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Daily by Faraz

"Questioning The Answers"

THE DRIVE THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

From Parliament to Palace, and then to No. 10

There are few political rituals in the world that carry quite the symbolism of the one Britain will witness today.

For most of the morning, Andy Burnham will simply be another Member of Parliament. By late afternoon, after a short journey across central London, he will emerge from Buckingham Palace as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

It is a constitutional transition unlike almost any other.

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It is a constitutional transition unlike almost any other.

Following his election as Leader of the Labour Party and his return to Westminster only weeks ago as the newly elected Member of Parliament for Makerfield, Burnham’s political journey has been remarkably swift. Few would have predicted, when he left Westminster in 2024 to continue as Mayor of Greater Manchester, that his route back to national leadership would be so rapid.

For those watching from Sri Lanka, there is another fascinating aspect to the day.

As many of us settle down for afternoon tea, events in London will be unfolding with clockwork precision. The outgoing Prime Minister will first travel to Buckingham Palace to formally tender his resignation to King Charles III. Only then does Andy Burnham make the short drive from Westminster to the Palace, where the King will invite him to form a government in His Majesty’s name.

It is a ceremony steeped in centuries of constitutional tradition, yet completed in little more than half an hour.

Then comes perhaps the most visual reminder that power has changed hands. Observe the motorcade.

On the way into Buckingham Palace, Burnham’s convoy will be modest. Security will naturally be present, but it will reflect the status of the Leader of the governing party rather than the Head of Government.

When the Palace gates open again a short time later, everything changes.

The convoy that leaves Buckingham Palace is no longer escorting Andy Burnham MP. It is carrying the Prime Minister. The security detail becomes noticeably larger, the police escort more substantial and the protocols altogether different. It is one of the few occasions when the transfer of executive authority can literally be observed in real time. There is something rather reassuring about the simplicity of it all.

No military parade. No elaborate inauguration. No oath administered before thousands of invited guests. No lengthy constitutional ceremony.

Instead, one constitutional monarch, one invitation to form a government, one short drive to Downing Street and a change of motorcade.

That quiet dignity is perhaps the greatest strength of Britain’s unwritten constitution. Governments may change, personalities may differ and politics may become deeply polarised, but the process itself remains calm, orderly and unquestioned.

Be that as it may, every Prime Minister remembers one journey above all others. It is not the drive into Buckingham Palace that changes history. It is the drive out.

SPAIN WIN 2026 WORLD CUP TO END MESSI AND ARGENTINA’S DREAM

Torres’ extra-time goal secured Spain’s second World Cup title against Argentina.

Spain outlasted Argentina 1-0 in the 2026 World Cup final.

Spain's patient playstyle continued to payoff as it kept Argentina on the back foot throughout the first 90 minutes and into extra time. Spain finally struck in the 106th minute when Nico Williams found Ferran Torres for a first-time finish.

Lionel Messi and Argentina pushed for an equalizer, and had chances on goal in the final minutes of extra time, but couldn't break through.

Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martínez put forth a miraculous effort with a Men's FIFA World Cup final record of 10 saves. But Spain's defense one-upped him, finishing the 2026 World Cup with one goal conceded through eight matches.

For Spain, it won its second Men's FIFA World Cup trophy, and did so in similar fashion to 2010 with a 1-0 victory in extra time.

WORLD CUP 2026 : SPAIN CROWNED CHAMPIONS AFTER EXTRA-TIME THRILLER AGAINST ARGENTINA

Spain were crowned World Cup champions for the second time in their history after defeating defending champions Argentina 1-0 in extra time at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey.

Ferran Torres' clinical finish in the extra period ended a tightly contested final, giving Luis de la Fuente's Roja their first World Cup triumph since 2010 and completing a historic Euro-World Cup double.

Spain defeated Argentina 1-0 in extra time on Sunday evening to claim their second World Cup title, with Ferran Torres' clinical finish in the 105th minute proving decisive in this championship battle. Both sides created opportunities but found Emiliano Martinez and Unai Simon equal to their efforts, with the Argentina goalkeeper producing a series of brilliant saves to keep the match alive.

The deadlock was finally broken in extra time when Nico Williams' intelligent header found Ferran Torres perfectly positioned to strike a clinical finish past Martinez, giving Spain the breakthrough they had been seeking throughout the final encounter.

The victory represents a remarkable achievement for Spain under Luis de la Fuente, who guided the European champions to complete the Euro 2024-World Cup 2026 double—a feat not accomplished since Spain's golden generation in 2008-2010. Argentina's bid to become the first nation since Brazil in 1962 to win back-to-back World Cups fell short in a World Cup final that demonstrated the evolving nature of modern tournament football.

