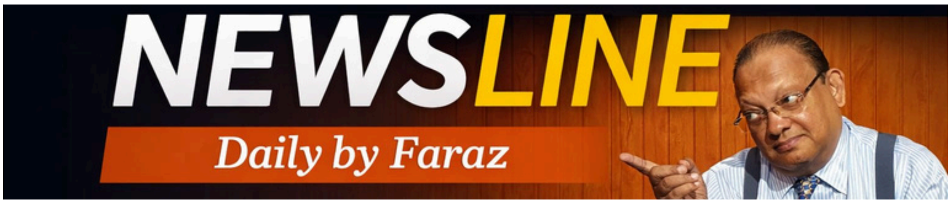
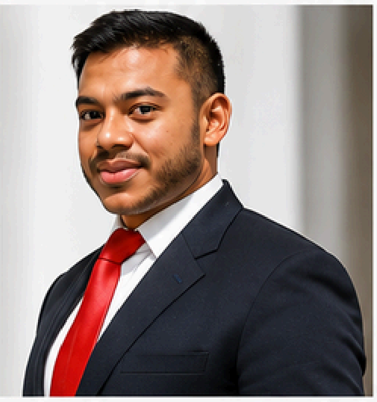


"Questioning The Answers"

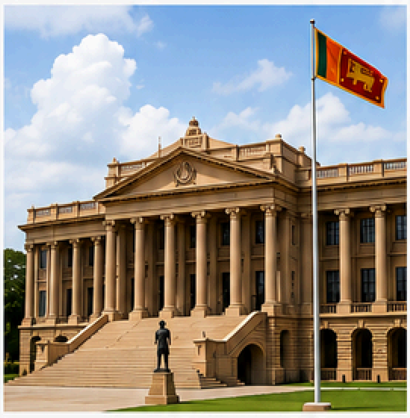
Rs.59 MILLION – YOSHITHA CASE MOVES TOWARDS TRIAL



The Colombo High Court fixes August 31 for a pre-trial conference in the money-laundering case against Yoshitha Rajapaksa and his grandmother Daisy Forrest.

The Attorney General alleges nearly Rs.59 million was deposited into bank accounts knowing or having reason to believe the funds were unlawfully acquired.

22A – TALKING IS OVER, NOW COMES PARLIAMENT



The Government will present the 22nd Amendment Bill in Parliament tomorrow, despite continuing opposition over extending judges' retirement ages.

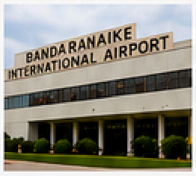
President–BASL talks end without agreement, with the President saying meaningful change requires taking risks.

COLOMBO–VIETNAM GOES DIRECT – NOW SELL THE BUDDHIST TRAIL

Direct flights between Vietnam and Sri Lanka commence Tuesday, August 18, alongside the launch of the "Buddha Wandana" Buddhist trail.

Tourism authorities must now deliver measurable results in visitors, nights stayed and foreign exchange earnings.

BIA TERMINAL 2 – FINALLY CLEARED FOR TAKE-OFF?



Japan agrees to expedite the long-delayed project with work now expected to restart before November. The Government must now confirm the revised cost and completion date.

TOURISM'S WARNING LIGHT STARTS FLASHING

July arrivals were 1.7% below last year, and early August figures are also softer. With new routes opening, Sri Lanka must understand the slowdown before the winter season.

BETTER THAN 2022 – BUT DON'T GET COMFORTABLE

Moody's says Sri Lanka is better placed to handle an oil-price shock than in 2022. But heavy dependence on imported energy remains a vulnerability.

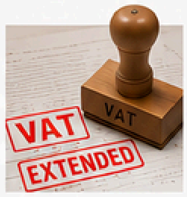
SEVEN OUT OF TEN – DRUGS SWAMP THE STATE LAB

Around 70% of reports received by the Government Analyst's Department are drug-related, raising concerns about delays and resource constraints across the justice system.

COLOMBO GOES BACK TO AUSTRALIA FOR INVESTORS

SEC and CSE return after nine years with an Invest Sri Lanka roadshow. The 2017 campaign saw a 700% jump in Australian buying – can history repeat?

