Issue No. 439 27th NOVEMBER 2026 CEYLON INDEPENDENT @+94 77 230 0305

NEWSLINE

Daily by Faraz

"Questioning The Answers"





SUBSCRIBE TO OUR YOUTUBE CHANNEL : @ceylonindependent

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

AHUNGALLA STAY, CONCEALED FILE AND GOTABAYA IN THE FRAME: NEW TWISTS IN SURESH SALLAY EASTER ATTACKS PROBE

When a criminal court hearing starts turning up hotel check-in dates, buried intelligence files, and the name of a former president in the same breath, seven years of polite official explanations start looking very thin. That was the scene before Colombo Fort Magistrate Pasan Amarasena yesterday, November 26, 2026, as prosecutors laid fresh investigative threads on the table in the case against former State Intelligence Service chief retired Major General Suresh Sallay over the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings.

Appearing for the state, Additional Solicitor General Dileepa Peiris told the court that investigators have corroborated a key detail raised in the 2023 Channel 4 documentary: Sallay and Azad Maulana stayed with their families at the same hotel in Ahungalla on August 15 and 16, 2020.

According to Peiris, Sallay initially told investigators the overlap was coincidental, only to shift his account when confronted with telephone records. In the prosecution's view, that timeline lends weight to claims made by Maulana, whose testimony regarding intelligence contacts and meetings has long been fiercely contested by Sallay and his defenders.

Why would a hotel stay in Ahungalla more than a year after the Easter attacks matter so much in a criminal probe?

Because in investigations involving covert intelligence networks, credibility hinges on who spoke to whom, when they met, and whether earlier denials hold up against digital and documentary records. Sallay, arrested by the Criminal Investigation Department on February 25, 2026, has repeatedly denied wrongdoing and previously pointed to his overseas posting in Malaysia during earlier periods referenced in the allegations.

Yet the prosecution is now stacking up multiple threads around concealment and obstruction.

Peiris alleged before the Magistrate that an informant known as Thambi Anna had passed intelligence regarding extremist ringleader Zahran Hashim to military intelligence six months before the April 2019 bombings, only for the file to be concealed with Sallay's knowledge. Investigators are also examining the potential role of a former DIG in the affair.

If a warning about Zahran reached intelligence channels half a year ahead of the blasts and vanished into a drawer, the public is entitled to ask a blunt question: was that negligence, political calculation, or deliberate cover-up?

Equally explosive was Peiris's remark regarding former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The Additional Solicitor General informed the court that, in his opinion, sufficient evidence exists to name Rajapaksa as a suspect, while making clear that any decision to arrest him rests with investigating officers. Naming a former head of state as potentially warranting suspect status in the Easter attacks probe turns a high-stakes intelligence investigation into a watershed moment for Sri Lankan accountability.

TRUMP'S TARIFF NET WIDENS: SINGAPORE FACES 20% DUTIES

Even one of Asia's most efficiently managed economies is discovering that economic discipline, diplomatic goodwill and free trade agreements offer no absolute protection against Washington's increasingly aggressive trade policies.

The Trump administration on Wednesday proposed a fresh round of tariffs targeting 14 major trading partners, with Singapore facing a proposed duty of 20%. Washington's stated justification is that excessive industrial production capacity across several economies is distorting international trade, undermining American manufacturers and flooding markets with competitively priced goods.

The proposals extend across much of Asia's manufacturing landscape, taking in countries including China, India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam, alongside several developed economies. The measures remain subject to a consultation process and should not yet be confused with tariffs that have entered into force.

For Singapore, the development is particularly significant. The island republic has spent decades positioning itself as a dependable commercial gateway between East and West, building an economy around international trade, financial services, sophisticated manufacturing and regulatory predictability. It has had a free trade agreement with the United States in force since 2004.

Yet here it is, confronting the possibility of substantial additional barriers to American markets. Be that as it may, Singapore has something that countries such as Sri Lanka have yet to develop sufficiently: the institutional capacity to respond rapidly to external economic shocks.

Its extensive commercial relationships, diversified investment portfolio, financial reserves and highly developed diplomatic machinery provide options that are considerably more limited elsewhere.

For Sri Lanka, the temptation will be to examine whether higher tariffs on competing Asian manufacturers might make Sri Lankan exports more attractive to American buyers.

That is a legitimate commercial consideration, particularly for the apparel, rubber products and specialist manufacturing sectors.



However, an advantage created by somebody else's disadvantage is hardly a sustainable national export strategy.

International buyers also consider production costs, reliability, shipping connections, regulatory stability and the ability of suppliers to fulfil orders consistently.

Sri Lanka cannot control the occupants of the White House. It can, however, control much of what happens within its own borders.

The Export Development Board, the Ministry of Trade and Sri Lanka's diplomatic missions should establish a joint tariff intelligence mechanism that identifies emerging opportunities by product category, engages directly with American importers and publishes regular assessments of competing Asian manufacturing costs.

Rather than dispatching expensive delegations overseas with little measurable accountability, Sri Lanka should set specific targets for new export orders, market diversification and investment conversions.

There is also a broader lesson in the Singapore experience. Economic sovereignty is not achieved merely by declaring that a country is independent. It comes from having sufficient economic strength, diversified markets and credible institutions to withstand decisions made in foreign capitals.

Singapore has spent decades building precisely those capabilities. Sri Lanka has spent far too much of its post-independence history discussing them.