While Lionel Messi's quest for a second World Cup crown ended in heartbreak, Spain's triumph sends them into football history as worthy successors to their illustrious predecessors.

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"Questioning The Answers"

THE IMF MAY SAVE AN ECONOMY. ONLY GROWTH SAVES A COUNTRY.

Sri Lanka's economic conversation has become increasingly dominated by one question: when will the IMF programme end? It is a perfectly reasonable question, but perhaps not the right one. The more important question is what happens the day after.

There is no doubt that the International Monetary Fund has played a critical role in stabilising an economy that, only four years ago, was on the brink of complete collapse.

Inflation has fallen dramatically. Foreign reserves have recovered. Debt restructuring is progressing. The queues have disappeared, fuel is available and confidence, at least compared with the dark days of 2022, has returned. That is no small achievement.

But stabilisation is not prosperity.

It is one thing to stop an economy from bleeding. It is quite another to make it healthy enough to compete. The IMF can provide the discipline required to restore order to public finances. It cannot create entrepreneurs. It cannot persuade investors to bring capital into Sri Lanka. It cannot build industries, create innovation or generate the thousands of high-value jobs needed to prevent another generation of talented young Sri Lankans from leaving our shores.

That responsibility rests squarely with those who govern.
There remains a tendency within Sri Lanka to measure economic success by macroeconomic indicators alone. Exchange rates stabilise, inflation falls and reserves rise, and understandably governments celebrate.

Yet none of those figures necessarily tells a small businessman whether sales are improving, a graduate whether meaningful employment is available or an investor whether the regulatory environment has become easier to navigate.

Growth comes from confidence. Confidence comes from consistency. Investors are remarkably patient with difficult economic conditions if they know the rules will remain stable. What they struggle to accept is uncertainty. Policy reversals, changing tax regimes, contradictory regulations and endless bureaucratic approvals have discouraged far more investment than economic downturns themselves.

Sri Lanka's greatest competitive advantage has never been cheap labour or abundant natural resources. It has always been its people, its strategic location and its ability to serve as a gateway between East and West.

Those advantages remain intact. The question is whether we are creating an environment in which those strengths can flourish.

The IMF programme will eventually end. That is inevitable. What matters is whether Sri Lanka emerges merely with healthier accounts or with a genuinely stronger economy.
There is a profound difference between recovering from a crisis and preparing for the future. One is about survival. The other is about ambition.

Be that as it may, history rarely remembers countries for successfully completing IMF programmes. It remembers those that no longer needed them.

THE PITFALLS AND PRATFALLS OF JUDICIAL REFORM

Why Extending Judges' Retirement Age Requires More Than Good Intentions

There is an important distinction between a pitfall and a pratfall.

A pitfall is a hidden danger waiting to trap the unwary. A pratfall is what happens after someone stumbles into it. One is the risk. The other is the embarrassment that follows.

Sri Lanka's increasingly contentious debate over extending the retirement age of judges of the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal now threatens to contain both.

On its face, the proposal is neither extraordinary nor unprecedented. Around the world, governments have revisited judicial retirement ages as life expectancy has increased and experienced judges have remained capable of serving well beyond what previous generations regarded as retirement.

Courts benefit from wisdom, continuity and institutional memory. Few would dispute that a judge at the height of his or her intellectual powers still has much to contribute.

Nor is the Government without a legitimate objective. Sri Lanka's courts continue to grapple with delays, mounting case backlogs and the practical difficulty of replacing senior judges whose experience has often taken decades to acquire.

Retaining experienced members of the Bench for a further period appears, at first glance, to be a sensible administrative response.

If that were the entire story, there would be very little to debate.

But constitutional democracies are rarely concerned only with outcomes. They are equally concerned with process, perception and public confidence.

That is where the pitfalls begin.

The first is not whether judges should retire at sixty-five, sixty-seven or even seventy. It is whether Parliament should alter the conditions of service of judges who are already occupying those offices. There is an important constitutional distinction between changing the rules for future appointments and changing the rules for those presently entrusted with exercising judicial power.

Many established democracies have chosen the former approach precisely because it avoids even the appearance that constitutional rules are being adjusted for identifiable individuals. Judicial independence is not protected merely by ensuring judges remain impartial.

It is protected by ensuring that no reasonable citizen has cause to wonder whether the Executive or Legislature possesses the ability to influence the tenure of serving judges.

Justice must not only be done. It must be seen to be done.

The second pitfall lies in assuming that retirement age is the principal cause of judicial delay. Anyone familiar with Sri Lanka's legal system knows the challenges run much deeper. Vacancies remain unfilled for lengthy periods.