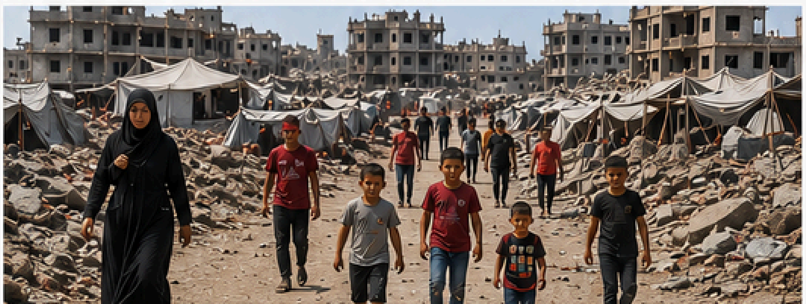
VAT DEADLINE MOVES AGAIN



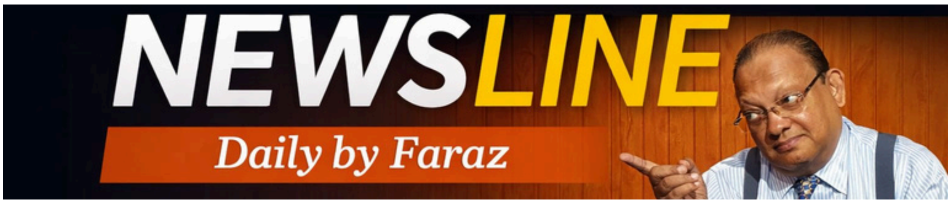
Businesses get until October 1 to comply with revised VAT invoice requirements. Another postponement highlights the need for certainty and a system that is ready.

GAZA – A CEASEFIRE THAT HAS NOT YET BECOME PEACE

- Kushner meets Netanyaku after rare talks with Hamas as Washington pushes a new road map.
- More than 1,250 Palestinians have been killed since last October's ceasefire, most of them civilians.
- Israel still controls around 60% of Gaza; parties disagree over who moves first.
- Two million people face critical humanitarian conditions: water insecurity, damaged health services and mass displacement.
- Reconstruction has barely begun; political settlement remains the real obstacle.



Diplomacy is underway. Lives are on hold.
Peace remains the destination Gaza's people have been waiting far too long to reach.



"Questioning The Answers"

RS.59 MILLION YOSHITHA CASE MOVES TOWARDS TRIAL

High Court fixes August 31 for pre-trial conference as prosecution prepares its case against Yoshitha Rajapaksa and Daisy Forrest

COLOMBO - The money-laundering case against Yoshitha Rajapaksa and his grandmother Daisy Forrest is moving another step towards trial, with the Colombo High Court fixing **August 31** for a pre-trial conference in the case involving nearly **Rs.59 million**.

The Attorney General alleges that funds amounting to approximately Rs.59 million were deposited into bank accounts in circumstances where the accused knew, or had reason to believe, that the money had been unlawfully acquired.

The allegations remain to be proved in court, and both accused are entitled to the presumption of innocence.

The significance of the latest development lies less in the allegations themselves - which have been public for some time - and more in where the proceedings are now heading.

A pre-trial conference is intended to identify the matters actually in dispute, deal with procedural issues and prepare the case for an efficient trial.

It therefore marks another step away from investigation and indictment and towards the actual trial process.

State Counsel has informed court that the prosecution expects at the August 31 conference to state its position concerning Forrest and also notify court regarding proposed amendments to the indictment.

That could make the August 31 proceedings particularly important in determining precisely what case ultimately proceeds before the High Court.

For years, investigations involving politically prominent figures have generated headlines at the point of arrest, questioning or indictment.

The more important test, however, comes afterwards: whether the judicial process moves efficiently towards determination.

In this case, that machinery is now beginning to turn.

NEWSLINE WATCH: August 31 - what amendments are made to the indictment, what position does the Attorney General take regarding Daisy Forrest, and when will the substantive trial begin?

22A - TALKING IS OVER. NOW COMES PARLIAMENT

Judges' retirement-age Bill due before House tomorrow after President-BASL discussions fail to bridge constitutional divide

COLOMBO - The controversy surrounding the proposed extension of the retirement ages of Sri Lanka's superior-court judges enters a decisive new phase tomorrow when the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution is due to be presented to Parliament.

Until now, much of the argument has centred on whether the Government should reconsider the proposal.

That question appears increasingly academic.

The Government is proceeding with the Bill despite opposition from the Bar Association of Sri Lanka and others who have raised concerns not simply about whether judges should serve longer, but about the constitutional mechanism being used to make the change. The BASL has maintained that the proposed alteration requires approval by the people at a referendum in addition to the necessary parliamentary majority.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's discussions with representatives of the Bar have not produced agreement. According to the Sunday Times, the President told lawyers that meaningful change could not be achieved without taking risks and indicated that he was prepared to take that risk in relation to the proposed amendment.

That leaves Sri Lanka facing a considerably more important question than whether judges should retire two years later.

How can the Constitution lawfully be changed to achieve it?

Once the Bill is formally presented, the controversy moves from political debate into constitutional procedure. Any challenge before the Supreme Court will place the proposed amendment under judicial examination and determine what level of approval is constitutionally required for it to become law.

That is where the argument becomes especially sensitive.

The proposal concerns the tenure of the very institution which may ultimately have to determine whether the constitutional amendment affecting that tenure can proceed in the manner proposed.

The Government argues for reform. Its opponents argue that judicial independence and constitutional safeguards demand particular caution.

Tomorrow, Parliament gets the Bill.

After that, the constitutional process - rather than the political rhetoric surrounding it - becomes the story.

THE NEWSLINE QUESTION

If the Government is confident that extending judicial retirement ages is both necessary and constitutionally sound, why not settle the referendum question beyond argument and allow the people themselves to decide?

