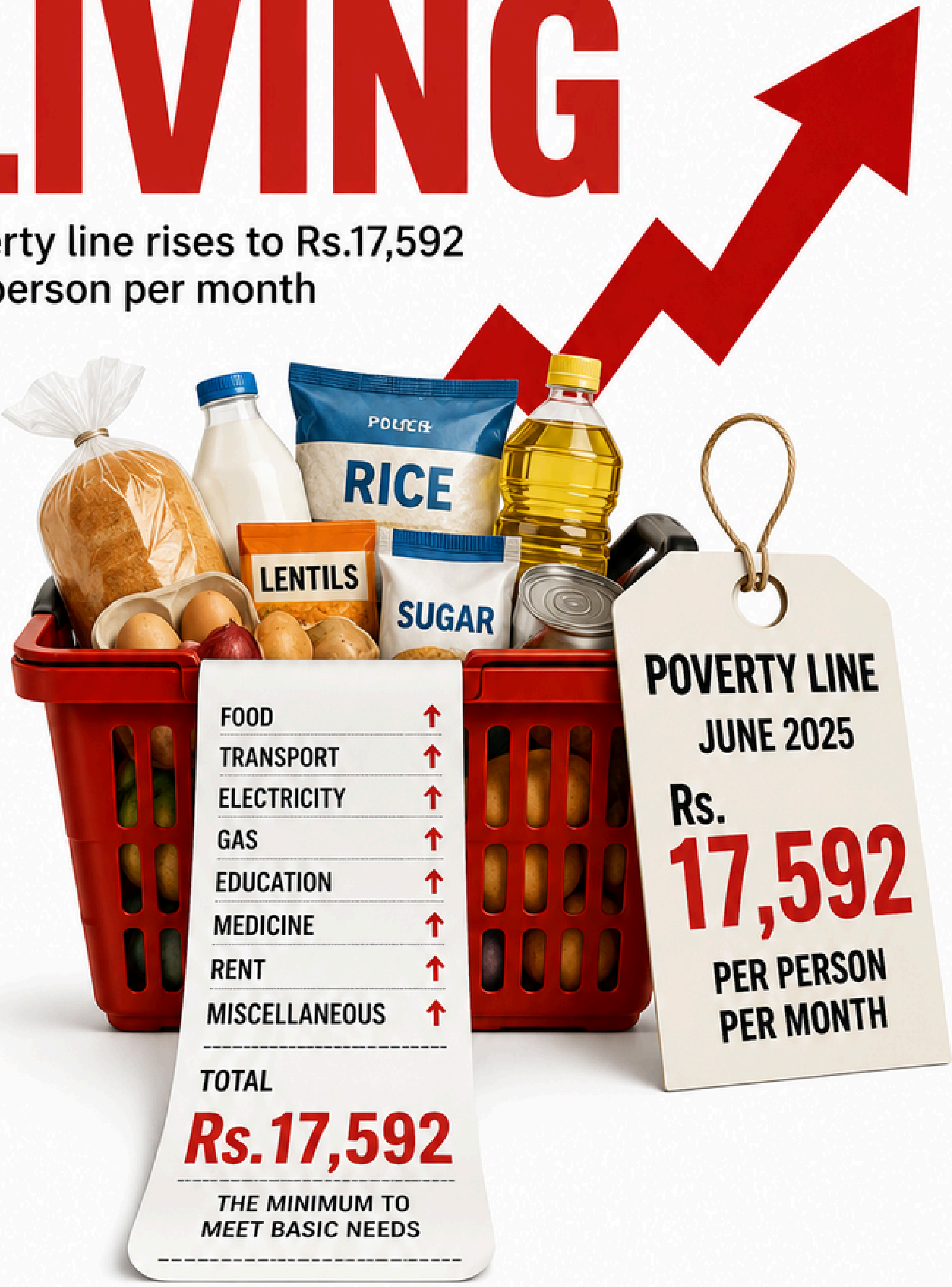
Issue No. 350 14th AUGUST 2026 CEYLON INDEPENDENT @+94 77 230 0305

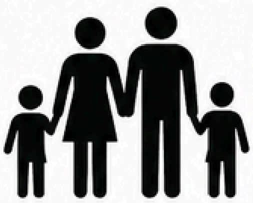
NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz

"Questioning The Answers"

THE COST OF LIVING

Poverty line rises to Rs.17,592 per person per month





A FAMILY OF FOUR NEEDS
Rs.70,368
A MONTH TO STAY ABOVE THE POVERTY LINE

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BASL DRAWS THE LINE ON JUDGES' AGES

Lawyers signal every legal avenue remains open as dispute over 22nd Amendment moves closer to a constitutional confrontation

By NewsLine News Desk

COLOMBO, Thursday - The controversy over the Government's proposed extension of the retirement age of Sri Lanka's superior court judges intensified Thursday, with the Bar Association of Sri Lanka maintaining its opposition and signalling that available legal avenues remain open as the proposed 22nd Amendment moves towards Parliament.