Courts are burdened with procedural inefficiencies. Modern digital case management remains incomplete. Court infrastructure in many parts of the country continues to require investment. Delays frequently arise not because judges retire too early, but because the system surrounding them struggles to function efficiently.

Changing one element of that system may assist, but it should not be mistaken for comprehensive reform.

The third pitfall is perhaps the most important of all. Public confidence in the judiciary is among the most valuable assets any democracy possesses.
It takes generations to build and remarkably little to undermine. Even where legislation is constitutionally valid, if the public begins to suspect that judicial tenure is capable of being adjusted according to the convenience of the political branches, confidence inevitably suffers.

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PITFALLS AND PRATFALLS...

That brings us to the pratfalls.

The Government appears to have underestimated the level of concern the proposal would generate within the legal profession.

Objections from senior lawyers, bar associations and constitutional commentators have transformed what may have begun as an administrative proposal into a national debate about judicial independence. That was entirely predictable and, perhaps, avoidable.

Communication has also left much to be desired. The public has heard various explanations: reducing backlogs, retaining experience, filling vacancies and now suggestions that the proposal may extend beyond the superior courts to encompass judges throughout the judiciary. Each explanation may possess merit, but together they risk creating the impression that the policy itself remains unsettled.

Good reform rarely succeeds through improvisation.

There is also an irony that cannot be ignored. Governments frequently argue that institutions should become younger, more innovative and more dynamic.

Across the public service there has often been emphasis on succession planning and leadership renewal. Yet when it comes to the judiciary, the argument suddenly becomes one of extending tenure. That inconsistency does not necessarily invalidate the proposal, but it does require a fuller explanation than has so far been provided.

None of this is to suggest that increasing the retirement age is inherently wrong.

It may well be the correct long-term policy.

If Parliament, after proper consultation, concludes that judges should serve longer, it possesses every democratic right to legislate accordingly. But there remains a compelling argument that any revised retirement age should apply prospectively to future appointments rather than immediately to those presently serving.

Such an approach would preserve the intended policy objective while avoiding unnecessary constitutional controversy.

The law is often judged not only by what it achieves but by how it chooses to achieve it.

History reminds us that confidence in courts can be weakened not only by corruption or incompetence but by perception. Once citizens begin questioning whether constitutional rules are being altered for those already holding judicial office, restoring that confidence becomes immeasurably more difficult.

That is why this debate deserves to rise above personalities, governments and individual judges.

It is ultimately about protecting an institution that belongs not to those who sit upon the Bench, nor to those who occupy the Treasury benches in Parliament, but to every citizen who may one day seek justice before it.

Be that as it may, every reform carries its pitfalls. The wisest governments recognise them before legislation is introduced.

The best governments avoid the pratfalls that follow when legitimate reform is pursued without first securing the confidence of those whose trust matters most. On matters touching the independence of the judiciary, public confidence is not simply desirable. It is indispensable.

A WEEK IN POLITICS AND POWER

There are weeks when Sri Lankan politics appears almost predictable. This was not one of them.

Over the past seven days, the country witnessed the emergence of a new political alliance, continuing controversy over the proposed extension of judges' retirement ages, growing pressure on the Government following the Negombo Prison tragedy and the quiet commencement of preparations for Budget 2027.

Individually, each would have dominated the political agenda. Together, they painted a picture of a Government finding itself increasingly on the defensive while an opposition continues searching for a coherent path back to relevance.

The week's most significant political development was undoubtedly the formation of a new platform bringing together six parties representing what they describe as Sri Lanka's Tamil-speaking communities.

The grouping brings together the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK), Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), All Ceylon Makkal Congress (ACMC), Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC), Tamil Progressive Alliance (TPA) and the Democratic Tamil National Alliance (DTNA).

On paper, the objectives are straightforward. The alliance says it will collectively campaign for a new Constitution, press for long-delayed Provincial Council elections and pursue unresolved land issues affecting Northern, Eastern, Upcountry Tamil and Muslim communities. It is, by any measure, an ambitious agenda.

Yet Sri Lanka has seen political alliances come and go for almost eight decades.

Very few have been built around shared ideology alone. Most have been products of political necessity, electoral arithmetic or changing fortunes at the ballot box.

Parties that once condemned one another have often found themselves sharing Cabinet tables only months later. Equally, partners have become opponents with remarkable speed.

It is against that backdrop that this latest alliance must be viewed.

Its leaders insist this is not an electoral coalition but simply a common platform through which issues affecting Tamil-speaking communities can be pursued while each party retains its own identity. That may well be true today. Whether it remains true when elections approach is another matter altogether.

