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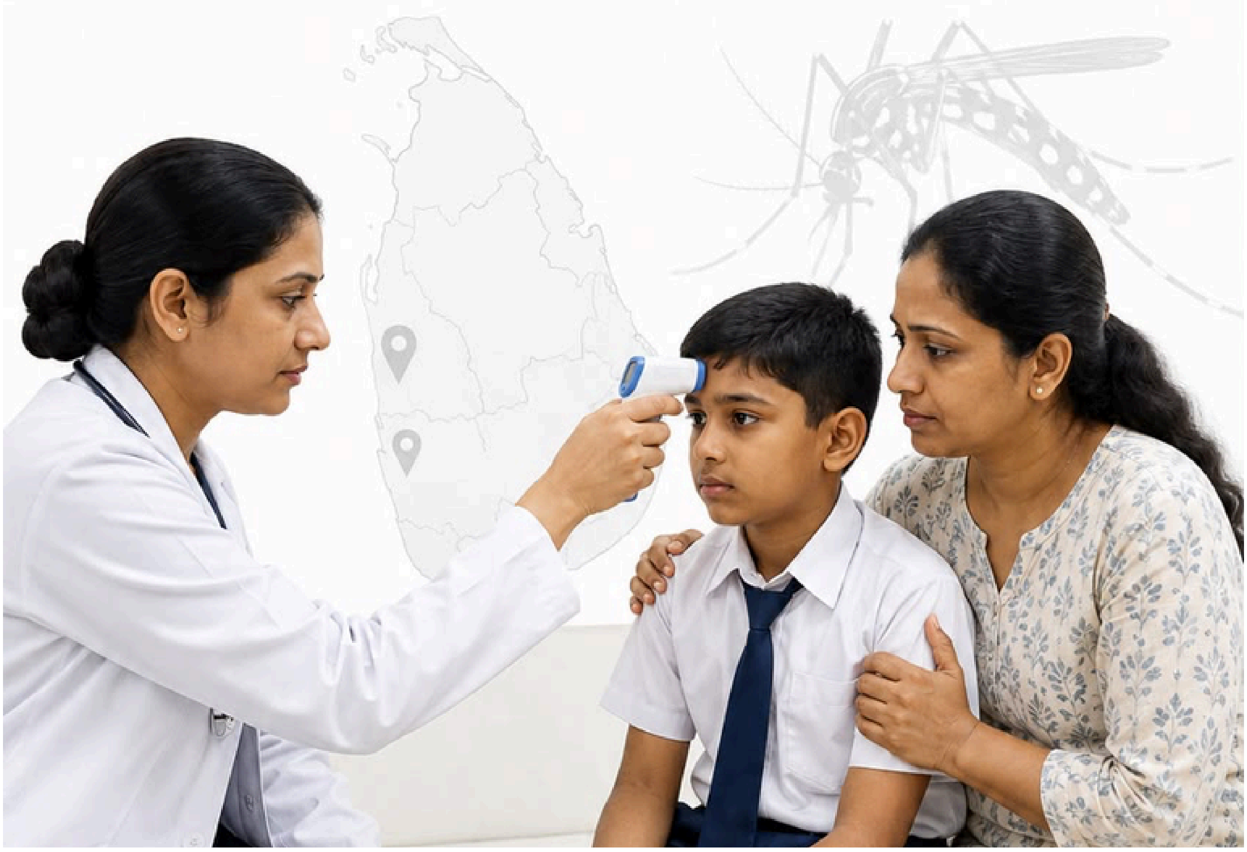
“Questioning The Answers”

DENGUE DEATHS REACH 71

CASES SURGE BEYOND 93,000



"Questioning The Answers"

DENGUE DEATHS REACH 71 AS CASES SURGE BEYOND 93,000

Colombo and Gampaha remain at the centre of an outbreak that has continued despite repeated clean-up drives, military assistance and public-health warnings

Sri Lanka's dengue death toll has risen to 71, with 93,115 infections recorded since the beginning of the year, according to the latest figures released by the National Dengue Control Unit.

The Western Province continues to carry the heaviest burden. Gampaha has reported 19,825 cases, while Colombo has recorded 18,475. Together, the two districts account for more than two out of every five infections reported nationally.

August has already produced 7,777 cases. This follows the severe mid-year escalation that forced hospitals to expand capacity and brought the armed forces into mosquito-control operations. Air Force drones have been used to identify rooftop breeding sites, while soldiers, police officers and health inspectors have participated in neighbourhood inspections.