The latest position comes after representatives of the BASL met President Anura Kumara Dissanayake at the Presidential Secretariat to discuss the proposed constitutional changes, which would increase the retirement age of Supreme Court judges to 67 and Court of Appeal judges to 65.

The BASL has urged the Government not to proceed with the amendment in its present form and has called for wider consultation involving legal experts, academics and other stakeholders before a change of such constitutional significance is pursued.

The lawyers' body has also maintained that altering the retirement provisions governing superior court judges engages constitutional safeguards concerning judicial independence and should therefore be subjected to the appropriate constitutional process, including, in its view, approval by the people at a referendum.

President Dissanayake, however, has rejected suggestions that the proposed change has been designed to benefit any particular judge or group of judges. He has maintained that the proposal forms part of a broader attempt to address issues affecting the administration of justice.

The President has also indicated that meaningful political and constitutional reform inevitably involves taking risks and that he is prepared to face the consequences of pursuing changes the Government considers necessary.

That leaves the Government and the organised Bar occupying substantially different positions on an issue that goes considerably beyond whether judges should remain on the Bench for another two years.

At its heart is the question of whether changing the retirement age of judges already holding office could affect public confidence in the independence of the judiciary - and whether such a change can constitutionally be made without direct approval from the electorate.

The issue has acquired an international dimension following concerns raised by the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers over the implications of applying an extension to serving judges.

Meanwhile, opposition to the amendment has widened beyond the legal profession, with civil society organisations, lawyers, trade unions and political activists forming a common platform opposing the proposed constitutional change.

The Government therefore faces a potentially significant constitutional test if it proceeds.

The debate that began over two additional years on the Bench is rapidly becoming a much larger argument over judicial independence, constitutional procedure and the limits of parliamentary power.

Be that as it may, the next decisive arguments over the retirement age of Sri Lanka's judges may no longer be made across a negotiating table - but before the judges themselves.

THE NET GOES GLOBAL: RED NOTICES OUT FOR 93 SRI LANKANS

Police widen overseas hunt for wanted suspects as 38 are brought back and authorities pursue Rs.839 million in allegedly illicit assets

By NewsLine News Desk

COLOMBO, Thursday - Sri Lankan Police have obtained Interpol Red Notices for **93 suspects believed to be hiding overseas**, significantly widening an international effort to bring back individuals wanted in connection with serious crimes committed in the country.

Police Spokesman ASP F.U. Wootler disclosed the figures Thursday while outlining progress under the authorities' continuing operations against organised crime and other serious criminal activity.

According to Police, **38 wanted suspects have already been brought back to Sri Lanka through Interpol-related processes between 2024 and 2026**, demonstrating an increasing reliance on international law-enforcement cooperation to pursue suspects who have left the country.

A Red Notice alerts law-enforcement agencies internationally that an individual is wanted by the requesting country and seeks that person's location and provisional arrest pending extradition, surrender or other legal proceedings. It is not, by itself, an international arrest warrant, and any arrest remains governed by the law of the country in which the suspect is located.

The disclosure comes amid increasing attempts by Sri Lankan authorities to pursue alleged organised-crime figures operating or taking refuge overseas.

Recent operations involving Malaysia and other jurisdictions have highlighted both the opportunities and difficulties involved in such investigations, since Sri Lankan officers operating abroad must depend upon cooperation from local authorities and comply with the legal procedures of the countries concerned.

Police also revealed another significant element of the campaign: following the money.

Since January, legal proceedings have been initiated seeking to bring into State custody **assets valued at approximately Rs.839 million** which authorities allege were acquired through illegal activity.

That could prove at least as important as the arrests themselves.

