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NEWSLINE

Daily by Faraz

"Questioning The Answers"

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DRONES TAKE TO THE SKIES AS DENGUE CRISIS DEEPENS

GOVERNMENT DEPLOYS AIR FORCE TECHNOLOGY AS SRI LANKA BATTLES ESCALATING OUTBREAK

Sri Lanka's battle against dengue has entered a new phase, with the Government turning to military technology in an effort to contain an outbreak that continues to place unprecedented pressure on hospitals across the country.

The deployment of Sri Lanka Air Force drones to identify mosquito breeding sites marks one of the most technologically advanced public health interventions ever attempted in the country and reflects growing concern over the scale of an epidemic that shows few signs of slowing.

Health authorities report that more than 77,000 suspected dengue infections have been recorded this year, with the Western Province continuing to account for the largest proportion of cases.

Hospitals in Colombo, Gampaha and Kalutara have experienced sustained pressure for weeks, while clinicians warn that the disease is increasingly affecting adults as well as children. The death toll has also continued to rise, reinforcing calls for more aggressive preventive action.

The drones are being used to survey rooftops, abandoned properties, marshland and other locations that are either inaccessible or difficult for inspection teams to monitor on foot. Equipped with high-resolution imaging systems, they are intended to identify stagnant water and other potential mosquito breeding grounds before local authorities move in to eliminate them. Officials believe the technology will allow public health inspectors to cover significantly larger areas in far less time than conventional inspections.

The decision is, however, likely to provoke a broader debate about how Sri Lanka reached a point where military assets are required to tackle what is fundamentally a preventable public health problem.

For years, successive administrations have conducted anti-dengue campaigns, organised clean-up drives and imposed fines for households that fail to eliminate mosquito breeding sites. Yet the disease continues to return with remarkable consistency each rainy season, suggesting that structural shortcomings remain unresolved.

Public health specialists have long argued that dengue cannot be defeated solely through emergency campaigns mounted after outbreaks begin.

Effective urban planning, proper drainage, consistent waste collection and sustained community participation are all regarded as essential components of long-term control. Without those measures, they warn, technological solutions risk becoming reactive rather than preventive.

The current deployment of drones may therefore represent both innovation and necessity.

If successful, the programme could become a permanent feature of Sri Lanka's disease surveillance strategy. Equally, it serves as a reminder that technology can assist public health, but it cannot replace sound local governance or individual civic responsibility.

For now, health authorities continue urging the public to inspect their homes and workplaces regularly, eliminate standing water wherever possible and seek immediate medical attention if symptoms such as persistent fever, abdominal pain or unusual bleeding develop.

As the monsoon season continues, the country's success against dengue may depend as much on public cooperation as on the drones now flying overhead.

WHEN PARLIAMENT POINTS THE FINGER

One of the more significant debates taking place in Parliament this week may not generate the political theatre of a no-confidence motion or a heated exchange across the chamber, yet its implications could prove far more important.

Members of Parliament are being asked to approve motions that would move the findings of two parliamentary oversight committees beyond the walls of the legislature and into the hands of the institutions responsible for criminal investigation and prosecution.

The first concerns a report prepared by the Committee on Public Accounts (COPA) into the controversial scheme that allowed Sri Lankans employed overseas to import fully electric vehicles using foreign remittances.

Parliament is being asked to approve referring the report to the Attorney General for observations and any action that may be considered appropriate under Standing Order 119. The second seeks approval to refer matters identified by the Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE) during its investigations to the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) under Standing Order 120.

For many Sri Lankans, the distinction between a parliamentary committee and a criminal investigation is often unclear. Committees such as COPE and COPA possess wide powers to summon witnesses, call for documents and examine how public institutions have discharged their responsibilities. They can expose weaknesses in governance, identify financial irregularities and recommend corrective action. What they cannot do is prosecute. That responsibility rests elsewhere.

It is precisely because of that distinction that this week's motions matter. If approved, they create a formal pathway through which the findings of Parliament may be examined by the Attorney General or by CIABOC to determine whether offences may have been committed and whether further legal action should follow.

Referral is not a finding of guilt. It is, however, an acknowledgement that Parliament believes the matters uncovered deserve independent legal scrutiny.