Perhaps it is time we moved from discussion to delivery.

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

BOMB SCARE TRIGGERS SECURITY CHECK ON MOSCOW FLIGHT AT MATTALA AS UZBEKISTAN ARRIVAL DIVERTS

A quiet southern runway rarely stays quiet for long when a bomb scare hits an international arrival. Following a threat alert on November 25, an Azur Air jet flying in from Moscow to Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport underwent a full security sweep, while another plane heading in from Uzbekistan was rerouted to Bandaranaike International Airport in Katunayake.

Official confirmation of any explosive device has not emerged, and airport or aviation officials have kept quiet on how the warning came in or what triggered the rerouting. That silence leaves travellers and industry observers asking simple questions about how emergency sweeps unfold on the ground and whether the Uzbekistan diversion stemmed directly from the scare or from knock-on scheduling shifts in the south.



Whenever a bomb alert lands on an arriving flight, standard protocol demands caution first and convenience second: isolating the aircraft, screening passengers and baggage thoroughly, and clearing every corner before normal turnaround resumes. Because Mattala leans heavily on charter and long-haul traffic from Russia and Central Asia to keep passenger numbers moving, any sudden security alert tests both emergency readiness and tourist confidence in the southern hub.

Bomb scares targeting flights linked to Russia are hardly new in international aviation, frequently turning out to be hoaxes yet still forcing costly delays, diversions, and tense ground operations. Until Sri Lankan authorities release a formal briefing on what happened at Mattala and Katunayake, the episode stands as a sharp reminder that even an unconfirmed threat can upend cross-border flight plans in minutes.



CID QUESTIONS ROHITHA RAJAPAKSA FOR FOUR HOURS OVER SUPREMESAT DEAL

Fourteen years after Sri Lanka was promised a bold leap into the space age, the unanswered questions surrounding that orbit have pulled Rohitha Rajapaksa back into the offices of the Financial Crimes Investigation Division. The youngest son of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa spent nearly four hours at the FCID on Thursday, November 26, recording a statement as investigators pressed deeper into the financing, ownership, and regulatory trail behind the controversial SupremeSAT satellite venture.



The inquiry revives scrutiny over one of the most politically charged projects associated with the Mahinda Rajapaksa administration. Launched in November 2012 from China's Xichang Satellite Launch Centre, SupremeSAT-1 was promoted at the time as Sri Lanka's first communications satellite. Rohitha Rajapaksa, who was widely linked to the initiative in his capacity as a space engineer, has consistently maintained that no public funds were spent on the project, telling investigators during an earlier 2017 probe that the venture was financed by a Singaporean investor and executed with a Chinese partner.

Yet questions over ownership, financing, regulatory clearances, and actual commercial returns have dogged the project for more than a decade. SupremeSAT (Pvt) Ltd, chaired by businessman R.M. Manivannan, operated with Board of Investment approval and tax concessions while framing the enterprise as a private commercial venture valued at around US$320 million across its planned phases. Critics and opposition lawmakers repeatedly questioned how a newly formed local firm raised such capital, whether any state guarantees or public resources were indirectly leveraged, and what became of the satellite's operations.

Debate flared again in Parliament in August 2025 when the government was forced to issue a clarification after initial Board of Investment figures tabled in the House contained statistical recording errors. Corrected BOI data placed SupremeSAT's declared annual revenues between Rs. 19.17 million in 2015-2016 and Rs. 87 million in 2021-2022, prompting cabinet ministers to question the gap between billion-rupee investment claims and modest reported earnings, as well as the absence of International Telecommunication Union filings under Sri Lanka's name.

Thursday's session at the FCID also comes amid broader investigative pressure on members of the Rajapaksa family, with separate corruption and asset probes advancing through police units and the courts.

Investigators have not yet disclosed what specific financial records or corporate agreements formed the focus of the four-hour questioning, or whether further summonses will follow as the FCID reviews statements and cross-checks corporate filings tied to the 2012 launch.

POLICE CONSTABLE EXTRADITED FROM DUBAI OVER SALE OF SERVICE T-56 RIFLE TO UNDERWORLD GANG

More than twenty-one months after walking off roadblock duty in Mount Lavinia with an assault rifle issued by the state, a 26-year-old Sri Lankan Police Constable has been brought back from Dubai in handcuffs. The suspect, a resident of Halambagaswewa in Pemaduwa, Anuradhapura, landed at Bandaranaike International Airport in Katunayake at around 5:20am on Thursday, November 26, aboard SriLankan Airlines flight UL 226, where officers of the Criminal Investigation Department took him into immediate custody.

According to the Police Media Division, the arrest followed an Interpol Red Notice issued after the constable allegedly sold his official T-56 firearm and 30 rounds of live ammunition to an organized crime syndicate before fleeing the country. Investigators stated that the breach occurred on February 8, 2025, while the officer was attached to the Mount Lavinia Police Station and deployed on roadblock duty. Rather than returning his weapon at the end of his shift, he allegedly handed the rifle and ammunition over to criminal elements and boarded a flight out of Sri Lanka.

His disappearance triggered an urgent internal and criminal investigation at the time. Within days of the February 2025 incident, police detained his parents and arrested another constable attached to the same station on suspicion of aiding and abetting his escape, while initiating international notices to trace him in the United Arab Emirates. Thursday's repatriation was carried out through coordinated action involving CID officers and SriLankan Airlines security personnel.