Organised criminal networks depend not merely upon individuals but upon money, property, vehicles, businesses and financial structures capable of sustaining their operations. Removing suspects without dismantling those financial networks risks leaving the machinery behind for others to inherit.

The disclosure that 93 Sri Lankans are presently being pursued internationally also demonstrates the extent to which serious crime has ceased to be an exclusively domestic policing problem.

Sri Lanka's challenge will therefore be measured not by the number of Red Notices issued, but ultimately by how many wanted suspects are lawfully returned, prosecuted - and, where the evidence permits, convicted.

Be that as it may, for 93 wanted Sri Lankans believed to be beyond the country's shores, the net has just become considerably wider.

RS.17,592 A MONTH - IS THAT REALLY ENOUGH TO LIVE ON?

Sri Lanka's official poverty line rises again as the numbers raise a more uncomfortable question about what it actually costs to meet basic needs

By NewsLine News Desk

COLOMBO, Thursday - Sri Lanka's official poverty line has climbed to **Rs.17,592 per person per month**, providing another reminder that the cost pressures confronting households have not disappeared merely because the country's headline economic indicators have improved.

The latest figure, covering June, represents an increase of **Rs.277 from May**, when the national poverty line stood at Rs.17,315 per person.

The poverty line represents the minimum monthly expenditure considered necessary for an individual to meet basic requirements.

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RS.17,592 A MONTH...

But translated from statistics into household economics, the figure becomes considerably more striking.

For a family of four, Rs.17,592 per person amounts to **Rs.70,368 a month** merely to remain at the official threshold. A household falling below that level would, statistically, be regarded as unable to meet the minimum expenditure necessary for basic needs.

That distinction matters at a time when Sri Lanka's economic conversation is increasingly dominated by recovery - stronger reserves, improved government revenue, greater economic stability and the gradual restoration of confidence following the country's unprecedented economic crisis.

Those improvements are important.
But recovery measured in national accounts does not necessarily arrive at the household kitchen table at the same speed.

Families continue to contend with the cumulative effects of several years of higher prices, alongside expenditure on food, electricity, transport, education, medicine, housing and other unavoidable necessities.

The latest poverty-line figure therefore provides another yardstick against which Sri Lanka's recovery should be measured.

The question is not simply whether inflation has moderated. It is whether incomes have recovered sufficiently to meet a permanently higher cost base created during the crisis years.

There is another question worth asking.

Can **Rs.17,592 - less than Rs.600 a day - genuinely represent the minimum required for one person to meet basic needs in present-day Sri Lanka?**

The official measure has an important statistical purpose and allows changes in living costs to be tracked consistently. But for families balancing food against electricity, transport against medicine and education against rent, poverty is rarely experienced as a statistical threshold.

It is experienced as the money that runs out before the month does.

Be that as it may, Sri Lanka's recovery will ultimately be judged not only by what happens to GDP, reserves and government revenue - but by whether ordinary households can afford to live in the economy that recovery has produced.

1,600 DEAD: SRI LANKA'S OTHER NATIONAL EMERGENCY

Police sound alarm over mounting road fatalities as motorcycles dominate the country's vehicle population and younger riders remain particularly vulnerable

By NewsLine News Desk

COLOMBO, Thursday - More than **1,600 people have lost their lives in road accidents in Sri Lanka**, according to figures disclosed by Police Thursday, placing renewed focus on a continuing national crisis that kills with disturbing regularity but often attracts attention only one collision at a time.

Police have highlighted motorcycle accidents as a particular concern, including fatalities involving younger riders, against the background of an enormous increase in the number of motorcycles using Sri Lankan roads.

There are now more than **9.2 million registered vehicles** in the country, of which over **5.2 million are motorcycles**.

That means motorcycles account for more than half the country's registered vehicle population - placing millions of riders on roads where congestion, speeding, poor discipline, inadequate infrastructure and inconsistent enforcement can combine with devastating consequences. Unlike occupants of cars, motorcyclists have little physical protection when an accident occurs. A collision that damages a motor vehicle can kill or permanently disable the person travelling on two wheels.

The consequences extend far beyond the casualty figures.

Many victims are working-age Sri Lankans whose families depend upon their incomes. A road death can therefore simultaneously become a financial catastrophe for a household, while serious injuries impose additional costs upon families and the State health system.

Successive governments have attempted to improve road safety through stronger enforcement, awareness campaigns and changes to traffic regulations. Yet the continuing death toll suggests that Sri Lanka's approach requires more than periodic crackdowns following particularly horrific accidents.