COLOMBO - VIETNAM GOES DIRECT

NOW SELL THE BUDDHIST TRAIL

New air connection could open valuable East Asian tourism corridor - but passenger numbers, nights and dollars will determine whether it succeeds

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka is preparing to open a potentially important new tourism corridor tomorrow with the commencement of direct air connectivity between Vietnam and Colombo alongside a new **"Buddha Wandana" Buddhist-trail tourism initiative**.

There will inevitably be ceremonies, speeches and photographs.

The more important question comes afterwards.

Will it bring tourists - and tourism dollars - to Sri Lanka? Vietnam gives Sri Lanka access to a substantial East Asian market while the Buddhist-trail concept offers something the country possesses in abundance but has arguably never marketed internationally to its full potential: more than two millennia of living Buddhist heritage.

Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Kandy and numerous other religious and archaeological sites provide the foundations for a specialist pilgrimage product capable of attracting visitors whose journeys are driven by faith, history and culture rather than the traditional beach-and-resort proposition.

Direct connectivity matters because accessibility remains one of the basic ingredients of tourism growth.

Sri Lanka has long discussed diversifying its tourism markets.

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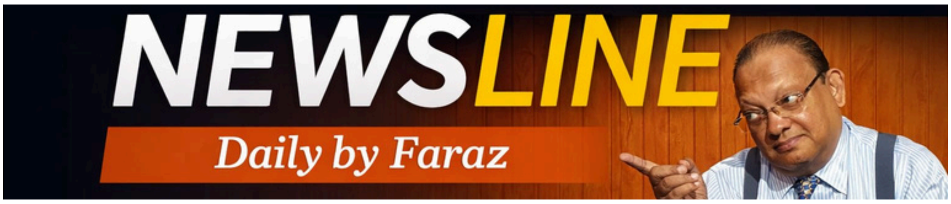
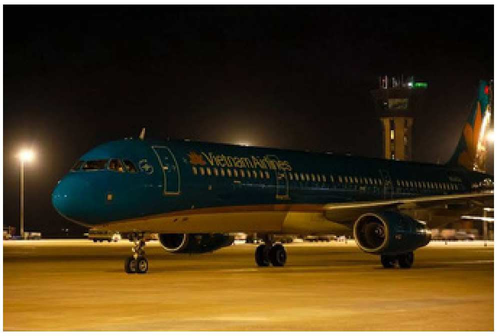


"Questioning The Answers"

A direct Vietnam connection provides an opportunity to test whether that ambition can be converted into actual arrivals.

But the success of the initiative should not ultimately be measured by the number of inaugural-flight photographs or memoranda signed.

It should be measured in numbers.



How many additional Vietnamese visitors arrive? How long do they stay? How much do they spend? And how much foreign exchange does the new market generate?

Those figures will tell the real story.

Sri Lanka's Buddhist heritage is already here.
The challenge now is to package it, connect it and sell it.

NEWSLINE WATCH

The Tourism Ministry should publish measurable targets for the Vietnam initiative - **visitor numbers, average stay and average spend** - and report progress against them.

Otherwise, another promising air route risks remaining precisely that:

A route rather than an economic corridor.

BIA TERMINAL 2 - FINALLY CLEARED FOR TAKE-OFF?

Japan moves to restart long-delayed airport expansion before November as Sri Lanka's principal international gateway prepares for another attempt at completing a project years overdue

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka's long-delayed second passenger terminal at Bandaranaike International Airport is once again moving towards construction, with Japan agreeing to expedite the project and work now expected to resume before November.

A delegation from the Japan International Cooperation Agency has held discussions with Ports, Civil Aviation and Energy Minister Anura Karunathilaka, with the latest timetable envisaging construction restarting this year. The revival is particularly significant because the terminal was among the major Japanese-funded projects disrupted in the aftermath of Sri Lanka's 2022 sovereign default and the suspension of foreign-funded development work.

The economic argument for expanding BIA has meanwhile become considerably stronger. Sri Lanka is seeking substantially larger tourist numbers, additional airlines and routes, increased business travel and greater foreign-exchange earnings.

Those ambitions ultimately depend upon the ability of the country's principal international gateway to accommodate the additional traffic without congestion becoming an impediment to growth.

Terminal 2 was conceived precisely to address that problem. The project includes a new passenger terminal and associated facilities intended to increase capacity at an airport which has for years been operating under increasing pressure.

Yet there is an uncomfortable history attached to the project. Construction was interrupted during the economic crisis, financing arrangements had to be revisited and projected restart dates have repeatedly shifted.

That history makes the latest announcement important, but it also means another promise to recommence construction should not itself be regarded as the achievement.

The real test will be whether contractors are actually back on site before November and, more importantly, whether the Government and its Japanese partners can now establish a credible completion timetable.

There is also the question of cost. Delaying a major infrastructure project rarely makes it cheaper.

Changes in construction costs, financing and the value of currencies since the original project was conceived make the revised financial picture particularly relevant to the public.