Yet the latest numbers show that the outbreak remains far from contained.

Sri Lanka has now moved uncomfortably close to the 100,000-case threshold, despite months of warnings, inspections and emergency interventions.

The numbers also raise the question of whether responsibility is being placed too heavily upon individual households while construction sites, blocked drains, abandoned properties and poorly maintained public spaces continue to provide breeding grounds.

The present outbreak is already the country's worst in nearly a decade. Health authorities have linked its severity to the more virulent DENV-2 strain, unplanned urbanisation and the environmental disruption left by Cyclone Ditwah.

The immediate requirement is medical vigilance. Anyone experiencing persistent fever, severe abdominal pain, vomiting, bleeding, unusual tiredness or difficulty breathing should seek medical advice without delay.

The larger question is institutional. Seventy-one people are dead and more than 93,000 have fallen ill. At some point, an annual "dengue season" must stop being treated as though it were an unavoidable act of nature.

TOURISM TARGET CUT BUT GOVERNMENT STILL SEEKS US$4.2 BILLION

Six-country promotional campaign begins as Sri Lanka attempts to recover lost arrivals before the winter season

Sri Lanka has launched a targeted tourism campaign across six important markets as the Government attempts to earn US$4.2 billion from the industry this year-despite reducing its visitor target from three million to 2.7 million.

The digital campaign will focus on India, China, Britain, Germany, Russia and Australia ahead of the northern winter travel season. A broader international campaign is now expected only in April 2027, following years of delays.

Sri Lanka welcomed approximately 1.3 million tourists during the first seven months of 2026 and earned an estimated US$1.5 billion. Arrivals, however, fell by about 20 per cent during March and April as the Gulf conflict disrupted travel, raised fuel costs and unsettled several key markets.

The Government is therefore asking the industry to generate nearly US$2.7 billion during the remaining five months of the year. That would require not merely more visitors, but significantly improved earnings from each arrival.

This is where the numbers become important.

A successful tourism industry cannot be measured only by airport headcounts. It must also be measured by the length of stay, daily spending, regional distribution of income and the amount of foreign exchange that actually reaches the formal banking system.

Sri Lanka has repeatedly promoted itself as a high-value destination while simultaneously introducing policies that appear designed to attract visitors on relatively modest spending thresholds.

The newly introduced Digital Nomad Visa, for example, requires proof of monthly income of US$2,000-a figure that may translate into limited daily spending once accommodation and dependants are included.

The six-country campaign is necessary and overdue. Be that as it may, advertising cannot compensate for weak air connectivity, bureaucratic delays, inconsistent destination management or a product that fails to persuade visitors to spend beyond their hotel rooms.

Sri Lanka does not need tourists merely to arrive. It needs them to stay, travel and spend.

CHILD-LABOUR PENALTIES RAISED AS BILL PASSES WITHOUT A VOTE

Parliament approves tenfold increase in fines under employment law-but enforcement will determine whether the amendment protects children or merely modernises the statute book

Parliament has passed the Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children (Amendment) Bill without a vote, increasing penalties for offences involving the unlawful employment of children and young persons.

The amendment raises the applicable fine from Rs.10,000 to Rs.100,000. The Government says the change will bring Sri Lanka's legislation closer to International Labour Organization standards and strengthen protection against child labour and workplace exploitation.

The Second Reading debate was held on Thursday from 11.30 a.m. until 5.30 p.m., after which the Bill was approved without a division.

The increase is substantial in percentage terms. Whether Rs.100,000 is sufficiently punitive for businesses that knowingly profit from illegal child labour is another matter.

A fine must be large enough to deter the offence rather than become another operating expense. More importantly, a higher statutory penalty has little value unless labour inspections are frequent, complaints can be made safely and prosecutions are pursued to conclusion.

Children engaged in domestic service, agriculture, street trading, workshops and informal businesses are often the least visible to regulators. They may also belong to households in which poverty makes unlawful employment appear to be an economic necessity.

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CHILD-LABOUR...

That means enforcement must be accompanied by stronger school-retention programmes, family assistance and reliable mechanisms through which teachers, neighbours and children themselves can report exploitation.

Parliament has updated the punishment. The real test begins outside Parliament-in plantations, factories, shops, kitchens, workshops and homes where the law is most difficult to see and easiest to evade.

FOUR BANK OFFICIALS REMANDED IN ALLEGED US$1 BILLION OUTFLOW CASE

Investigators say 36 companies were allegedly used to transfer foreign currency overseas for imports that never arrived

Four officials attached to private commercial banks have been further remanded until September 3 in connection with an alleged scheme through which nearly US$1 billion was transferred out of Sri Lanka using purportedly fraudulent import documentation.

