

The Daily News Line by Faraz



The Mannar Concerns

Statement from the Law & Society Trust on the Police Violence in Mannar.

The Law & Society Trust expresses its grave concern and deep sadness regarding the violence unleashed against residents of Mannar who were peacefully protesting the ongoing wind turbine project that threatens their environment and livelihoods. Reports indicate that police forces resorted to brutal attacks against community members who were resisting the sudden transport of turbine parts to Mannar, despite the government's repeated assurances of dialogue and transparency before advancing the project.



For several months, the people of Mannar have raised serious concerns about the impact of the wind farm projects on their lives and livelihoods.

Communities have consistently pointed to flooding caused by altered water flows, contamination of drinking water, the spread of disease, the disruption of fisheries and agriculture, and significant ecological damage, including harm to migratory bird patterns.

These concerns are neither new nor unfounded. They are rooted in lived experiences and well-documented environmental risks.

It is especially troubling that these incidents occurred after the President himself pledged to suspend further work until a committee report was finalized and shared.

The government has chosen to move forward without disclosing the report's findings or engaging in any meaningful consultation with affected communities.

The attempt to proceed unilaterally and the use of police force to silence legitimate dissent constitute a serious violation of democratic rights, human dignity, and the constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

The Law & Society Trust, which for more than four decades has worked to advance human rights, equality, dignity, and justice in Sri Lanka, calls on the government to:

Immediately cease the use of force against peaceful protestors in Mannar;

Ensure full accountability for the acts of police brutality;

Conduct independent investigations and assure justice for victims;

Release the findings of the committee appointed to study the Mannarwind project, and engage in genuine, good-faith consultations with theaffected communities.

The government must guarantee that no development project proceedswithout proper environmental assessments, transparency, and theinformed consent of local communities.

Development cannot come at the expense of the lives, livelihoods, and dignity of people. The people of Mannar, like all communities in Sri Lanka, have the right to be heard, to live in safety, and to protect their environment. It is the responsibility of the government to respect and uphold these rights.

#lawandsocietytrust #policeviolence #brutality
#humanrights #freedomofspeech #peacefulprotest
#Mannar #srilanka #lka

Bali, Indonesia's famed tropical paradise, has charmed plenty of tourists over the years.

But it's also leaving a growing number disillusioned - recently among them Zoe Rae.

Since landing in Bali, something for us has just not felt quite right," she said in a YouTube video in July, filmed in her hotel room.

We came to Bali with high expectations because we'd seen on social media everyone having such a lovely time."



She added: "If you took a picture of the coffee shop and zoomed out, you would see what the reality was."

Ms Rae did not describe the reality she saw - nor reply to the BBC's questions. But it was unsettling enough to make her book an impromptu flight to Dubai to continue celebrating her wedding anniversary there instead.

Millions flock to Bali every year in search of the spiritual Shangri-La promised in the noughties memoir and film Eat, Pray, Love.

What they're greeted by instead are crowds, traffic and the cacophony of construction, which has ramped up alongside a post-pandemic boom in tourism.



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Plastic pollution is a huge problem on some beaches

The growing strain on the island had produced plenty of eye-rolls and grumbles, but this month events took a sombre turn.

More than a dozen people died in rare floods on the island. Poor waste management and unchecked urban development had worsened the situation, officials said.

The local government has since announced it will restrict new construction. But many see such interventions as too little, too late.

How did Bali, celebrated for decades as the "last paradise", get to this point?

#Bali on Instagram

Western adventurers have been turning up in Bali since the early 20th Century, when it was seen as an exotic backwater, home to Hindu temples and rice fields.

Spirituality and a reverence for nature run deep: monkeys, cows and birds carry sacred import,

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large ancient trees are thought to house spirits, and the popular trekking volcano Mount Batur is believed to be protected by a goddess.

Bali was "one of the first places that there was all this talk of utopia and great beauty and culture," says Gisela Williams, a Berlin-based travel writer who has been visiting the island since the '90s.

"It's the Balinese Hindu culture that has created this myth of the place."