Following initial questioning at the airport, the suspect was scheduled to be handed over to the Western Province South Crime Division, which is leading the broader probe into the weapon's whereabouts and the underworld network that acquired it.

The case strikes at a sensitive nerve inside Sri Lanka's law enforcement apparatus. Over the past two years, police leadership has faced mounting public scrutiny over underworld shootings and the circulation of military-grade weapons among rival criminal gangs, many of whose leaders operate from overseas havens such as Dubai. When a serving officer tasked with maintaining public order is accused of turning state-issued firepower directly into underworld inventory,

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

POLICE CONSTABLE...

the breach goes beyond routine misconduct and exposes serious vulnerabilities in armoury controls and frontline supervision.

Detectives from the Western Province South Crime Division will now focus on reconstructing the financial trail behind the sale, identifying the intermediaries who arranged the handover in Mount Lavinia, and determining whether the missing T-56 rifle and 30 rounds of ammunition have been used in subsequent gangland shootings across the Western Province.

RS. 33.6 BILLION ON THE MENU, YET THE CLASSROOM PLATE COMES UP SHORT

How does a state spend Rs. 33.6 billion feeding 1.4 million schoolchildren and still end up sitting in Parliament asking why the food is not up to scratch? That awkward question hovered over the Ministerial Consultative Committee on Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education when it met under the chairmanship of Prime Minister and Education Minister Dr. Harini Amarasuriya. Behind the polite parliamentary phrasing about "instances where guidelines had not been properly followed" lies a far sharper reality: an ambitious, expensive welfare lifeline is being undermined by sloppy execution on the ground.

First, consider why Sri Lanka cannot afford to treat school lunches like an afterthought. Child malnutrition in this country is neither an abstract seminar topic nor evenly spread across postcodes. Central Bank data following the economic crisis showed 15.3% of children under five were underweight, 10.1% suffered from wasting, and 9.2% were stunted, while a third of children aged zero to four lived in multidimensional poverty. Step onto the tea estates and the numbers turn bleak. World Bank assessments have long flagged estate stunting and underweight rates at 36%, roughly triple urban levels, while post-crisis clinical surveys in Nuwara Eliya recorded stunting surging to 31.3% and severe household food insecurity hitting nearly 20%. Class and geography dictate what lands on a child's plate long before a school bell rings: children born to mothers without formal education face stunting rates of 37.6%, compared with 12.1% among mothers holding degrees.

In that context, a hot school meal is not charity. It is basic cognitive infrastructure. You cannot lecture a hungry eight-year-old about quadratic equations or national productivity when their blood sugar crashed before the first interval. Sri Lanka understood this as far back as 1931, when midday meals were first introduced, and successive governments expanded the current universal primary push across roughly 8,900 schools to keep attendance up and fainting spells down. By 2026, the treasury's Rs. 33.6 billion allocation works out to roughly 1% of all government expenditure, feeding one in sixteen citizens on any given school day.

So how do you take a policy that noble and bruise it in broad daylight? You write detailed nutrition manuals, fix per-meal allocations around Rs. 110, mandate teacher taste-tests and Public Health Inspector sign-offs, and then let monitoring quietly go to sleep. When suppliers cut corners on protein, stretch menus with cheap starch, or ignore hygiene rules, the failure is not merely culinary. It is a quiet theft of public money and a breach of trust with families who rely on that single meal to bridge the gap left by stagnant wages and inflated grocery bills. Even more absurd is the wider patchwork laid bare at the same committee meeting: stalled teacher transfers, creaking infrastructure, and preschools operating with weak oversight while the state simultaneously pledges to link school kitchens to local agriculture and women's empowerment.

SEVEN CASES, RS. 1 MILLION BAIL, AND AN ICCPR PROBE AFTER ANURADHAPURA TEMPLE BRAWL

There is a particular irony in staging a fast unto death at one of Buddhism's most revered sanctuaries, only for the so called exercise in spiritual endurance to end in a fistfight, hospital admissions, and seven separate criminal files. Yesterday, November 26, Anuradhapura Chief Magistrate Siyapath Sasindu Wickramaratne granted personal bail of Rs. 1 million each to 11 suspects, including Ven. Balangoda Kassapa Thera and Rajangane Saddharathana, bringing a temporary pause to a fortnight of unedifying theatre outside the historic Ruwanweli Maha Seya.



How did a supposedly non-violent "satyagraha" turn into a police logbook? Back on November 12, Ven. Balangoda Kassapa Thera and a group of followers were camped near the sacred premises in defiance of an existing court order to vacate the area. Things unravelled rapidly when a rival faction led by Rajangane Saddharathana arrived on the scene. Instead of serene contemplation, chaos broke out, leaving Saddharathana with head injuries and several participants requiring treatment at the Anuradhapura Teaching Hospital before police moved in to make arrests.

Four of the seven cases before the court name Ven. Kassapa Thera's group as suspects, while three target the rival faction accused of assaulting them.

At the time of their remand on November 13, the Chief Magistrate went so far as to visit the hospital to inspect the injured before ordering psychiatric evaluations and medical drug tests on the suspects, alongside noting an outstanding Trincomalee Magistrate's Court arrest warrant against Kassapa Thera for failing to appear in an earlier case.

When the parties were produced again on Thursday, the court opted to release all suspects across the seven cases on personal bail of Rs. 1 million each and fixed the next hearing for April 29 next year. Yet the bench did not simply wave everyone off with a clean slate: the Magistrate also directed the Anuradhapura Divisional Crimes Unit to investigate whether Rajangane Saddharathana committed an offence under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Act.