Enforcement against speeding, dangerous overtaking, intoxicated driving and reckless riding must be consistent rather than episodic. Road design, pedestrian protection, driver training and vehicle standards must form part of the same conversation.

So too must responsibility.

Drivers and riders cannot demand safer roads while treating traffic laws as optional, just as the State cannot demand better behaviour while failing to provide adequate enforcement and reasonably safe infrastructure.

Behind the figure of 1,600 are more than 1,600 individual stories - families receiving telephone calls, police officers arriving at homes and journeys from which someone never returned.

Sri Lanka has rightly devoted enormous national resources to confronting crises that threaten life and economic security.

Road deaths deserve the same seriousness.

Be that as it may, when more than 1,600 people die on our roads, the word "accident" begins to sound increasingly inadequate.

KANJIPANI: POLICE SAY MALAYSIA OPERATION WAS NO FAILURE

Questions over overseas pursuit prompt Police to explain legal limits confronting Sri Lankan investigators abroad - but the central question remains: where is Kanjipani Imran?

By NewsLine News Desk

COLOMBO, Thursday - Sri Lanka Police have rejected suggestions that a recent operation in Malaysia connected to the pursuit of alleged organised-crime figure **Kanjipani Imran**amounted to a failure, arguing that investigations conducted on foreign soil are necessarily governed by the laws and procedures of the country concerned.

The clarification comes amid questions surrounding efforts to locate and secure the return of wanted Sri Lankan suspects believed to be operating or sheltering overseas.

Police have stressed that Sri Lankan investigators travelling abroad do not possess independent powers to arrest suspects in another sovereign jurisdiction. Any detention, questioning, arrest or subsequent transfer must take place through the appropriate local authorities and in accordance with that country's law.

ASP Rohan Olugala, addressing the controversy, defended the Malaysian operation and rejected the characterisation that it had failed.

The explanation highlights an increasingly important difficulty confronting Sri Lankan law enforcement as organised criminal networks extend beyond the country's borders.

Police disclosed separately Thursday that **Interpol Red Notices have been obtained against 93 Sri Lankan suspects believed to be overseas**, while 38 wanted persons have been returned to the country through international cooperation between 2024 and 2026.

KANJIPANI: POLICE...

The figures demonstrate that the authorities are increasingly attempting to take the pursuit of alleged organised crime beyond Sri Lanka's geographical boundaries.

Recent operations involving Malaysia have already resulted in wanted Sri Lankan suspects being brought home, reinforcing the importance of cooperation between Police, Interpol and foreign law-enforcement agencies.

But the controversy surrounding Kanjipani Imran illustrates the difference between identifying or locating a wanted person abroad and actually securing that person's lawful return to Sri Lanka.

Extradition arrangements, immigration law, evidentiary requirements and the domestic law of the country in which a suspect is located can all determine what happens next.

Police are therefore entitled to point out that an overseas operation cannot be judged by precisely the same standards as an arrest operation conducted in Colombo. Yet public accountability requires another part of the equation too.

When significant resources are deployed internationally to pursue a high-profile suspect, the public is entitled to know what the operation was intended to achieve, what it actually achieved and what happens next - without compromising continuing investigations.

The broader campaign against organised crime will ultimately be judged by outcomes rather than operations.

Be that as it may, Police may well be correct that Malaysia was not a failure. But until Kanjipani Imran is in lawful custody, the most obvious question remains unanswered: where is he?

FOUR-YEAR-OLD FOUND ASSAULTED AND ABANDONED

Child discovered at deserted location in Wattegama as Police investigate circumstances surrounding disturbing case

By NewsLine News Desk

KANDY, Thursday - Police have launched an investigation after a four-year-old girl was found assaulted and abandoned at a deserted location in the Wattegama area, in a disturbing case that raises urgent questions over the circumstances in which the child came to be there.

The child was discovered along Yatirawana Road in the Wattegama Police area and authorities subsequently initiated inquiries to establish what had happened and identify those responsible.

The identity of the child is being withheld by NewsLine in keeping with the protection that must be afforded to minors, particularly where violence or abuse is suspected.

Police investigations are expected to focus on reconstructing the child's movements, establishing who had responsibility for her immediately before she was discovered and determining how she came to be abandoned.

The circumstances surrounding the alleged assault will also form a critical part of the investigation.