Over the past decade, tourism to the island has skyrocketed, from 3.8 million visitors in 2014 to 6.3 million last year.

This year looks set to be a record-breaker: the island appears on track to welcome more than seven million foreign tourists.

Rather than unique traditions or idyll, Bali today is better known for its beach clubs and surf houses.

Alcohol is easily available and scanty clothing is more acceptable compared to the rest of Indonesia. And most visitors also want to immerse themselves in Bali's luxe hotels, villas and spas.

"You have a lot of Westerners who are really taking advantage of the affordability of a luxury lifestyle," Ms Williams says. "Since social media has taken over, it's a very superficial way of understanding a place... You just see a picture, and then you go."



In the 1990s, tourists to Bali were drawn by the island's unique traditions

Zoe Rae's disillusionment with the reality she encountered in Bali exposes the idealised image held by many casual travellers.

Responding to Mr Rae's post, Hollie Marie, a British content creator living in Bali, warned in a TikTok video that "only looking up Bali on Instagram will give you a distorted reality of the island itself".

"The problem with Bali is people come here and only stay in certain areas because they want to see cute cafes, visit Instagrammable places. And they miss out on the fact that Bali is a very culturally rich island," Ms Marie tells the BBC.

Those who live there, or have explored beyond the obvious haunts,

will tell you Bali's natural beauty is alive and well, from dolphin-watching and dive explorations, to the lush landscape in the quieter north.

The island is "much, much more" than the "party places" that tourists tend to visit, says Canny Claudya, who moved to Bali from Indonesia's capital, Jakarta.



"If you think that Bali is overcrowded, then you're just not in the right places."

Beach clubs, with their stunning sunset views, are a big pull

'Eroded day by day'

Still, locals say their island has certainly changed under the demands of tourism.

And when they hear of complaints that this is not the paradise travellers signed up for, some point out that such comments are dripping with irony.

"When tourists said they are disappointed with Bali being more crowded, they are also part of the crowd," says I Made Vikannanda, a Balinese researcher who advocates for the protection of the island's nature and people.

"It's like when we're in traffic, we're like 'Why is there so much traffic?' But we're in a car. We're the ones driving the car, we're the ones making the traffic," he said.

Twenty-two-year-old Ni Kadek Sintya recalls a time when she used to ride her scooter through the quiet roads of Canggu, past paddy fields where she would take a lunch break.

Five years on, Canggu has some of the worst traffic on the island. And Ms Sintya's journey to her job in a wellness resort is lined with villas and cafes, and impatient honks follow her all the way.

"I wouldn't bother stopping, let alone rest there," she said. "Now every time I ride past that spot I used to sit [at], there's this feeling of sadness. I feel that Bali is being eroded day by day."

Canggu's narrow roads once cut through paddy fields - now they're lined with construction

As tourism rises, hotels, cafes and bars have been fanning out from the island's congested south.

The latest hipster destination is Canggu, a once sleepy fishing village that has become a magnet for surfers from around the world.

Canggu follows in the footsteps of other neighbourhoods, from Uluwatu to Seminyak, quiet backwaters that have transformed as tourists search for new "hidden gems".

This migration has seen trendy cafes, gyms and co-working spaces pop up along narrow rural roads.

Pererenan, to the north, is now being hailed as a more laid-back Canggu.

Further north, in the forests of Ubud, resorts are marketing themselves as a sanctuary to escape the bustle of the south.

"There's a real catch-22," Ms Marie says. "On one hand, it's always a good thing to encourage people to visit different areas... But I think there's a danger to that as well, because that will encourage people to build everywhere and anywhere."

Plus, she adds, "people treat Bali a bit like a playground".

Resorts in Bali's northern jungles sell themselves as an escape from the bustle

Barely a month goes by without misbehaving tourists making headlines: they have been in serious accidents after riding scooters intoxicated or without helmets; foreigners were deported for getting naked at sacred sites; others got in trouble for drunken brawls.



Adding to recent tensions are thousands of Russians and Ukrainians who have been settling down in Bali after fleeing the war.