Sri Lanka has, over the years, produced no shortage of committee reports detailing waste, inefficiency and questionable decisions. Many have generated headlines before quietly disappearing from public attention.

That history has inevitably fostered public scepticism. Citizens have grown accustomed to reports being tabled, recommendations being made and little appearing to happen thereafter.

The challenge now is whether this process will prove different. Accountability is not achieved merely because a report is written or debated. It is achieved when institutions entrusted with enforcing the law examine the evidence impartially, decide whether criminal or civil proceedings are justified and, where appropriate, pursue those cases without fear or favour.

This week's parliamentary debate should therefore be viewed not as the conclusion of an investigation, but as the beginning of another. Whether the public's confidence in oversight institutions grows or diminishes will depend not on the speeches delivered inside Parliament, but on what happens after the chamber falls silent.

INDIA CLOSES A TAX LOOPHOLE

New Treaty Rules with Sri Lanka Target Tax Avoidance, Not Genuine Investment

A quiet but potentially significant change has taken place in the economic relationship between India and Sri Lanka.

New Delhi has formally amended the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) between the two countries by introducing a strengthened anti-abuse provision designed to prevent companies and individuals from exploiting the treaty solely to reduce their tax liabilities.

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While the change is technical in nature, it carries important implications for investors, multinational businesses and tax advisers operating across both jurisdictions.

At the heart of the amendment is what is known internationally as the **Principal Purpose Test (PPT)**. In simple terms, the new rule allows tax authorities to deny treaty benefits if they conclude that one of the principal purposes of a particular arrangement or transaction was simply to obtain a tax advantage. The objective is to distinguish between genuine commercial activity and structures created primarily to exploit differences between tax systems.

Importantly, the amendment does **not** introduce new taxes, nor does it alter the tax rates contained in the treaty itself. Companies conducting legitimate business between India and Sri Lanka should continue to enjoy the protections offered by the agreement.

The focus is instead on arrangements commonly described as “treaty shopping,” where businesses establish entities in a particular jurisdiction primarily to access favourable tax treatment that was never intended for them.

The revised treaty reflects a broader international movement led by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) through its Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) initiative.

Countries around the world have been updating older tax treaties to ensure that agreements designed to prevent double taxation are not instead used to facilitate double non-taxation or aggressive tax avoidance. India has already incorporated similar provisions into many of its other bilateral tax agreements.

For Sri Lanka, the timing is noteworthy. The country is actively seeking foreign direct investment while simultaneously strengthening public finances following its economic crisis. Investors consistently value certainty and predictability in tax policy. Although anti-abuse provisions may initially appear restrictive, many international investors view them as evidence that governments are aligning themselves with recognised global standards rather than allowing loopholes to persist.

Businesses operating between the two countries are therefore unlikely to experience immediate disruption, provided their investments are supported by genuine commercial substance.

Companies with real operations, employees, assets and business objectives should continue to qualify for treaty benefits. Those relying on artificial structures created primarily to minimise tax, however, may now find those arrangements subject to far greater scrutiny.

For Sri Lanka, the amendment also reflects the growing maturity of economic relations with its largest neighbour.

Cross-border investment has become increasingly sophisticated, and both governments recognise that encouraging legitimate investment must go hand in hand with protecting the integrity of their respective tax systems.

As economic ties between Colombo and New Delhi continue to deepen, transparency is likely to become just as important as tax competitiveness. Investors generally welcome clear rules. Those who rely on ambiguity seldom do.

CRICKET’S CREDIBILITY ON THE LINE

Alleged LPL Corruption Case Reminds Sri Lanka That Integrity Is the Game Within the Game

Cricket has long occupied a unique place in Sri Lankan life. It has united communities, inspired generations and provided moments of national pride that transcend politics and economics.

It is precisely because the game means so much that allegations of corruption continue to strike such a sensitive nerve. The latest investigation surrounding the Lanka Premier League (LPL) is therefore about far more than one individual. It is about protecting public confidence in the integrity of the sport itself.

The recent arrest of an individual in connection with alleged corrupt approaches linked to the Lanka Premier League has once again focused attention on the constant battle being fought behind the scenes to keep cricket free from manipulation.

Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) responded swiftly, reiterating its policy of zero tolerance towards corruption and confirming that it would extend its full cooperation to investigators.

The governing body emphasised that preserving the integrity of the game remains one of its highest priorities.

The allegations are now subject to legal process, and it is important that those proceedings are allowed to take their course. An arrest is not a conviction, and those under investigation remain entitled to the presumption of innocence until proven guilty before a court of law.

That distinction is fundamental to any justice system and should not be overlooked simply because the matter concerns a high-profile sporting competition.

What the latest case does underline is the increasingly sophisticated nature of corruption in modern sport. Gone are the days when attention focused solely on players deliberately underperforming.

Today’s anti-corruption investigators monitor betting markets, financial transactions, communications, approaches made through intermediaries and organised criminal networks that seek to profit from manipulating sporting events. T20 cricket, with its global reach, high betting volumes and rapid format, presents opportunities that dishonest actors have repeatedly attempted to exploit.

Sri Lanka has experienced this reality before. Over the past decade, Parliament has strengthened legislation dealing with sports-related corruption, recognising that the traditional disciplinary mechanisms available to sporting bodies were no longer sufficient. Match-fixing and corruption have increasingly become matters for criminal investigation rather than merely internal sporting sanctions. That legislative framework has placed Sri Lanka among the countries taking a firmer legal approach to protecting sporting integrity.

For Sri Lanka Cricket, maintaining credibility is as important as winning tournaments. Sponsors invest because they believe competitions are genuine. Broadcasters pay significant sums because supporters trust that what they are watching is authentic. Once that confidence begins to erode, the damage extends well beyond any single tournament or individual. Reputations built over decades can be undermined remarkably quickly.

The LPL has, despite its relatively short history, become an important fixture on Sri Lanka’s sporting calendar. It has provided opportunities for local players to compete alongside international stars while attracting overseas audiences and commercial investment. Protecting that competition from corruption is therefore not simply a sporting obligation but an economic one as well.

The investigation will now follow its legal course. Whatever its eventual outcome, it serves as another reminder that cricket’s greatest victories are not measured solely on the scoreboard. They are also measured by the confidence supporters have that every run scored, every wicket taken and every result achieved has been earned honestly.

For a country where cricket remains woven into the national identity, that may be the most valuable victory of all.

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GALLE FACE HOTEL LEADS SRI LANKA IN THE AGE OF AI

Historic Landmark Tops National Rankings for Artificial Intelligence Visibility

For more than 160 years, the Galle Face Hotel has occupied a unique place in Sri Lanka’s history. It has welcomed royalty, heads of state, celebrities, writers and generations of travellers who have regarded the grand old hotel as one of Asia’s most enduring hospitality landmarks.

This week, however, the hotel achieved a distinction that has nothing to do with its Victorian architecture or illustrious guest list. It has become Sri Lanka’s highest-ranked hospitality brand in the emerging world of artificial intelligence.

According to *The State of AI Visibility in Sri Lanka 2026*, compiled by BrandRadar, the AI search intelligence platform developed by Roar Global, Galle Face Hotel has been ranked the country’s leading hotel brand in terms of visibility across major artificial intelligence platforms, including ChatGPT, Google Gemini and Perplexity. The study examined how often brands are surfaced, cited and recommended when users seek information or recommendations through AI-powered search systems.

The distinction may sound technical, but it reflects a profound change in the way consumers are beginning to discover businesses.

For decades, companies invested heavily in traditional advertising, public relations and search engine optimisation in an effort to appear prominently on Google. Increasingly, however, travellers are asking artificial intelligence platforms where they should stay, what restaurants they should visit and which destinations are worth exploring.

Instead of scrolling through pages of search results, many users now rely on AI-generated recommendations that synthesise information from multiple trusted sources.

That shift is creating an entirely new measure of brand strength.

For a hotel such as the Galle Face, visibility within AI-generated responses means that its reputation extends beyond conventional marketing. It reflects the consistency of its digital footprint, the quality of publicly available information, media coverage, customer reviews and the credibility that AI systems associate with the brand.