Which leaves a few awkward questions hanging in the Anuradhapura air. When court orders barring protests around sacred heritage sites are treated as optional suggestions, what deterrent remains? Why do public disputes involving prominent robe-wearers repeatedly spiral into physical clashes, social media spectacles, and ICCPR inquiries before anyone remembers the law? And when the dust settles before April 29, will anyone actually respect the sanctity of the Ruwanwelisaya premises, or are we merely waiting for the next loud confrontation to test the patience of the courts all over again?

TOURISM MINISTER TURNED VISA OVERSTAYER: DIANA GAMAGE PLEADS GUILTY

For a politician who spent years lecturing Sri Lanka on how to welcome foreign visitors and loosen immigration red tape, Diana Gamage appears to have been remarkably casual about her own paperwork. Appearing before Colombo Chief Magistrate Asanga S. Bodaragama yesterday, the former State Minister of Tourism changed her tune in court and pleaded guilty to remaining in Sri Lanka without a valid visa between July 17, 2015, and July 16, 2016.

Sentencing on that charge has been fixed for mid-January next year, adding an unflattering chapter to a saga that has kept Sri Lanka's courts, election officials, and political circles entertained for half a decade. Having pleaded not guilty when her trial commenced in October 2025, Gamage's sudden admission on one count still leaves her facing six remaining charges filed by the Criminal Investigation Department on the Attorney General's instructions under the Immigrants and Emigrants Act. Those remaining counts cover additional periods of visa-free living and the far stickier allegation of submitting false information to the Controller General of Immigration and Emigration to obtain a Sri Lankan passport.

To appreciate how Sri Lanka ended up here, one has to rewind through Gamage's remarkably nimble political career. Before becoming a headline fixture for demanding extended bar hours, cheaper liquor, and state-backed cannabis cultivation, Gamage and her husband, retired Army Captain Senaka Haripriya de Silva, controlled the political party registration that Sajith Premadasa's camp used to launch the Samagi Jana Balawegaya in 2020. Rewarded with an SJB National List seat in August 2020, she wasted little time before voting for the 20th Amendment,

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

TOURISM MINISTER...

crossing over to back the Rajapaksa government, and collecting portfolios first as State Minister of Transport and later as State Minister of Tourism.

All the while, an inconvenient paper trail was closing in. Under Sri Lankan law, acquiring foreign citizenship automatically terminates Sri Lankan citizenship unless dual citizenship is formally obtained. CID investigations revealed that Gamage held British citizenship, failed to produce valid proof of dual citizenship, and left behind a trail of conflicting civil records, including questions raised in court over duplicate birth certificates and an uncancelled National Identity Card. She even drew diplomatic side-eyes in 2023 when she met a Taiwanese representative in Colombo, briefly ruffling Beijing's feathers over Sri Lanka's One China policy.

The political house of cards finally collapsed on May 8, 2024, when a unanimous three-judge Supreme Court bench ruled in a writ petition filed by activist Oshala Herath that Gamage was ineligible to sit in Parliament under Article 89 of the Constitution, stripping her of both her seat and her ministerial perks.

Now, the former minister who once championed hassle-free entry for global travellers awaits sentencing for failing to sort out her own stay in Colombo. With six more charges still awaiting trial, Thursday's guilty plea looks less like the end of the road and more like the opening act of a long judicial retribution.

INDIA OVERTAKES BRITAIN TO BECOME SRI LANKA'S FASTEST-GROWING EXPORT ENGINE

Sri Lanka's export map has been anchored in the West for decades, built on garment containers bound for New York and London. That commercial geography is shifting in real time. Fresh data released by the Sri Lanka Export Development Board shows that India has firmly cemented its place as Sri Lanka's second-largest export destination ahead of the United Kingdom, purchasing US$ 989.66 million worth of Sri Lankan merchandise in the first ten months of 2026.

The trajectory tells a clear story of divergence across Sri Lanka's top three markets. Between January and October 2026, overall export earnings across goods and services climbed 6.03% year-on-year to US$ 15.28 billion, comprising US$ 12.01 billion in merchandise and US$ 3.27 billion in services. Within that basket, shipments to India jumped 14.16% from roughly US$ 867 million in the same period of 2025, accelerating sharply in October 2026 with a 34% surge to US$ 99.82 million. By contrast, exports to the United States, still Sri Lanka's single largest buyer, edged up just 0.81% to US$ 2.52 billion, while exports to the United Kingdom fell 8.67% to US$ 723.40 million, including a 1.88% dip in October to US$ 69.04 million.

The shift becomes even sharper when looking at the multi-year timeline. Full-year Sri Lankan exports to India stood at US$ 830 million in 2023, rose to US$ 883.7 million in 2024, and crossed the billion-dollar mark at US$ 1,035.72 million in 2025. With US$ 989.66 million already banked by the end of October 2026, Colombo is on course to shatter last year's record with two months still to spare.

What is driving the surge across the Palk Strait?

Unlike Western markets, where sluggish consumer demand weighed on Sri Lankan apparel exports, down 3.82% over the ten-month period, Indian buyers are snapping up agricultural commodities, processed foods, and industrial inputs. In October alone, pepper exports to India soared 371.58%, non-alcoholic beverages climbed 122.27%, desiccated coconut rose 92.41%, and animal feed grew 27.08%, alongside strong bilateral trade in refined petroleum products and spices.