Japan's continued involvement is nevertheless an encouraging development.

Sri Lanka badly needs infrastructure investment that increases the country's capacity to earn foreign exchange, and an international airport capable of handling future passenger growth clearly belongs in that category.

But the Government should now put two figures firmly on the record: **the revised total cost and the contractual completion date.**

THE NEWSLINE QUESTION

Before November tells us when they hope to restart. When will Terminal 2 actually open - and what will it finally cost?

TOURISM'S WARNING LIGHT STARTS FLASHING

Sri Lanka celebrates more than 1.4 million visitors, but softer July and August numbers raise an awkward question about whether the country's tourism recovery is beginning to lose momentum

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka's tourism industry has crossed another important milestone, recording more than 1.4 million visitors so far this year. Yet the latest numbers contain a warning that deserves rather more attention than the headline total.

July recorded 196,845 arrivals, approximately 1.7 per cent below the corresponding month last year, while the early August figures have also been running below the comparable 2025 period. The development does not amount to a tourism crisis, but it does challenge the assumption that visitor numbers will continue rising simply because Sri Lanka's post-crisis tourism recovery has so far been strong.

That is particularly relevant as the country prepares to open direct connectivity with Vietnam and promotes a new Buddhist pilgrimage trail. Both initiatives have considerable potential, but new routes and tourism campaigns must ultimately produce additional visitors rather than simply redistribute existing traffic between markets.

Sri Lanka is also operating in one of the world's most competitive tourism regions. Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Maldives are all competing for international travellers, while improvements in regional air connectivity increasingly allow tourists to compare destinations not merely on attractions but on price, convenience and overall value.

The Government has repeatedly set ambitious targets for tourist arrivals. Those targets matter, but the fixation with the number of people passing through immigration can sometimes obscure the figure that matters more to an economy recovering from a foreign-exchange crisis: **how much money those visitors actually leave behind.**

A visitor staying fourteen nights and spending generously is plainly more valuable to the economy than one staying four nights on a heavily discounted package. Tourism policy therefore needs to focus simultaneously on arrivals, average length of stay and foreign-exchange earnings per visitor.

The recent moderation in arrivals may prove temporary. Regional aviation disruption, seasonal factors and conditions in individual source markets can all influence monthly numbers, and it would be premature to conclude from a short period of weaker growth that Sri Lanka's tourism recovery has stalled.

It would be equally unwise to ignore the signal.

The timing is especially interesting. Sri Lanka is opening a new Asian route, Japan is moving towards restarting BIA Terminal 2 and tourism authorities are seeking new source markets. On the supply side, therefore, the country is preparing for considerably more visitors.
The demand side must now keep pace.

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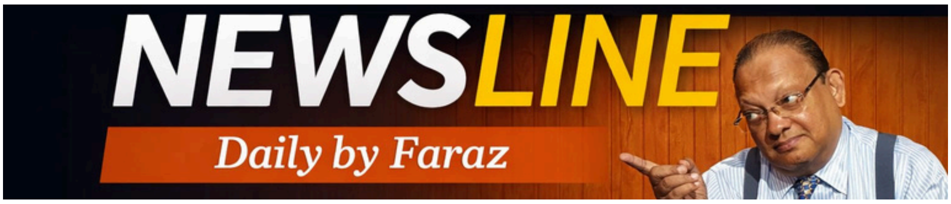


"Questioning The Answers"

TOURISM'S WARNING...

THE NEWSLINE QUESTION

Sri Lanka is adding routes, hotel capacity and airport infrastructure. If tourist arrivals are nevertheless beginning to soften against last year, what is causing it - and what is being done before the crucial winter season arrives?

BETTER THAN 2022 - BUT DON'T GET COMFORTABLE

Moody's says Sri Lanka is better equipped to withstand an oil-price shock than during the economic crisis, but the country's dependence on imported energy remains a significant vulnerability

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka may be in a considerably stronger position to withstand an international oil-price shock than it was at the height of the 2022 economic crisis, but that should not be mistaken for immunity from another sustained surge in energy costs.

That is the broad message emerging from an assessment by Moody's Ratings, which places Sri Lanka among the Asian economies particularly exposed to higher oil prices because of its dependence on imported energy.

The distinction is important. Sri Lanka today has stronger foreign-exchange reserves, improved access to foreign currency and a substantially different economic framework from the extraordinary conditions of 2022, when fuel shortages, power cuts and depleted reserves brought much of the economy to a standstill.

Those improvements provide a buffer that simply did not exist four years ago.

They do not, however, change the fundamental fact that Sri Lanka must spend scarce foreign exchange to purchase much of the energy required to keep its transport system, businesses and wider economy functioning.

A prolonged increase in world oil prices therefore works its way through the economy in several directions. The immediate effect is a higher import bill.

Depending upon how international prices are transmitted domestically, consumers and businesses can then face increased fuel and transport costs, while higher production and distribution expenses eventually find their way into the prices of other goods and services.