Politically, the alliance may ultimately present a greater challenge to the Samagi Jana Balawegaya than to the Government itself. Three of its constituent parties remain aligned with the SJB, while others have spent years participating in successive governments of varying political colours.

The minority vote that traditionally proved decisive for the UNP and later the SJB has, over the past two years, shown a greater willingness to support the National People's Power.

If this new grouping eventually evolves into an electoral understanding, it risks further fragmenting an opposition that can scarcely afford further division.

The Government, however, has more immediate concerns.

The fallout from the Negombo Prison tragedy continues to cast a long shadow over the administration. President Anura Kumara Dissanayake convened senior prison officials this week to examine both the immediate causes of the violence and the deeper structural weaknesses within Sri Lanka's prison system.

The meeting came as the number of prison officers who lost their lives continued to rise, reinforcing the gravity of what has become one of the most serious prison disturbances in recent memory.

The figures alone explain why the issue has become so pressing.

Sri Lanka's prisons, originally designed to accommodate around 11,000 inmates, are now holding approximately 41,000.

According to the Government, much of that increase has followed intensified anti-narcotics operations conducted under its nationwide campaign against organised drug crime. Success in law enforcement has, ironically, exposed longstanding weaknesses within the correctional system itself.

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WEEK IN POLITICS...

The Government has now indicated that more offenders arrested under anti-drug operations will, where appropriate, be diverted towards rehabilitation rather than incarceration. It has also instructed that thousands of long-outstanding Government Analyst reports be expedited to reduce delays in narcotics prosecutions.

Those are practical responses to practical problems. Whether they arrive quickly enough to restore public confidence remains uncertain.

The political consequences are already becoming evident. The Samagi Jana Balawegaya intends presenting a motion of no confidence against Justice Minister Harshana Nanayakkara when Parliament reconvenes, arguing that failures in prison administration contributed directly to the Negombo tragedy.

The continued absence of a permanently appointed Commissioner General of Prisons has become one of the central criticisms levelled against the Government.

Meanwhile, another controversy continues gathering momentum.

The Government's proposal to extend the retirement age of judges has now evolved into one of the most sensitive constitutional debates since the National People's Power assumed office.

Initially confined to superior court judges, the proposal has reportedly been expanded to include judges throughout the judicial hierarchy. Rather than reducing criticism, however, the broader proposal has generated fresh opposition.

The Judicial Service Association has publicly opposed the move, while political parties, civil society organisations and sections of the legal profession continue questioning both its necessity and its timing.

Opposition parties have even taken their concerns to the United Nations, arguing that the process lacks transparency and risks undermining public confidence in judicial independence.

The Government remains unmoved.

Its position is that increasing the retirement age is intended to retain experienced judges, improve judicial efficiency and reduce delays in the administration of justice. Ministers have also stressed that no judge would be compelled to remain in office beyond the current retirement age and that any extension would remain entirely voluntary.

Critics remain unconvinced.

For them, the issue is not simply whether judges serve for two additional years. It is whether altering retirement ages while sitting judges remain in office inevitably creates perceptions that individual office holders may benefit from legislative change.

In constitutional matters, perception can often prove as significant as reality.

Adding further weight to the debate this week was the return of former President Ranil Wickremesinghe to the public stage.

Speaking during his "Read with Ranil" dialogue, the former President cautioned that the Government should carefully consider the consequences of proceeding with judicial reforms that have already generated significant resistance within both political and legal circles.

Whether one agrees with his assessment or not, his intervention ensured that the debate gained further political prominence.

Away from the headlines, President Dissanayake also began the less visible but equally important work of preparing Budget 2027.

Senior officials from several ministries were summoned for pre-budget discussions reviewing current expenditure and future priorities. It was a timely reminder that while political controversies dominate headlines, governments are ultimately judged by their ability to govern.

If there was one theme running consistently through the week, it was that governing has become considerably more difficult than campaigning.

The Government continues to enjoy the advantages of office and retains a commanding parliamentary majority. Yet it now finds itself defending decisions on prisons, the judiciary and institutional reform simultaneously.

At the same time, the opposition remains energetic but fragmented, producing new alliances while still searching for a common political strategy.

That may prove to be the defining feature of Sri Lankan politics today.

The Government is no longer judged by the promises it made before entering office but by the decisions it makes now. The opposition, meanwhile, can no longer rely simply on criticising those decisions. It must convince the public that it offers something demonstrably better.

The political chessboard continues to shift.

Whether this week's alliances, controversies and confrontations represent temporary manoeuvres or the beginning of a more fundamental realignment will only become apparent in the months ahead.