The head of Indonesia's National Narcotics Agency recently warned of a growing problem

, external with Russians and Ukrainians engaging in criminal activities in Bali.

Cleaning up

Local resentment is rising, with social media vigilantes putting misbehaving tourists on blast - even as the Balinese maintain their world-famous hospitality.

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"A lot of tourists think because they're the ones with money to spend on our island, we locals should be OK with whatever they do," says Ms Sintya, who like many of her generation have come to rely on the stability of a career in tourism.

"It can feel like I'm being trapped," she says, "because we live on tourism. So if we stop tourism, what will we survive on?"

Despite the "uncontrolled growth" of tourism, Mr Vikannanda, the researcher, thinks the "development of Bali and the harmony of nature can still be maintained".

"I'm still optimistic. Especially with the participation of young people."

Indeed, businesses and activists have launched ground-up efforts to encourage sustainable development, from waste management education to beach clean-ups.

Authorities, who have been criticised for not regulating tourism enough, are also trying to clean up the island.

Earlier this year, Bali banned single-use plastics and issued behaviour guidelines for visitors to "ensure that Bali's tourism remains respectful, sustainable, and in harmony with our local values".

Police have been deployed to popular areas to make sure visitors follow rules.



Bali's worst floods in a decade spotlighted the island's waste management problem

"The Indonesian government has come to understand that Bali is also a natural asset, it's not just a tourist market to be exploited," Maria Shollenbarger, travel editor at the Financial Times' HTSI magazine, tells the BBC.

"Bali is a crucible in a lot of ways of overtourism," she says.

"But no matter where you're going in the world, I think it's important for people to remember that it's incumbent on you, the traveller, to engage responsibly with the destination."

State Capture

(from the Morning.lk)

In the noise and distraction of Sri Lanka's daily political theatre, something far more sinister is unfolding quietly, stealthily, and dangerously. Beyond the headlines, beyond the carefully planted controversies that dominate evening talk shows and social media chatter, lies a seemingly calculated attempt to blur and ultimately erase the line between Government and State.

Sri Lanka, probably for the first time, is witnessing Government excess of a new kind, one that is deeper, systematic, and far more corrosive than past excess: State capture. If unchecked, it risks hollowing out Sri Lanka's democracy until all that remains is the façade of institutions, elections, and courts in form, but stripped of substance and independence.

The term 'State capture' may sound academic, but its implications are all too real. State capture occurs when a political entity goes beyond traditional corruption like bribes, kickbacks, patronage, etc., and instead seizes control of the entire set-up where laws, regulations, appointments, tenders, and verdicts are manipulated to serve the interests of the ruling clique. South Africans learnt this bitter lesson under Jacob Zuma and the Gupta family. Post-Soviet states fell into the same trap when oligarchs bent entire systems to private ends. If recent events are anything to go by, Sri Lanka appears to be witnessing the familiar signs of State capture.

What makes the danger greater is the failure of those tasked with guarding democracy. The Opposition and much of the media have surrendered initiative and, instead of setting the agenda, they chase after distractions. Throw a scandalous bone and both Opposition benches and newsrooms pounce, while the real action – appointments, budget allocations, institutional reshaping – takes place quietly behind closed doors.

This 'marrow bone culture' is the perfect cover for State capture. A proactive Opposition would be exposing systemic risks; an independent press would be digging into the quiet transfer of power from State to party. Instead, both chase headlines while democracy erodes.

The tragedy is heightened by irony. The National People's Power (NPP) coalition swept to power promising a clean break: no political appointments, no patronage, and State institutions run by professionals. It was this promise that resonated after decades of corruption and abuse under both the Rajapaksas and the UNP.

Yet, within a year, the NPP has violated its own pledges. The post of Treasury Secretary, traditionally reserved for one of the most senior State administrators, has been handed to an NPP MP and former Deputy Minister of Finance.

The Secretary to the President, the apex figure in the State bureaucracy, is a handpicked loyalist imported from the Customs Department – an institution already in the eye of a storm over the release of 323 containers. The new Customs Director General is the very man who presided over that scandal.