For a country attempting simultaneously to rebuild reserves, contain inflation and maintain economic growth, that combination deserves careful attention.

The Middle East situation makes the issue particularly relevant. Sri Lanka cannot control international oil prices or geopolitical events affecting energy markets.

What it can control is the strength of the financial buffers it builds while conditions remain manageable and the speed with which policy responds if those conditions deteriorate.

There is consequently some comfort in Moody's assessment that Sri Lanka is better positioned than it was in 2022. Four years after one of the country's worst economic crises, it would be considerably more troubling if that were not the case.

The more useful question is how much stress the present recovery can withstand.

Sri Lanka's economic debate has understandably concentrated on growth, debt restructuring, reserves and fiscal consolidation. Energy remains capable of cutting across all four. A sufficiently large and sustained oil-price increase would place pressure on household expenditure, corporate margins, inflation and the country's external account at precisely the same time.

The lesson of 2022 is therefore not that another oil shock would necessarily produce another 2022.

It is that countries dependent upon imported energy should use periods of relative stability to prepare for the shocks they cannot predict.

THE NEWSLINE QUESTION

Sri Lanka is better prepared than it was in 2022. But at what oil price - and for how long - does that comfortable buffer begin to become uncomfortable?

SEVEN OUT OF TEN - DRUGS SWAMP THE STATE LAB

Government Analyst says around 70 per cent of reports received by the department are drug-related, raising wider questions over delays across Sri Lanka's criminal-justice system

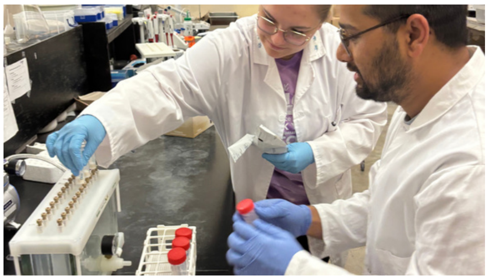
COLOMBO - Around seven out of every ten reports received by the Government Analyst's Department are now related to drugs, an extraordinary concentration of forensic work that provides another indication of the scale at which narcotics cases are moving through Sri Lanka's criminal-justice system.

Acting Government Analyst Kamani Perera has said approximately 70 per cent of the reports received by the department concern drugs, with priority being given to cases involving suspects held in remand custody so that the relevant legal proceedings can be expedited.

The figure is striking not merely because of what it says about narcotics. It also raises an important question about what such an enormous workload means for everything else the Government Analyst's Department is required to do.

Forensic analysis can play a crucial role in criminal proceedings. Courts, investigators, prosecutors and defendants may depend upon scientific reports before cases can advance, and delays can have consequences extending far beyond administrative inconvenience. Where an accused person remains in remand pending the completion of evidence, time itself becomes an important component of justice.

Prioritising cases involving remand prisoners is therefore understandable. But if drug-related submissions now account for roughly 70 per cent of the department's workload, the Government should establish whether the available laboratory capacity, personnel and equipment have expanded sufficiently to deal with that demand.



The issue also connects directly with Sri Lanka's wider campaign against narcotics. Increased police operations and arrests inevitably create downstream work for prosecutors, courts, prisons and forensic laboratories. An enforcement campaign can therefore only move as quickly as the slowest part of the criminal-justice chain.

Arresting more suspects without providing the institutions responsible for processing those cases with corresponding resources risks moving a bottleneck rather than eliminating it.

There is also a basic accountability question surrounding remand custody. The public should know how many people are presently awaiting Government Analyst reports, what the average turnaround time is for a narcotics report and how that compares with other categories of forensic examination.

Those figures would help distinguish between a department successfully managing an exceptional workload and a system struggling under the weight of the cases being sent to it.

Sri Lanka's drug problem is usually measured in kilograms seized, suspects arrested and raids conducted. The Government Analyst's figures provide another measure - the enormous institutional burden that begins after the television cameras have left the raid.

THE NEWSLINE QUESTION

If drugs now consume around 70 per cent of the Government Analyst's caseload, how long are suspects waiting for reports - and what is happening to all the other cases waiting in the laboratory queue?

Be that as it may, an arrest may make the evening news. Justice still has to make its way through the laboratory, the prosecution and the courtroom.

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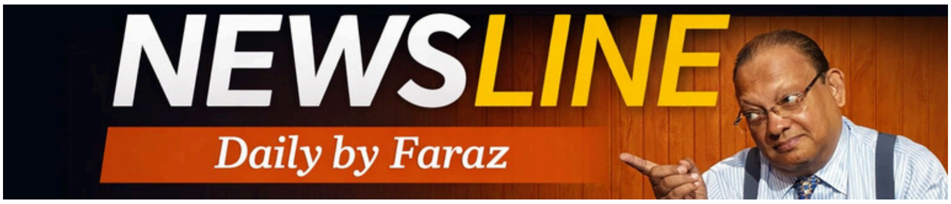


"Questioning The Answers"

COLOMBO GOES BACK TO AUSTRALIA FOR INVESTORS

SEC and CSE return after nearly nine years with an Invest Sri Lanka roadshow - and this time there is a useful benchmark against which to measure whether the exercise actually works

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka's capital-market authorities are returning to Australia this week in search of investors, nearly nine years after their last major promotional effort there produced a sharp increase in Australian participation in the Colombo market.