That momentum reflects how deeply economic diplomacy now shapes Sri Lanka's trade fortunes. Commercial ties with New Delhi are underpinned by the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement and strengthened by India's pivotal financial backing during Sri Lanka's 2022 economic crisis, alongside ongoing discussions over the Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement, grid connectivity, and port logistics. Yet the relationship remains lopsided: while Sri Lanka exported US$ 1.04 billion to India in 2025, it imported US$ 4.33 billion in Indian fuel, fabrics, pharmaceuticals, and foodstuffs, leaving a US$ 3.29 billion trade deficit that exporters hope tariff-rate quota expansions and smoother non-tariff clearances will gradually narrow.

Meanwhile, relations with Washington and London carry their own economic weight. The United States remains indispensable to Sri Lanka's apparel factories and diplomatic recovery under the IMF program, even as tariff uncertainty and softer retail orders flatten growth. Britain, tied to Sri Lanka through historical links, diaspora networks, and the Developing Countries Trading Scheme, continues to face cost-of-living headwinds that have dampened traditional clothing and tea orders.

For Sri Lankan policymakers, it appears that the lesson in the ten-month numbers is that Western markets still pay the biggest bills, but regional integration with a fast-growing neighbour is increasingly what keeps export growth moving forward.



ZERO CONVICTIONS IN 20 YEARS: UN REPORT CITES FOUR WARTIME ATTACKS ON HUMANITARIAN TEAMS

Twenty years after unarmed relief workers were pulled from vehicles, shot at close range inside marked compounds, and shelled inside hospital wards, the most telling detail in the United Nations Human Rights Office's latest report on Sri Lanka is not merely what happened between 2006 and 2009. It is what happened between September 24 and November 26, 2026.

Ahead of publishing its 40-page assessment, "I Died Many Times: Attacks on Humanitarian Assistance in Sri Lanka, 20 Years On," the OHCHR submitted 27 specific questions to the Sri Lankan government on September 24 and shared an advance copy of the text on November 3, inviting official comment. When the report went public on Thursday, November 26, the space reserved for Colombo's reply remained blank. Not a rebuttal, not a clarification, not even a diplomatic holding line.

In many ways, that unanswered correspondence captures two decades of Sri Lankan statecraft on wartime accountability better than any legal treatise ever could. Successive administrations in Colombo have treated inquiries into the final chapters of the 26-year civil war as a public relations storm to be outlasted rather than a constitutional and moral obligation to be resolved. Even under President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, who swept into office in September 2024 promising a clean break from old political impunity and pledging structural reforms such as an independent public prosecutor's office, core accountability mechanisms remain stalled and the government continues to reject the UN's Sri Lanka Accountability Project.

Yet the facts laid out by the OHCHR refuse to age gracefully. Focusing on the brutal escalation between 2006 and May 2009, the report concludes that attacks on humanitarian personnel, hospitals, and relief convoys were neither tragic misunderstandings nor isolated battlefield accidents. Instead, they formed a sustained pattern of violations of international humanitarian law, compounded by arbitrary restrictions imposed by both the Sri Lankan state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam that starved civilians of food, medicine, and shelter.

To illustrate how completely domestic justice has failed, the UN anchors its timeline around four emblematic cases in which not a single perpetrator has been held criminally accountable twenty years later.

The sequence began in January 2006, when seven staff members of the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation were abducted and forcibly disappeared while travelling in eastern Sri Lanka, vanishing without a credible prosecution ever reaching a courtroom.

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

ZERO CONVICTIONS...

Seven months later, in August 2006, 17 Sri Lankan humanitarian workers employed by the French charity Action Contre la Faim were executed inside their clearly marked compound in Muttur, lined up and shot at close range in an atrocity that became an international symbol of impunity after domestic commissions collapsed amid witness intimidation and official interference.

By the final phase of the war in early 2009, even international emblems offered no shield. In January 2009, a clearly marked United Nations humanitarian convoy attempting to deliver life-saving supplies and evacuate wounded civilians in the Vanni came under artillery fire and sustained obstruction, trapping aid workers and displaced families alike. Weeks later, Puthukkudiyiruppu Hospital, one of the last functioning medical facilities serving tens of thousands of trapped civilians in the northern war zone, was repeatedly shelled despite its exact coordinates having been shared with the warring parties.

Why have twenty years of domestic inquiries produced zero convictions across all four cases?

The OHCHR identifies four interlocking pillars of impunity: persistent state denial of responsibility, the chronic failure of police and prosecutorial institutions to investigate their own security apparatus, systematic intimidation and surveillance of victims, witnesses, and investigators, and the political habit of appointing presidential commissions of inquiry designed to buy time in Geneva rather than deliver verdicts in Colombo.

To its credit, the United Nations does not entirely spare itself in this reckoning. The report openly acknowledges the UN's own institutional failures during the closing months of the war, including its inability to protect civilians under its care or respond effectively to early warnings as the humanitarian perimeter collapsed. That candour matters, because it strips away the familiar nationalist talking point that Geneva's scrutiny is merely a one-sided campaign against Sri Lanka. The report explicitly recognizes atrocities and humanitarian obstructions committed by the LTTE alongside violations by state forces.