The new Director General of the Bribery Commission is alleged to be a former member of the JVP's Legal Division, raising questions about whether an institution that should be fiercely independent has instead been compromised.

A former CID Chief, linked to the mishandling of post-Easter Sunday attacks investigations, has been recalled from retirement to head the Police's most sensitive arm. Even the Ministry of Public Security has as its Secretary a political appointee who openly campaigned for the NPP.

These appointments certainly don't qualify to be termed as isolated lapses.

Taken together, they form a pattern of replacing independent officials with party loyalists – the essence of State capture. Perhaps the most alarming front is the Judiciary. Judges have been shuffled without explanation.

A magistrate who ordered the arrest of three powerful Government figures over real estate fraud was abruptly transferred. Such action can be inferred as interference and undermines the last line of defence in any democracy.

While appointments tell one story, budgets tell another. The 2026 Appropriation Bill presented in Parliament on Friday (26) provides the clearest evidence yet of consolidation.

The President's allocation has soared nearly 400% – from Rs. 2.7 billion this year to Rs. 11 billion next year. Even more troubling, a quarter of the entire Government spending budget, amounting to Rs. 1.1 trillion out of a total of Rs. 4.4 trillion, now lies directly under ministries controlled by one individual – the President.

The supreme irony is that this is coming from a party that pledged to abolish the presidency altogether. Instead, the presidency is being fattened beyond recognition.

What needs to be kept in mind is that capture corrodes more deeply than corruption. Under corruption, a bribe may tilt a contract. Under capture, the entire tender process is redesigned so that only one winner exists.

Under corruption, a law may be bent. Under capture, the law itself is rewritten to serve the rulers. Corruption weakens democracy but capture hollows it out completely. Recently when an influential Cabinet Minister who feigned poverty all this time but was found to be a multi-millionaire was questioned about his wealth in a television interview, his blunt response was to tell the interviewer not to question him on the subject.

For citizens, the cost of State capture is not abstract, with the immediate consequence being collapse of accountability with auditors, regulators, and watchdogs becoming mere rubber stamps. Policy will likely be distorted when economic reforms, tax breaks, and contracts are written not in the public interest but in the interest of a clique.

Power becomes entrenched when institutions that should guarantee alternation of Government instead guarantee incumbency. Trust erodes when citizens conclude that 'all are the same' and that erosion of trust usually creates space for authoritarian alternatives. Sri Lanka, still reeling from an economic crisis, can least afford such erosion. A state captured by a political entity cannot rebuild credibility abroad, restore fiscal discipline at home, or inspire confidence among its people, leave alone much-needed investors.

The pattern is a familiar one. Russia and Hungary offer sobering parallels of democracies hollowed into shells while maintaining the outward appearance of elections and parliaments. South Africa lost billions to Gupta-linked capture, setting back its development for years. Sri Lanka has seen shades of this before. The Rajapaksas treated the State as family property. The UNP indulged in cronyism under the banner of reform. The NPP rose as the alternative, promising to break this cycle. Yet within months of taking office, it has begun walking the same path. The betrayal is doubly dangerous because disillusioned citizens will not simply shift to another party; many will turn away from democracy itself.

Whatever the regime may claim in its defence, the signs of capture are clear: politicised appointments, purported judicial interference, a bloated presidential budget, and a distracted Opposition and media. Democracy rarely dies in a single blow. More often it is smothered slowly with new appointments here and revised budgets there, until the very institutions meant to check power become instruments of it. By then, the coup is complete.

The way forward is vigilance. The Opposition must move beyond reactive theatrics to systemic scrutiny. The independent media must rediscover its investigative muscle instead of chasing headlines. Civil society, academia, and ordinary citizens must demand transparency, question appointments, and follow the money. Sri Lanka's democracy has survived war, insurgency, and economic collapse. But it cannot survive if what is remaining is hollowed out by capture. The late American jurist, Learned Hand, once said: "Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it." This is what Sri Lanka is staring at if its citizens are not vigilant.