The Securities and Exchange Commission of Sri Lanka, the Colombo Stock Exchange and representatives of the stockbroking industry are holding a series of Invest Sri Lanka forums in Sydney and Melbourne from August 17 to 20, seeking to present the country's post-crisis investment case to Australian investors.

Overseas investment forums are hardly unusual. Delegations travel, presentations are made and meetings with prospective investors invariably produce optimistic statements about interest in Sri Lanka. What makes the Australian exercise more interesting is that there is a previous performance against which the latest campaign can eventually be measured.

Following the 2017 Australian roadshow, Australian investor buy turnover on the Colombo market reportedly increased from Rs.72.9 million to Rs.603.8 million during the following six months - an increase of more than 700 per cent.

That provides the organisers with something many investment-promotion exercises lack: a numerical benchmark.

The timing is also important. Sri Lanka is attempting to rebuild international investor confidence after the sovereign default and economic crisis, while the Colombo market has experienced substantial changes in valuations, activity and investor sentiment.

Convincing international investors that the recovery represents a sustainable investment opportunity rather than simply a rebound from crisis will be central to the sales pitch.

Foreign portfolio investment also has a broader significance. Sri Lanka needs foreign capital across several channels, from direct investment in businesses and infrastructure to participation in listed companies and government securities. A deeper pool of international investors can improve market liquidity while widening the sources from which domestic companies can attract capital.

But overseas roadshows should ultimately be judged by what happens after the delegation returns home.

The 2017 figures demonstrate that Australian investors can respond when the Sri Lankan proposition is sufficiently attractive. The challenge in 2026 is to establish whether that appetite can be rebuilt in an international environment where investors have an enormous range of competing emerging and frontier-market opportunities.

The SEC and CSE therefore have an opportunity to make this roadshow unusually transparent. Rather than merely announcing that meetings were productive, they could publish the level of Australian participation in the Colombo market six months from now and compare it directly with the position immediately before the campaign.

That would tell investors, policymakers and the public whether the roadshow produced more than interest.

THE NEWSLINE QUESTION

If the last Australian campaign was followed by a 700 per cent increase in buying, what is the target this time - and will the CSE publish the result six months from now?

VAT DEADLINE MOVES AGAIN

Businesses get until October 1 to comply with revised VAT invoice requirements - but another postponement raises questions over whether taxpayers and the system were ready

COLOMBO - Businesses affected by Sri Lanka's revised Value Added Tax invoice requirements have been given additional time to comply, with mandatory implementation now pushed back from July 1 to **October 1, 2026**.

For businesses required to alter accounting, billing and invoicing systems, the additional three months may be welcome.

From the perspective of tax administration, however, the postponement raises a more fundamental question: why was a requirement scheduled to become mandatory in July not ready for implementation by July?

The issue matters because Sri Lanka's economic recovery has placed unusually heavy emphasis on taxation. Increasing government revenue was one of the central elements of the post-crisis fiscal adjustment, with VAT playing an important role in that effort.

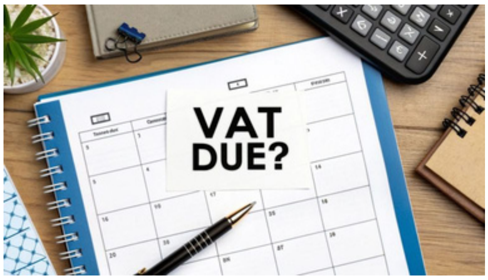
Tax collection, however, depends on considerably more than setting rates. Businesses must understand the rules, accounting systems must accommodate them and the Inland Revenue Department must possess the administrative and technological capacity to implement and enforce them consistently.

Invoice requirements form part of that architecture. Proper VAT documentation helps establish transactions, provides an audit trail and assists the authorities in identifying under-reporting and other forms of non-compliance.

A postponement is therefore not necessarily evidence of a serious problem. Governments routinely provide transitional periods when new administrative requirements prove more complicated for businesses than originally anticipated. Indeed, allowing additional time can be preferable to enforcing a system before taxpayers are capable of complying with it properly.

But repeated changes to implementation dates carry their own costs. Businesses spend money modifying software and accounting processes, training staff and seeking professional advice. Smaller enterprises in particular need certainty about when new requirements will actually become compulsory.

The Government should therefore use the period before October 1 to ensure that the revised system is genuinely ready, rather than allowing the additional three months simply to produce another deadline.



There is also a wider issue. Sri Lanka has asked taxpayers to shoulder substantially greater burdens during the economic recovery. In return, taxpayers are entitled to expect a revenue administration that provides clear rules, predictable deadlines and systems capable of implementing the policies announced by the State.