Where the report sharpens its teeth is in what it demands next. The OHCHR is no longer asking Colombo for another committee or another roadmap. It is calling on the Sri Lankan government to issue a formal public apology, pay comprehensive reparations to victims and their families, establish an independent prosecutorial mechanism, and investigate whether restrictions and attacks on aid formed part of a broader state policy. Alongside those steps, Geneva urges Colombo to incorporate war crimes and crimes against humanity into domestic law, accede to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, overhaul the security sector, and end the surveillance and harassment of survivors, journalists, and human rights defenders.

Most importantly, the report also puts an explicit price tag on continued inaction. Where domestic efforts remain inadequate, the OHCHR urges UN member states to pursue international investigations and prosecutions under universal jurisdiction, impose targeted sanctions, and enforce strict human rights vetting on Sri Lankan security personnel seeking overseas deployments or training.

A government chasing foreign investment, diplomatic goodwill, and democratic credibility after years of crisis cannot treat 27 United Nations questions with radio silence and call it policy. Two decades ago, relief workers under humanitarian emblems stayed in Muttur, Kilinochchi, and Puthukkudiyiruppu because they took neutrality at face value. Twenty years later, grieving families are owed a straight answer on how that shield failed.

MUSTAPHA CALLS FOR MODERN PRISON REFORM, SKILLS TRAINING AND CONJUGAL RIGHTS AS REHABILITATION DEBATES WIDEN

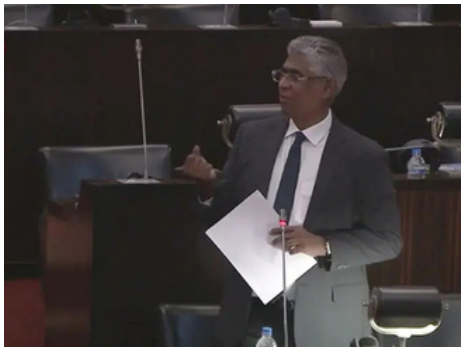
Parliamentarian Faizer Musthapha, President's Counsel and Member of Parliament, brought up several pressing issues before Parliament yesterday, November 26, 2026, urging lawmakers to overhaul a prison system that locks offenders away without equipping them to return safely to society. Speaking in the chamber as the Sectoral Oversight Committee on Legal Reforms and Justice has scrutinized severe overcrowding and deteriorating jail conditions, Musthapha pointed out that Sri Lanka is still governing its correctional facilities under the colonial-era Prisons Ordinance of 1890 and pressed the government to enact modern legislation suited to contemporary penological realities.

The core of Musthapha's intervention was the failure of purely punitive custody to stop repeat offending. Noting that global correctional standards have moved away from isolating inmates entirely from society, he pointed to reports showing that a majority of Sri Lankan prisoners are serving second, third, or subsequent sentences. Without structured education and marketable skills, he warned, the state cannot realistically reintegrate former offenders into civilian life, leaving both inmates and taxpayers trapped in a cycle of reoffense.

To break that cycle, Musthapha outlined a practical rehabilitation and economic model centered on education, vocational training, and paid labour. He proposed establishing an Open University unit inside prison facilities so inmates can pursue formal higher education while serving their terms, alongside coordinated programs with the vocational training minister to teach trades aligned with market demand. Drawing on international examples where correctional systems generate substantial revenue through structured inmate employment, Musthapha highlighted the economic contradiction facing Sri Lanka: while key sectors struggle with labour shortages and employment pressures, roughly 10,000 prisoners remain idle behind bars. Even where a worker outside might command daily wages of Rs 10,000 to Rs 20,000, he argued that training inmates and paying them a structured salary inside custody would ease labour bottlenecks, restore human dignity, and allow prisoners to support themselves and their dependents.

Musthapha also urged the government to expand open prisons and agricultural work programs, noting that jurisdictions worldwide are shifting eligible offenders out of closed cells into agricultural zones where they contribute directly to crop development and food security. In Sri Lanka, by contrast, he observed that authorities largely rely on locking people away while society turns a blind eye, reinforcing stigma and wasted human capital.

Alongside economic rehabilitation and statutory reform, Musthapha raised the question of conjugal rights in prison, pointing to legal and policy developments in India and across the region as Sri Lanka considers modernizing its 1890 framework. In Jasvir Singh & Anr. v. State of Punjab & Ors. (CWP No. 5429 of 2010, decided May 29, 2014), the Punjab and Haryana High Court held that the right to conjugal life and procreation survives incarceration under Article 21 of the Constitution of India, subject to reasonable restrictions and procedure established by law, though it declined to grant the specific relief sought by the petitioners.



That judgment established a doctrinal benchmark across the Indian subcontinent, framing conjugal rights in prison around whether married inmates may maintain marital companionship, intimacy, or procreative capacity through regulated private visitation, temporary furlough or parole, or assisted reproduction.

Across India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, however, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century prison statutes were drafted around physical confinement, institutional security, and brief supervised visits rather than rehabilitation or family preservation. In practice across South Asia today, implementation of conjugal access remains sparse and uneven, constrained by severe overcrowding that exceeds 100% capacity in many Indian states and reaches roughly 200% to 232% of authorized capacity in Sri Lankan prison audits, where inmate populations have hovered near 40,000 against capacity closer to 11,000. Within India, Rajasthan operates one of the longest-running family cohabitation models through its open-air camp system under the Rajasthan Prisoners Open Air Camp Rules, 1972, allowing eligible convicts to live with their spouses and children in dedicated quarters while working outside during the day, whereas Punjab's pilot conjugal visitation rooms were suspended after launch due to contraband-screening and security challenges, and courts in states such as Tamil Nadu have granted fertility or conjugal parole only in narrow, exceptional cases while stressing that such rights remain bounded by statutory rules.