Be that as it may, the week has reinforced one enduring truth about Sri Lankan politics. Governments may command power, oppositions may seek opportunity, alliances may rise and fall, but public confidence is earned only through competent governance.

That remains the one contest every political party must eventually face.

TRUST : THE ONE THING MONEY CANNOT BUY

There are many things that can be purchased. Reputation consultants can polish an image. Advertising can increase visibility. Lawyers can defend a position. Public relations experts can shape a narrative. But there remains one commodity that no amount of money can ever guarantee.

Trust.

As the Chief of SLON observed recently, trust is neither sellable nor obtainable. It is earned. More importantly, it is earned slowly and lost quickly.

That observation deserves far wider reflection because trust lies at the heart of almost everything we value. It underpins successful businesses, stable governments, enduring friendships and healthy societies. Without trust, contracts become meaningless, institutions become suspect and leadership becomes little more than theatre.

Trust is built conversation by conversation.

Every telephone call, every customer interaction, every parliamentary speech, every media interview and every promise made presents a small but significant opportunity. Each is a test of integrity. Every decision either deposits something into the account of trust or quietly withdraws from it.

That is why trust cannot simply be declared. It must be demonstrated.

Consumers understand this instinctively. They return to the businesses that consistently keep their promises. They recommend professionals who deliver what they say they will deliver. They remain loyal to brands that admit mistakes rather than conceal them.

The same principle applies in politics.

Governments are elected on promises, but they survive on trust. Policies may be popular or unpopular. Difficult decisions may be unavoidable. Citizens will often accept hardship if they believe those making the decisions are being honest with them. What they rarely forgive is the feeling that they have been misled.

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TRUST...

History repeatedly demonstrates that governments seldom collapse because they make one unpopular decision.

They falter when public confidence evaporates.

The corporate world is no different.

A company may possess impressive balance sheets, modern offices and sophisticated marketing campaigns, yet if customers no longer trust its products, suppliers question its reliability or employees lose faith in its leadership, decline becomes almost inevitable. Confidence, once fractured, is extraordinarily difficult to rebuild.

Trust also demands consistency.

People rarely judge us by our finest moments. They judge us by what we do repeatedly. Integrity is not an occasional act performed when circumstances are favourable. It is the discipline of making the same ethical choice when no one is watching.

That is perhaps why trust takes so long to acquire. It requires evidence accumulated over months and years. Every kept promise strengthens it. Every broken promise weakens it. There is no shortcut.

In journalism, trust is our most valuable asset. Readers may occasionally disagree with an editorial position, challenge an interpretation or question a conclusion. That is perfectly healthy.

What they must never question is whether we have pursued the facts honestly, fairly and without fear or favour. Once credibility disappears, so too does relevance.

Perhaps the greatest irony is that trust often reveals its true value only after it has gone.

Families recognise it after relationships fracture. Businesses recognise it after customers leave. Politicians recognise it after elections are lost. Institutions recognise it after public confidence has drained away.
The lesson is remarkably simple.

Trust is not built through slogans, advertising campaigns or carefully choreographed speeches. It is built through ordinary decisions made consistently over time.

It grows when words and actions remain aligned. It flourishes where honesty is practised even when it is inconvenient.

Be that as it may, there is one principle that deserves to stand above all others. In business, in public service, in politics and in everyday life, trust remains the only currency whose value can never be inflated, manipulated or manufactured.

It is earned one conversation at a time, protected by integrity and, once established, becomes the strongest foundation upon which any lasting success can be built.

DIRTY MONEY DOESN'T ONLY CORRUPT BANKS. IT CORRUPTS NATIONS.

Money laundering is one of those subjects that rarely captures the public imagination. It sounds technical, complicated and best left to bankers, accountants and financial investigators. That would be a mistake.

Behind almost every major organised crime lies one simple objective: turning illegal money into respectable money.

Drug trafficking, human trafficking, corruption, organised fraud, illegal gambling, cybercrime and tax evasion all generate enormous profits. Those profits become valuable only when criminals are able to move them through banks, companies, property purchases and seemingly legitimate businesses without attracting attention.

That is why money laundering matters.

It is not simply about protecting the banking system. It is about protecting the integrity of the entire economy.

Every rupee successfully laundered represents honest businesses competing against dishonest money. Criminal organisations can afford to sell cheaper, buy faster and expand quicker because their objective is not profit in the conventional sense. Their objective is disguising criminal proceeds.

The damage extends much further.

Countries perceived as weak in combating financial crime inevitably attract the wrong kind of investor while discouraging the right one. International banks become cautious. Overseas regulators demand greater scrutiny. Legitimate businesses face additional compliance costs simply because confidence in the country's financial system begins to weaken.