The achievement is also a reflection of leadership. Under General Manager **Suresh Abbas**, and with the guidance of Chairman **Sanjiv Gardiner**, the hotel has continued to modernise its operations while carefully preserving the heritage that has made it one of Colombo’s most recognisable institutions.

Balancing history with innovation is seldom easy. Yet the latest recognition suggests that the hotel has succeeded in presenting itself as both timeless and contemporary.

More broadly, the BrandRadar report offers an early glimpse into what may become one of the defining business metrics of the coming decade. Companies will increasingly find themselves competing not only for market share or online search rankings, but also for visibility within artificial intelligence systems that are rapidly becoming the first point of contact between businesses and consumers.

For Sri Lankan companies, the lesson is clear. A strong digital presence is no longer simply about having an attractive website or an active social media account. It is about building credibility, publishing reliable information and maintaining a reputation that artificial intelligence systems recognise as trustworthy.

The Galle Face Hotel has demonstrated that even an institution founded in the nineteenth century can thrive in the twenty-first century’s newest technological frontier.

In an age where algorithms increasingly shape first impressions, the Grand Old Lady of Colombo has once again shown that relevance is earned, not inherited.

Be that as it may, the real significance of this recognition extends beyond one hotel. It is an early indication that the future of brand reputation will be shaped as much by artificial intelligence as by traditional advertising, and Sri Lankan businesses would do well to take notice.

VIJAY’S FIRST TEN WEEKS

A Government That Has Changed the Conversation. Now It Must Change the State.

When C. Joseph Vijay took the oath of office as Tamil Nadu’s Chief Minister on 10 May, he did more than form a new government. He ended nearly six decades of alternating rule by the DMK and AIADMK, breaking one of the most entrenched political duopolies in Indian democracy. It was a victory built not on inheritance or coalition arithmetic, but on a promise that Tamil Nadu could be governed differently.

Barely ten weeks into office, it would be unfair to deliver a definitive verdict on the administration. Governments are not transformed in a matter of weeks. Budgets have yet to be implemented, long-term policies are only beginning to take shape and many election promises remain works in progress. Even so, first impressions matter, and the early months of a new administration often reveal the governing philosophy that will define the years ahead.

One of the first signals sent by the new government was organisational discipline. Portfolio allocations were announced quickly, with Vijay retaining key departments including Home, Public Administration and Municipal Administration while assigning specialist responsibilities across his Cabinet.

The emphasis appeared to be on central coordination, reflecting the Chief Minister’s message that there would be a single centre of executive authority.

The government’s immediate priorities have focused on restoring confidence in public administration, accelerating investment and preparing its first full Budget, which is scheduled to be presented on 5 August. That Budget will be the first real opportunity for the administration to demonstrate how campaign promises translate into fiscal reality. It is one thing to inspire voters during an election. It is quite another to balance welfare commitments, infrastructure spending and financial discipline once in office.

Perhaps the greatest political achievement of the new administration has been psychological rather than legislative. Tamil Nadu’s political landscape has been reset. The traditional contest between two established Dravidian parties has given way to a government led by a movement that many observers regarded as improbable only a year ago. Whether that realignment becomes permanent will depend not on campaign speeches but on measurable improvements in governance.

For Sri Lanka, developments in Tamil Nadu deserve close attention. The state is home to one of India’s largest manufacturing economies, a global automotive hub, a leader in information technology and a natural commercial partner across the Palk Strait. Decisions taken in Chennai influence trade, shipping, education, tourism and investment opportunities that extend well beyond India’s borders.

There is another lesson worth noting. Democratic politics periodically produces moments when voters decide not simply to change a government but to change the political order itself. Tamil Nadu has experienced such a moment. The challenge facing Vijay is the same challenge confronting every leader swept into office by extraordinary public expectation: hope is easy to generate, but considerably harder to sustain.

The coming months will therefore be decisive. The first Budget, the pace of investment, the efficiency of the bureaucracy and the government’s response to inevitable crises will begin shaping public judgement. Political popularity brought Vijay to Fort St. George.
Administrative performance will determine how long he remains there.

From Our Chennai Desk: It is still too early to declare the experiment either a triumph or a disappointment. What is beyond dispute is that Tamil Nadu has entered a new political era. The headlines have already been written. The history, however, is only just beginning.

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