The October deadline should consequently be treated as more than another date in the Gazette. It should be the point at which both sides - taxpayer and tax collector - are ready.

THE NEWSLINE QUESTION

Why was the July deadline postponed, how many businesses are affected, and can the Inland Revenue Department guarantee that October 1 will now be the final date?

Be that as it may, taxpayers are expected to meet their deadlines. It is not unreasonable to expect the tax system to meet its own.

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NEWSLINE Daily by Faraz

"Questioning The Answers"

GAZA - A CEASEFIRE THAT HAS NOT YET BECOME PEACE

Kushner meets Netanyahu after rare talks with Hamas as Washington pushes a new road map - but Israeli strikes continue, more than 1,250 Palestinians have been killed since last October's ceasefire, and two million people remain trapped in an enclave waiting for diplomacy to catch up with their lives

GAZA/JERUSALEM/CAIRO - Gaza has slipped somewhat from the world's front pages, overtaken by war with Iran, turmoil elsewhere in the Middle East and the relentless churn of international politics.

It has not, however, stopped suffering.

Nearly ten months after the October 2025 ceasefire brought the worst of the two-year Gaza war to a halt, people continue to be killed, Israeli forces remain across large parts of the territory, reconstruction has barely begun on the scale required and a political settlement remains elusive.

The latest diplomatic effort is unusually significant. Jared Kushner, President Donald Trump's envoy and son-in-law, met Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday after holding a rare, more than two-hour meeting in Egypt with senior Hamas leader Khalil al-Hayya. Egyptian, Qatari and Turkish mediators were also involved in the Cairo discussions.

At the centre of those talks is a U.S.-backed road map intended to move the Gaza ceasefire into its next phase. It envisages Hamas disarming, Israeli forces withdrawing in stages, an international stabilisation force working alongside a new Palestinian police service, reconstruction beginning and Gaza eventually being administered by a Palestinian technocratic authority rather than Hamas.

On paper, that could represent the most consequential opening since the ceasefire itself.

In practice, the parties remain divided over the question that has repeatedly paralysed the process: **who moves first?**

TWO MILLION PEOPLE WAIT WHILE GOVERNMENTS NEGOTIATE

Diplomacy is being conducted in Jerusalem, Cairo and Washington.

Life is being endured in Gaza.

The United Nations' latest humanitarian assessment describes conditions as critical, with continuing military activity causing further casualties and displacement. Between August 5 and 12 alone, Gaza's Ministry of Health reported seven Palestinians killed and 28 wounded. Since the ceasefire was announced on October 10, 2025, the ministry's reported toll stood at 1,259 deaths and 4,148 injuries as of the UN's latest reporting period.

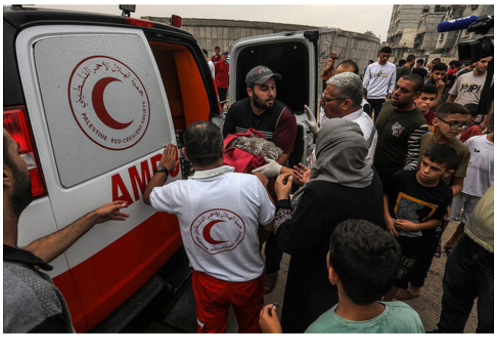
Water remains one of the starkest illustrations of how far Gaza remains from recovery.

A UN-backed survey found that 90 per cent of Gaza's population experiences frequent and unpredictable disruption to safe and reliable water supplies, up from 84 per cent the previous month. In Gaza City, 92 per cent of surveyed households were classified as moderately to highly water insecure.

Health care is scarcely in a normal condition either. The World Health Organization has recorded 45 attacks affecting health care in Gaza during 2026, with medical transport frequently obstructed and evacuation operations delayed or interrupted.

The long-term injuries tell another part of the story. The UN says approximately a quarter of those injured in Gaza since October 2023 may be living with potentially life-changing injuries including amputations, spinal-cord damage and traumatic brain injuries. Children account for 18 per cent of amputations and 31 per cent of reported spinal-cord and traumatic brain injuries. Gaza has no specialised paediatric rehabilitation service.

That is what the phrase "post-war Gaza" presently means for thousands of families.
Not post-war prosperity.
Rehabilitation, displacement, missing homes, damaged schools and trying to obtain sufficient water.



AND THEN THERE IS RECONSTRUCTION

The physical destruction remains overwhelming.
Buildings are being stripped for usable metal.

Families live among makeshift shelters and damaged neighbourhoods. Palestinians in Gaza City have been removing iron from buildings destroyed during the war so that it can be reused for construction, tents or sold.

That small act captures something enormous about Gaza's present condition: reconstruction has begun from below because political reconstruction has not yet begun from above.

Large-scale rebuilding remains dependent upon the political and security arrangements being negotiated. International money can rebuild roads, hospitals, homes and utilities, but investors and donor governments require some confidence that what they rebuild will not simply be destroyed again in another round of fighting.