Sri Lanka has experienced this before.

The country has spent years rebuilding international confidence following concerns over financial oversight. Considerable progress has undoubtedly been made, but credibility is not something that can ever be permanently secured. It requires constant vigilance.

The responsibility also extends beyond government.

Banks cannot simply process transactions without asking difficult questions. Lawyers, accountants, auditors, company secretaries and real estate professionals all become part of the country's first line of defence. Compliance is no longer an inconvenience.

It is a necessity.

Perhaps the greatest danger is that money laundering gradually normalises corruption itself.

Once illicit wealth becomes indistinguishable from legitimate wealth, public confidence begins to erode. Citizens lose faith that success is earned honestly. Institutions become viewed with suspicion. Cynicism replaces confidence.

That is a dangerous place for any democracy.

Be that as it may, financial crime is never simply about money. Left unchecked, it eventually begins laundering something even more valuable than cash: the nation's integrity.

WHEN GOVERNMENT BECOMES ITS OWN BIGGEST OBSTACLE

There is an irony that successive governments seldom acknowledge.

Every administration promises to reduce bureaucracy. Every administration speaks about efficiency, investment and faster decision-making. Yet somehow, government itself continues becoming larger, slower and more complicated.

Sri Lanka today suffers less from a shortage of ideas than from an abundance of procedures.

A business wishing to expand, an investor seeking approvals or even an ordinary citizen trying to obtain a simple public service often finds themselves navigating a maze of ministries, departments, authorities, committees and regulatory agencies. Individually, each institution performs an important function. Collectively, they often create paralysis.

Nobody argues against accountability.

Public money deserves proper scrutiny. Environmental safeguards matter. Procurement rules exist for good reason. Transparency is essential. The problem arises when the process itself becomes more important than the outcome.

There comes a point where excessive procedure ceases to protect the public and instead begins punishing it.

Investment delayed is often investment lost. Businesses do not wait indefinitely. Capital simply moves elsewhere.

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JERUSALEM...

The world has become extraordinarily competitive, and investors comparing Sri Lanka with Vietnam, Indonesia or India rarely ask whether our paperwork is thorough. They ask how long it will take to obtain an answer.

Unfortunately, uncertainty has become one of Sri Lanka's least attractive exports.

The issue extends well beyond foreign investment. Government departments themselves frequently complain that projects stall because approvals remain trapped somewhere else within the State. Ministries wait for agencies.

Agencies wait for Treasury. Treasury waits for reports. Reports await committees. Committees await meetings.

The file moves.

The country does not.

Digital government has undoubtedly improved some areas, but technology alone cannot solve a culture that often mistakes delay for diligence.

Efficiency is not achieved by purchasing better computers. It is achieved by trusting competent public servants to make decisions and holding them accountable when those decisions prove wrong.

The countries admired for efficient government are not those with fewer regulations. They are those with clearer regulations. Investors understand the rules. Officials understand their responsibilities. Decisions are made within known timeframes.

Predictability creates confidence.

Sri Lanka has spoken about becoming an investment hub for decades. Yet investment is attracted not merely by tax concessions or promotional campaigns. It arrives where governments themselves demonstrate confidence in making timely decisions.

Be that as it may, the greatest obstacle to Sri Lanka's development may no longer be politics, geography or even economics. It may simply be the growing inability of government to get out of its own way.

HORMUZ : THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS WATERWAY IS HOLDING ITS BREATH

If there is one stretch of water capable of unsettling the global economy almost overnight, it is the Strait of Hormuz.

Barely 33 kilometres wide at its narrowest point, the waterway separating Iran from Oman carries close to a fifth of the world's internationally traded oil.

Every day, enormous crude oil tankers and liquefied natural gas carriers thread their way through one of the most strategically sensitive maritime corridors on earth.

Any disruption is felt not only in the Gulf but in petrol stations, factories and supermarkets across the globe.

The Middle East remains dangerously poised.

Although the immediate exchange of missile attacks between Iran and Israel has eased compared with the height of recent hostilities, tensions remain exceptionally high.

The United States and its allies continue maintaining a significant naval presence in the Gulf, while commercial shipping companies remain cautious about routing vessels through Hormuz.

Insurance premiums for ships operating in the region have risen sharply, reflecting the continued uncertainty.

For countries such as Sri Lanka, these developments are not distant geopolitical events.

Almost every barrel of crude oil arriving in Colombo passes through or originates from the Gulf region.

Any prolonged disruption to shipping through Hormuz would almost certainly translate into higher fuel prices, increased freight costs and renewed inflationary pressure.

