible payment solutions



**IKEA Kuwait and KIB (Kuwait International Bank) signed a strategic partnership agreement to provide financing solutions to their customers.**

The strategic agreement was announced on June 13th, 2022 in the latest IKEA shop located in The Assima Mall by Mr. Adil Kejjouj, Finance Director of IKEA, Ms. Elisa Albendea, Marketing and Communication Director of IKEA and the General Manager of KIB Retail Banking, Mr. Othman Tawfeeq.

Year after year, IKEA continues to be by your side to create a better life at home. Through this strategic partnership, IKEA and KIB aim to help customers to create their dream home. They can use flexible monthly payments to change from one room to their

whole home, with easy and small payments, free of Interest and accessible for everyone.

"Our partnership with KIB will contribute to reach more people with great home furnishing solutions that are affordable. Our customers will have more flexible ways to pay for their IKEA solutions at no extra cost, always enjoying an easy and exciting shopping experience whether they decide to meet us in store or online.", said Mr. Kejjouj.

On her part, Ms. Albendea, said: "We are so excited to start this collaboration with KIB. Our vision is to create a better life for everyone in Kuwait and with this new service we are contributing to the dream of many people to have a beautiful, comfortable, and safe home for them and their families. A home that they can be proud of."