Taken together, these issues placed before Parliament underscore that genuine prison reform cannot be piecemeal. Replacing an 1890 ordinance means addressing the full arc of incarceration: decongesting

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

MUSTAPHA CALLS...

overcrowded facilities, introducing accredited education and vocational wages, expanding productive open-air agricultural camps, and establishing clear legal rules on family ties and conjugal access so that custody prepares prisoners to return as productive citizens rather than repeat offenders.

TAMIL NADU SIGNS 78 DEALS WORTH RS 58,214 CRORE AS 200-DAY PLEDGES HIT US$18.7 BILLION

Folders exchanged, cameras flashed, and another headline figure landed in Chennai on Wednesday, November 25, 2026, as Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam administration marked 200 days of investment promotion at the second VETTRI Tamil Nadu Investment and Conversion Conclave. Across that stretch since taking office in May, the state has lined up 190 investment agreements worth roughly INR 1.73 trillion (about US$18.7 billion) with a projected potential of nearly 199,000 jobs.

Wednesday's conclave alone added 78 new agreements worth INR 582.14 billion (about US6.3 billion), expected to create 65,786 jobs across 25 districts. Alongside those pledges, Vijay laid foundation stones for 15 projects worth INR 79.25 billion (about US857.1 million), inaugurated six completed projects worth INR 14.3 billion (about US$154.7 million) carrying 1,710 job commitments, and handed appointment orders to 18 candidates selected by five companies.

How does a newcomer administration in its first 200 days try to separate itself from the usual Indian investment summit playbook where big numbers fade once the spotlights switch off? Industries Minister S. Keerthana struck an unusually candid tone at the conclave, noting that politics loves the future tense because nobody can check it right away, while acknowledging that 83 of the 112 agreements signed before Wednesday had reached land allotment or beyond, a 74.1% conversion rate, leaving 25.9% still needing work.

What stands out inside the 78 new deals is the balance between capital-heavy infrastructure and job creation. Industrial parks and logistics accounted for more than a quarter of Wednesday's commitments, led by players such as Avigna, Greenbase Industrial & Logistics Park, and ESR Industrial Park Realty envisaging INR 91.5 billion (about US989.6 million) across 680 jobs, while JM Baxi Ports & Logistics' INR 52 billion (about US562.4 million) proposal carries a projected 7,500 jobs and CSE Development India's INR 81.4 billion (about US880.4 million) renewable energy programme spans six districts.

Automobiles led project count with 13 proposals worth INR 74.88 billion (about US809.8 million) and 9,750 projected jobs, including commitments from TVS Motor and Apollo Tyres, alongside 12 aerospace and defence startup deals, electronics, semiconductors, and shipbuilding projects such as L&T's.

Geographically, the push reaches beyond established hubs: 18 agreements worth INR 174.13 billion (about US$1.88 billion) target eight industrially backward districts including Dharmapuri, Sivaganga, Virudhunagar, and Ramanathapuram, while aerospace and drone clusters are taking shape around Karaikudi and Thoothukudi. To back those pledges, the government points to a 21-day industrial approval framework, 25 reforms across 23 government orders in 11 departments, trade licence validity extended from three to ten years, and a Semiconductor Special Incentive Scheme launched in October.

SINGAPORE REWARDS ITS CIVIL SERVANTS WHILE SRI LANKA STRUGGLES

Two island nations, two public services and two remarkably different conversations about the relationship between economic performance and employee remuneration.

Singapore announced on Wednesday that its civil servants would receive a year-end variable bonus equivalent to 1.55 months of salary. Together with the mid-year payment of 0.45 months, Singapore's public officers will receive variable bonuses equivalent to two months of salary for 2026.



In Sri Lanka, meanwhile, the national conversation surrounding public-sector remuneration is frequently conducted through trade union demands, threatened industrial action, disrupted university examinations and appeals for allowances to offset the rising cost of living.

The contrast deserves examination beyond the obvious differences in national wealth.

Singapore's approach recognises an important principle: when the economy performs well and public finances permit, employees should participate in the benefits of that performance. Its variable remuneration framework also provides flexibility during periods of weaker economic growth.

Sri Lanka's public-sector remuneration arrangements, by contrast, have historically been driven by a mixture of political promises, rigid salary structures, fiscal limitations and periodic confrontations with organised labour.

Governments announce salary increases. Trade unions demand further revisions. The Treasury looks for additional revenue. Ultimately, the taxpayer is presented with the bill.
Be that as it may, it would be fundamentally unfair to place responsibility for Sri Lanka's public-sector difficulties entirely at the feet of its employees. Thousands of teachers, nurses, doctors, technical officers and administrators continue to deliver essential services under challenging conditions. Many have experienced substantial erosion of their purchasing power.

The real question is whether Sri Lanka's public administration has been designed to reward efficiency, professional competence and measurable improvements in service delivery.

Consider the citizen who spends an entire working day obtaining a document from a government department, the pensioner repeatedly visiting an office to resolve a payment discrepancy or the entrepreneur waiting months for regulatory approval.