Beyond the immediate criminal inquiry, however, the incident again raises the issue of safeguarding children who may be particularly vulnerable because of their age and circumstances.

A four-year-old cannot reasonably protect herself, seek assistance in the same way as an adult or fully explain what may have happened to her.

The responsibility consequently falls upon adults, institutions and ultimately the State to ensure that warning signs involving vulnerable children are recognised and acted upon.

The case should therefore be investigated with particular care, both to protect the child and to ensure that evidence capable of identifying those responsible is properly secured.

There is equally an obligation upon the media and the public not to circulate information, photographs or other details capable of identifying the child.

What matters now is her safety and recovery - and establishing precisely how a child of four came to be assaulted and left in such circumstances.

Be that as it may, a society's commitment to protecting children is measured most severely when the child concerned is too young to protect herself.

CUSTOMS' RS.1.64 TRILLION QUESTION: RECOVERY, IMPORTS - OR BETTER COLLECTION?

July collections surge past target as Customs revenue races ahead - but the numbers tell a bigger story about imports, taxation and Sri Lanka's recovering economy

By NewsLine News Desk

COLOMBO, Thursday - Sri Lanka Customs has collected approximately **Rs.260.6 billion in revenue during July**, comfortably exceeding its monthly target and providing the Government with another significant boost to State finances.

The July collection was around **35.5 per cent above the monthly target of Rs.192.4 billion**, while cumulative Customs revenue during the first seven months of the year reached approximately **Rs.1.64 trillion**.

That performance places collections substantially ahead of the cumulative target and significantly above the corresponding period of last year.

On the surface, the figures represent an impressive revenue performance.

But the size of the increase raises a more interesting economic question: **what exactly is driving it?**

Customs revenue is closely linked to the volume and value of goods entering the country, applicable duties and taxes, changes in import policy and the effectiveness with which revenue is collected.

The resumption and expansion of categories of imports that were severely restricted during Sri Lanka's foreign-exchange crisis has consequently altered the revenue landscape considerably.

Vehicle imports in particular have become an important source of government revenue following the relaxation of restrictions imposed during the crisis.

Improved enforcement and collection can also contribute to stronger receipts, making it important to distinguish between revenue generated by higher levels of taxable imports and gains resulting from greater administrative efficiency.

Either way, the figures carry important implications for the Treasury.

Sri Lanka emerged from its sovereign default with an urgent need to rebuild government revenue and reduce the chronic fiscal weaknesses that contributed to the economic collapse. Stronger tax collection has consequently become one of the central pillars of the country's post-crisis economic programme.

Yet rapidly increasing Customs receipts also contain an apparent paradox.

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More imports can produce more tax revenue for the Government, but they simultaneously increase demand for foreign currency and place additional pressure on the country's external accounts.

The durability of the improvement therefore matters more than a single record month.

If the higher collections reflect stronger legitimate economic activity, improved compliance and a broadening tax base, they would represent another encouraging indicator of economic normalisation.

If they are disproportionately dependent upon heavily taxed imports, however, the Government will need to consider how sustainable that revenue stream is over the longer term.

Be that as it may, Rs.1.64 trillion collected in seven months is a number worth celebrating - but understanding where the money came from may tell us considerably more about the real state of Sri Lanka's recovery.

22A OPPOSITION WIDENS AS CIVIL SOCIETY JOINS THE FIGHT

New common platform brings lawyers, trade unions and civil organisations into growing confrontation over proposed constitutional amendment

By NewsLine News Desk

COLOMBO, Thursday - Opposition to the Government's proposed **22nd Amendment to the Constitution** widened Thursday as civil society organisations, lawyers, trade unions and political activists came together under a common platform to campaign against the proposed constitutional changes.

The initiative, operating under the banner of the **Free Operations Centre**, adds another dimension to a controversy that has already placed the Government at odds with sections of the organised legal profession over proposals to extend the retirement ages of Sri Lanka's superior court judges.

The development comes as the Bar Association of Sri Lanka maintains its opposition to the proposed changes and signals that available legal avenues remain open.

The proposed amendment would alter the constitutional retirement arrangements applying to judges of the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal, an issue that has generated debate not merely over the merits of allowing judges to serve longer, but over the manner in which any extension would apply to judges presently holding office.

Opponents have argued that changing the tenure of serving judges raises questions concerning judicial independence and public confidence in the courts.