The road map therefore involves far more than persuading Hamas to surrender weapons or Israel to reposition soldiers.

It must answer who polices Gaza, who administers it, who pays for its reconstruction, who guarantees that armed groups do not re-emerge and who guarantees that Israeli military operations do not again reduce reconstructed neighbourhoods to rubble.

Without answers to those questions, billions of dollars of reconstruction money would be attempting to build permanence upon political uncertainty.

PRESSURE IS NOW BUILDING ON ISRAEL

The diplomatic alignment surrounding the latest proposal is notable. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Pakistan, Indonesia and the ceasefire mediators were among countries that issued a statement condemning Israel's rejection of the road map and calling for immediate measures to prevent any party from obstructing implementation.

That does not mean Hamas has escaped pressure. Quite the opposite. The entire arrangement assumes that Hamas gives up its military role and relinquishes control of Gaza.

What has changed is that regional governments are increasingly arguing that Hamas disarmament must be matched by Israeli withdrawal and movement towards a political settlement.

Netanyahu also confronts domestic politics. Israel is due to hold a national election on October 27, and his coalition includes ministers taking a considerably harder line on Gaza. It remains unclear whether Netanyahu will be willing to take decisive steps on the ceasefire before that election.

That calendar matters because Gaza cannot suspend itself until Israeli politics becomes convenient.

THE HOSTAGES ARE NO LONGER THE CENTRAL OBSTACLE

One important element has changed fundamentally from earlier phases of the war.

The October 2025 agreement led to the release of the remaining hostages seized during Hamas' October 7, 2023 attack, removing one of the principal barriers that had dominated earlier negotiations. Kushner's involvement in those talks was instrumental in reaching that agreement.

The present negotiation is therefore no longer principally about exchanging hostages for prisoners.

It is about ending the architecture of war itself.
That may prove much harder.

Hostages can be counted and exchanged. Weapons can, theoretically, be surrendered and monitored. Troops can be repositioned.

Political trust cannot be delivered on a truck.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

Kushner's meeting with Netanyahu may prove critical because Washington is attempting something substantially more ambitious than another temporary cessation of hostilities.

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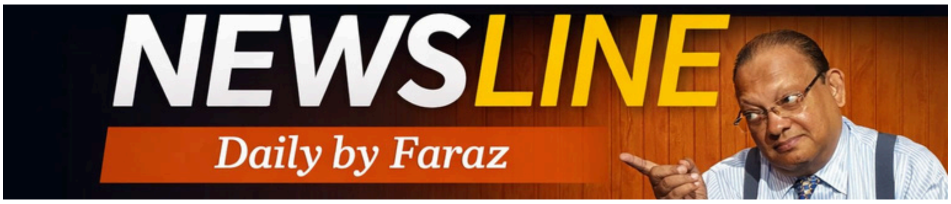

“Questioning The Answers”

TWO MILLION PEOPLE...

It wants to transform last year’s ceasefire into a political and security arrangement capable of surviving.

For that to happen, Hamas would have to surrender the armed power through which it has dominated Gaza for years. Israel would have to relinquish military control over territory it presently occupies.

Regional governments would have to participate in security and reconstruction arrangements. Palestinians would require a credible administration with legitimacy among the people it governs.

And eventually, somebody will have to answer the question every temporary Gaza arrangement has repeatedly postponed: what is the political future of the Palestinian people?

Until that question is addressed, every ceasefire risks becoming merely the interval between wars.

THE NEWSLINE VIEW

It is possible to hold two truths simultaneously.

The murder of civilians and taking of hostages by Hamas on October 7, 2023 cannot be erased from the history of this conflict. Neither can the extraordinary scale of Palestinian death, injury, displacement and destruction that followed Israel’s military response.

Recognising one does not require pretending the other did not happen.

Today, however, the responsibility of diplomacy is not to refight the moral arguments of October 2023. It is to prevent another generation of Israelis and Palestinians from inheriting precisely the same war.

There are now elements on the table that did not exist previously: a Hamas commitment in principle to disarm, an international security proposal, a Palestinian technocratic administration, reconstruction plans and a mechanism for Israeli withdrawal.

If each side waits for the other to make every concession first, Gaza will remain exactly where it is.
Half destroyed.
Half occupied.
Technically under ceasefire.
And still burying people.

THE NEWSLINE QUESTION

If Hamas can be verifiably disarmed, Israeli forces withdrawn, Gaza placed under credible Palestinian civilian administration and international guarantees established for Israel’s security, what precisely remains to justify postponing the beginning of peace?

Because after almost three years, the people of Gaza should no longer be asked merely how they survive tomorrow.

Someone must finally answer what sort of tomorrow they are being allowed to have.

Be that as it may, maps, weapons and negotiating positions will occupy diplomats for months.

For the people living among Gaza’s ruins, peace is rather simpler: a night in which nobody bombs them, a morning in which there is water, and a reasonable belief that their children will still be alive when evening comes.

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz

"Questioning The Answers"