These delays represent economic costs, even when they do not appear as expenditure in the national budget.
Sri Lanka could introduce a carefully structured public-sector productivity dividend, funded through independently verified savings, improved revenue administration and better service delivery. Such a programme need not begin with a nationwide financial commitment.

A pilot scheme involving selected government departments could establish service benchmarks, including processing times, complaint resolution, digital accessibility and operating expenditure. Employees contributing to genuine improvements could receive a share of the resulting financial benefits.

Safeguards would be essential to ensure that performance targets do not penalise departments serving poorer or geographically isolated communities.

Singapore cannot simply be replicated in Sri Lanka. Its economic circumstances, institutional history and scale are different. But the principle of linking national prosperity with fair employee remuneration is entirely transferable.

Sri Lanka needs a public service that citizens respect and public servants are proud to belong to.

Paying people poorly, tolerating inefficient systems and periodically promising unaffordable increases is unlikely to deliver either outcome.

29 DEALS WITH CHINA: THE SINGAPORE BALANCING ACT

Singapore demonstrates that international relations need not be a contest in which friendship with one nation automatically translates into hostility towards another. There is a lesson here for Colombo.

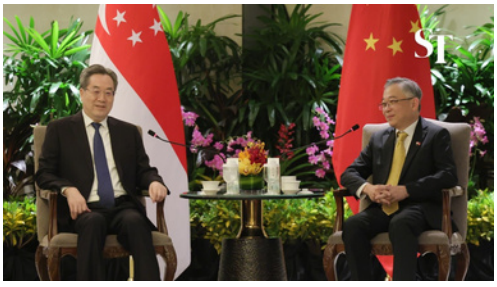
Singapore and China concluded 29 agreements at their principal bilateral cooperation forum on Monday, covering areas ranging from trade and finance to scientific research, healthcare and exchanges between their citizens.

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

29 DEALS ...

The meeting, co-chaired by Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister Gan Kim Yong and Chinese Vice-Premier Ding Xuexiang, also addressed further improvements to the existing free trade agreement between the two countries.

The developments followed discussions between Singaporean Prime Minister Lawrence Wong and Chinese President Xi Jinping, against a backdrop of growing international economic uncertainty and intensifying competition between Washington and Beijing.



What makes Singapore's approach particularly interesting is that its engagement with China has not prevented it from maintaining extensive economic and security relationships with the United States.

Singapore appears to understand that its foreign policy must ultimately serve Singaporeans rather than satisfy the geopolitical expectations of another country.

Be that as it may, Sri Lanka faces a somewhat different and arguably more complicated geographical reality. India's proximity, China's substantial investment in Sri Lankan infrastructure and the importance of Western markets to Sri Lankan exports create competing considerations that Colombo cannot afford to ignore.

India's legitimate security concerns must be understood. China's commercial interests must be evaluated fairly. American and European markets remain vital to Sri Lanka's export earnings.

None of these relationships necessarily requires the abandonment of the others.

The problem arises when foreign policy becomes excessively dependent on the preferences of individual political administrations. Investors and diplomatic partners are understandably concerned when agreements negotiated by one government become controversial merely because another government has assumed office.

Sri Lanka needs a coherent foreign economic policy that survives changes of administration and provides transparent criteria for evaluating international investment proposals.

Whether an investor originates from Beijing, New Delhi, Washington, Tokyo or London, the questions should essentially remain the same. How much capital will actually enter the country? What employment opportunities will be created? What revenue will Sri Lanka earn? What are the implications for national security, public debt and ownership of strategic assets?

A practical starting point would be the establishment of a permanent inter-ministerial mechanism for strategic economic partnerships, supported by professional expertise and parliamentary oversight.

Its mandate should include monitoring implementation, identifying commercial opportunities and publishing measurable outcomes.

Singapore's 29 agreements will ultimately be judged not by the number of signatures exchanged, but by what those agreements deliver.

Sri Lanka would do well to adopt precisely the same standard.

International friendships are valuable. Diplomatic photographs have their place. But neither should be mistaken for economic achievement.
The ultimate responsibility of Sri Lankan foreign policy is to the people of Sri Lanka.

OMAN | MUTTRAH CABLE CAR OPENS OVER MUSCAT'S HISTORIC WATERFRONT

Oman has formally opened the Muttrah Teleferik cable car, bringing the Muscat tourism project into full operation after a soft opening earlier this month. Developed by Sabeen Investment in cooperation with Muscat Municipality, the route links the waterfront area with a summit station and continues to Hay Al Ward Station within Al Riyam Park, near Muscat Gate. The roughly three-kilometre journey gives visitors a view of the harbour and hills around one of the capital's oldest districts.



The project gives visitors another way to explore a part of Muscat where the Corniche, the souq and Muttrah Fort can already fill an afternoon. How the stations connect to those places will shape the economic benefit.

A visitor who can easily walk from a station to the souq is more likely to stop at a shop or café. A visitor who arrives by coach, rides the cable car and leaves from the same forecourt may spend little in the surrounding district.

Muscat Municipality could publish a simple visitor map linking the stations to walking routes, taxi and bus points, and the main heritage sites. The operator could supplement it with clear information on step-free access, peak waiting times and what passengers should do if weather interrupts the service.

A useful measure after the first season would be how many passengers also visit other parts of Muttrah. A short visitor survey and feedback from nearby traders could show where the additional footfall goes. That would help the municipality decide where to improve crossings, signage and pedestrian access.