Sri Lanka has only recently emerged from a severe economic crisis, making it particularly vulnerable to external shocks over which it has absolutely no control.

That is the uncomfortable reality of globalisation.

A missile fired in the Gulf can eventually influence the price of vegetables in Pettah, bus fares in Matara or electricity generation across the island. Geography may separate conflicts, but economics connects them.

There is another concern.

Even if Hormuz remains open, uncertainty itself carries a price.

Shipping companies become more cautious, insurers increase premiums and commodity markets begin pricing in future risk rather than current reality.

Sometimes it is not the closure of a sea lane that damages economies. It is simply the fear that it might close.

For now, the world's naval powers are ensuring that commercial traffic continues to move. Yet everyone understands how fragile that stability remains.

No nation truly wants the Strait of Hormuz closed. Iran depends upon it.

The Gulf states depend upon it. The world's major economies depend upon it.

Be that as it may, the Strait of Hormuz remains the one place where a few kilometres of water have the capacity to determine the economic fortunes of billions of people. It is a reminder that in an interconnected world, the narrowest waterways often carry the greatest weight.

SOUTHERN EXPRESSWAY TRAFFIC DISRUPTED AFTER BUS CATCHES FIRE

A bus caught fire on the Southern Expressway between the Welipenna and Kurundugahahetekma interchanges while travelling towards Galle, causing severe traffic congestion.

Motorists are advised to exercise caution and expect delays in the area.

Authorities are responding to the incident.

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CHENNAI PORT STEPS UP THE CHALLENGE TO COLOMBO

CHENNAI: The Tamil Nadu Government is expected to place renewed emphasis on maritime infrastructure as it works alongside the Union Government to strengthen the State’s position as southern India’s principal logistics gateway.

Officials here say continued expansion at Chennai, Kamarajar (Ennore) and Kattupalli ports, together with improved road and rail connectivity, is steadily increasing cargo handling capacity across the eastern seaboard.

Shipping analysts note that while Colombo remains the dominant transshipment hub in the region, Indian planners have never hidden their ambition of gradually reducing dependence on foreign ports by strengthening domestic capacity.

The strategy has been underway for several years through investments in deep-water terminals, container handling equipment and port connectivity.

For Sri Lanka, the developments are being closely watched within the shipping industry.

The Port of Colombo continues to enjoy important advantages, particularly in handling international transshipment cargo.

However, logistics experts say regional competition is expected to intensify over the coming decade as India’s port modernisation programme gathers momentum.

Officials in Chennai insist the objective is not to compete directly with neighbouring ports but to accommodate India’s own rapidly growing trade volumes.

Even so, port operators acknowledge that every efficiency improvement achieved on the Indian side inevitably alters the competitive landscape across the Bay of Bengal.

For Colombo, the message is increasingly clear.

Remaining South Asia’s preferred maritime hub will depend not only on geography but on efficiency, turnaround times and continued investment.

TAMIL NADU PUSHES AHEAD WITH GLOBAL INVESTMENT DRIVE

CHENNAI: Attracting new international investment remains one of the principal economic priorities of the Tamil Nadu Government, with officials continuing discussions with manufacturers in the automotive, electronics, renewable energy and semiconductor sectors.

Senior officials say the State intends maintaining its position as one of India’s leading destinations for foreign direct investment, building on decades of industrial development centred around Chennai, Coimbatore, Hosur and Tiruppur.

Business organisations here believe political stability following the recent elections has provided investors with greater certainty regarding policy direction.

Industry leaders point to Tamil Nadu’s extensive supplier network, skilled workforce and well-developed transport infrastructure as major attractions for multinational companies looking to expand manufacturing operations in India.

Several overseas delegations are expected to visit Chennai during the coming months to explore investment opportunities.

Economic observers in Sri Lanka are following developments with interest.

Tamil Nadu’s industrial success has frequently been cited by regional economists as an example of how consistent long-term policy can encourage private investment across successive governments regardless of political change.

Trade analysts also believe stronger industrial growth in southern India could create additional opportunities for Sri Lankan exporters supplying components, services and logistics support to manufacturers operating in Tamil Nadu.

FISHERMEN ISSUE REMAINS HIGH ON CHENNAI’S AGENDA

CHENNAI: The long-running fishermen issue between India and Sri Lanka continues to feature prominently in discussions between political leaders, fishing organisations and officials in Tamil Nadu.

Representatives of fishermen’s associations have once again called for greater protection of traditional fishing livelihoods while urging New Delhi to continue diplomatic engagement with Colombo over arrests, boat seizures and access to fishing grounds in the Palk Bay.