The Government has rejected suggestions that the proposed changes have been designed for the benefit of particular members of the judiciary.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has maintained that the initiative should instead be viewed in the context of broader reforms affecting the administration of justice. The widening opposition nevertheless presents the administration with a political as well as constitutional challenge.

What began largely as a debate within legal circles over retirement ages has now drawn organised civil society and trade-union interests into the argument.

That matters because constitutional amendments rarely remain purely legal questions once they enter Parliament. They become questions of political legitimacy, public confidence and - depending upon the determination of the Supreme Court - potentially the direct consent of the electorate.

The coming weeks could therefore see the controversy develop simultaneously on three fronts: **inside Parliament, before the courts and in the arena of public opinion.**

For the Government, there is still an opportunity to demonstrate that the objective of reform can coexist with consultation and constitutional caution.

For opponents, there is an equally important responsibility to explain why extending judicial service by two years would materially threaten judicial independence rather than simply asserting that it does.

Sri Lanka deserves that debate.

Be that as it may, what began as an argument about when judges should retire is rapidly becoming a test of how Sri Lanka changes the rules governing those who sit in judgment over the State itself.

CSE ENDS LITTLE CHANGED AS RIL BLOCK TRADE DOMINATES LKR 2.96BN SESSION

All Share slips 0.19% while S&P SL20 edges higher; crossings account for a substantial share of activity as RIL alone generates more than Rs. 1 billion

NEWSLINE BUSINESS DESK

COLOMBO, Tuesday, August 4 - Sri Lankan equities ended a largely directionless session on Tuesday, with the benchmark All Share Price Index slipping marginally as a substantial block transaction in RIL Property PLC dominated turnover on an otherwise mixed day at the Colombo Stock Exchange.

The **ASPI closed at 21,082.08**, losing 39.70 points or 0.19%, while the **S&P SL20 moved in the opposite direction**, gaining 4.23 points, or 0.07%, to finish at 5,944.52.

The divergence between the two indices suggested that weakness across the broader market was relatively contained, with movements in several heavyweight counters providing some support to the more concentrated S&P SL20.

CTHR, Sampath Bank and HNB were among the largest contributors to the day's index movement.

Turnover reached **Rs. 2.96 billion**, but the headline figure was heavily influenced by negotiated transactions, particularly in RIL, where 43.5 million shares changed hands through a sizeable crossing at prices between **Rs. 23 and Rs. 24**.

RIL consequently emerged as the day's largest turnover generator, accounting for approximately **Rs. 1.07 billion** - more than a third of total market turnover - while its share price eased 0.43%.

Access Engineering was the second-largest contributor to turnover at **Rs. 421.1 million**, with the counter declining 0.67%. John Keells Holdings generated Rs. 354.6 million while closing unchanged, followed by Sampath Bank with Rs. 146.9 million in turnover and a 0.37% decline.

Sampath Bank, JKH and RIL were also among the most actively traded counters on the regular board.

Crossings played an unusually prominent role in Tuesday's activity. In addition to the 43.5-million-share RIL transaction, **5.6 million Access Engineering shares crossed at Rs. 74.50**, while **10.2 million JKH shares changed hands at Rs. 19.90**.

Among the smaller negotiated deals, 250,000 HNB shares crossed at Rs. 380, 270,000 Ceylon Cold Stores shares at Rs. 126 and 200,000 Sampath Bank shares at Rs. 136.

The scale of the RIL transaction is significant when viewed against the day's overall activity. At approximately Rs. 1.07 billion, the counter represented roughly **36% of total CSE turnover**, meaning Tuesday's Rs. 2.96 billion headline turnover somewhat overstated the level of broad-based trading interest across the market.

The session therefore offered two somewhat different signals: the indices remained remarkably steady around historically elevated territory, but trading activity was concentrated in a relatively small number of counters and heavily influenced by crossings.

The marginal 0.19% decline in the ASPI, coupled with the SL20's 0.07% advance, points less towards a decisive change in market direction than a period of consolidation as investors assess valuations and selectively reposition portfolios.

For the market, the more important test will be whether turnover can broaden beyond large negotiated transactions and whether buying interest returns across a wider range of counters.

Be that as it may, Tuesday belonged overwhelmingly to RIL: one transaction provided more than a third of the day's turnover while the broader market effectively marked time.

"Questioning The Answers"