State Government officials have maintained regular contact with the Union Government, emphasising the importance of securing the early release of detained fishermen whenever incidents occur.

Political parties across Tamil Nadu continue expressing broad support for local fishing communities, although differences remain regarding the most effective long-term solution.

Marine experts argue that sustainability will ultimately become central to any lasting settlement.

"Questioning The Answers"

FISHERMEN ISSUE...

Overfishing, declining fish stocks and the continued use of bottom trawling remain concerns frequently raised by environmental groups on both sides of the Palk Strait.

Diplomatic observers believe the issue is unlikely to disappear soon but note that dialogue between the two governments has become more structured than in previous years.

For coastal communities in both countries, however, finding a practical solution remains as important as ever.

CHENNAI'S HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY LOOKS TOWARDS SRI LANKA

CHENNAI: Private hospitals across Chennai are reporting steady demand from overseas patients, with Sri Lanka continuing to rank among the important source markets for specialist medical treatment.

Hospital administrators say patients continue travelling to Chennai for cardiac surgery, oncology, neurology, organ transplantation and advanced diagnostic procedures.

The city's reputation as one of South Asia's leading healthcare destinations has strengthened over the past decade through continued investment in specialist facilities and internationally accredited hospitals.

Industry representatives believe medical tourism is expected to expand further as airlines increase connectivity between southern India and neighbouring countries.

Travel operators in Chennai also report growing demand for combined treatment and recovery packages, particularly among patients travelling with family members.

Healthcare analysts note that while Sri Lanka continues investing in its own medical services, cross-border healthcare cooperation is likely to remain an important feature of regional relations.

Medical professionals here believe opportunities also exist for greater collaboration in medical education, research and specialist training between institutions in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka.

START-UP CULTURE CONTINUES TO GROW IN CHENNAI

CHENNAI: Chennai's technology sector continues expanding beyond its traditional information technology base, with start-ups increasingly attracting venture capital in artificial intelligence, financial technology, healthcare technology and clean energy.

Technology parks across the city report rising occupancy, while universities continue strengthening partnerships with private industry aimed at commercialising research.

State officials have identified innovation and entrepreneurship as important pillars of Tamil Nadu's long-term economic strategy.

Several new incubation centres are expected to become operational during the coming year, providing support for young entrepreneurs seeking access to investment and mentoring.

Business organisations believe Chennai's relatively lower operating costs compared with Bengaluru and Mumbai continue attracting technology companies looking to establish research and development facilities.

Observers say the city's growing innovation ecosystem is gradually broadening Tamil Nadu's economic base beyond manufacturing.

For Sri Lanka, developments are being monitored with interest by technology entrepreneurs seeking greater collaboration with India's rapidly expanding digital economy.

MO MARKETPLACE

"I GREW UP WATCHING HIM."

A Young Fan's Journey from Cinema Queue to Chief Minister

From Our Chennai Desk

CHENNAI: When 19-year-old engineering student Karthik S. first queued outside a Chennai cinema to watch a Vijay film, politics was the last thing on his mind. Like millions of young Tamils, he admired the actor for his screen presence, music and larger-than-life characters. His bedroom wall carried film posters, his phone still plays Vijay songs and his first day at college was marked by a selfie in a T-shirt bearing his favourite star's image.

Two months ago however, Karthik found himself standing outside Fort St. George for a very different reason.

"I never imagined the person whose films I watched as a schoolboy would one day become our Chief Minister," he said. "Now I want to see what he can do for young people like us."

His sentiment is echoed by many first-time voters across Tamil Nadu.
For them, Vijay is not a veteran politician or a familiar face from decades of public life. He belongs to their generation's memories. They grew up with his films, followed him on social media and watched his transition from actor to political leader unfold in real time.

Political observers say that connection gives the new Chief Minister something few leaders enjoy - an emotional bond with younger voters before a single government policy is announced.
Whether that goodwill can be sustained will depend not on cinema but on governance.

Young voters interviewed across Chennai repeatedly mentioned jobs, affordable housing, better public transport, start-up opportunities and improved higher education as their priorities. They say admiration alone will not guarantee support forever.
For Karthik, the excitement remains tempered by realism.
"I'll always be a fan," he smiled. "But now he's our Chief Minister. We don't need another blockbuster. We need results."

It is perhaps the most honest assessment of all.

The applause that once filled Tamil Nadu's cinemas has now moved to the political stage. Whether it continues will depend not upon the next film release, but upon the next Budget, the next investment announcement and the next opportunity created for young people.

For Chief Minister Vijay, the audience has become the electorate.

"Questioning The Answers"

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