Colombo Chief Magistrate Asanga S. Bodaragama issued the order after the suspects were produced before court on Thursday. A fifth suspect connected to the investigation was also further remanded.

Investigators allege that businessman Jeffrey Mohamed established approximately 36 companies claiming to import goods into Sri Lanka. Bank accounts were then reportedly opened in the companies' names and substantial foreign-currency payments transferred overseas.

The corresponding goods were allegedly never imported. The investigation has acquired national significance because the alleged transfers occurred while Sri Lanka was experiencing a severe foreign-exchange crisis, imposing import restrictions and asking citizens and businesses to endure shortages.

One of the bank officials is alleged to have been connected to transfers amounting to approximately US$5.5 million. The allegations have not been proved, and the suspects remain entitled to the presumption of innocence.

Nevertheless, the inquiry now extends beyond the conduct of a single businessman or group of companies. Commercial banks are not passive conduits.

They operate compliance departments, transaction-monitoring systems and procedures governing foreign-exchange payments, customer verification and import documentation.

If the amount alleged by investigators is accurate, it will be necessary to establish how the transactions passed through the banking system, which internal warnings were generated, whether suspicious-transaction reports were filed and what action-if any-was taken by regulators.

Sri Lanka cannot investigate the customers while treating the institutional gatekeepers as incidental witnesses. The central issue is not merely who presented the documents. It is who examined, authorised and processed them.

ASSET DECLARATIONS TO FOLLOW OFFICIALS INTO RETIREMENT

Anti-Corruption Amendment Bill also extends conflict-of-interest provisions and places larger trade unions and specified media-company officeholders within the law

Public officials may be required to submit asset and liability declarations after leaving office under amendments presented to Parliament this week.

The Anti-Corruption Amendment Bill seeks to amend Section 90 of the 2023 Act to provide a clearer legal basis for post-retirement declarations.

The purpose is important: an official should not be able to avoid financial scrutiny simply by retiring or resigning before the declaration date.

The Bill also proposes amendments relating to conflicts of interest and the handling of redacted asset declarations. A person who misuses another individual's redacted declaration could, following conviction by a Magistrate, face a fine of up to Rs.100,000, imprisonment for up to one year, or both.

The Government says elected representatives' declarations will remain publicly accessible. Privacy protections are principally intended for the much larger number of public servants and other individuals brought within the electronic declaration system.

Nearly 160,000 people are reportedly now covered by the declaration regime.

The proposed amendments would also apply provisions of the Anti-Corruption Act to trade unions with more than 1,000 members. Proprietors, chairpersons and directors of certain media companies registered with the relevant ministry and licensed under telecommunications legislation are also identified.

That expansion requires careful parliamentary scrutiny.

Those who exercise substantial institutional power should not automatically be exempt from accountability. At the same time, legislation affecting media ownership and management must be precise, proportionate and protected against selective enforcement.

Asset declarations are intended to reveal unexplained wealth and conflicts of interest-not to become instruments of political intimidation or personal curiosity. The objective must be transparency where public power is exercised, accompanied by genuine privacy protection where no legitimate public interest exists.

NAVY CRAFT RECOVERED - BUT OFFICER REMAINS MISSING

Fast Attack Craft P 4447 was found following the emergency off Angulana as questions remain over the cause of the incident

A Sri Lanka Navy Fast Attack Craft involved in a maritime emergency off Angulana has been located and recovered, but the search for a missing naval officer has continued.

Fast Attack Craft P 4447 encountered difficulties at approximately 11.40 a.m. on August 15 while returning to Colombo from what the Navy described as a routine patrol.

Eleven personnel were rescued with the assistance of Angulana Police, fishermen and residents. They were taken to hospital and reported to be in stable condition.

Naval divers subsequently located the craft and began salvage operations. Rough sea conditions complicated efforts to tow the vessel, while the Navy and Air Force continued searching for the missing officer.

The incident occurred approximately three nautical miles off the Moratuwa coast.

The successful rescue of the surviving personnel deserves recognition, particularly the assistance provided by local fishermen and residents. The continuing search must remain the immediate priority.

There must, however, eventually be a technical and operational inquiry.

A Fast Attack Craft is a sophisticated military vessel. The public should be told whether the emergency resulted from mechanical failure, collision, weather conditions, navigational error or another cause.

It should also be established whether the craft's distress and emergency-location systems functioned properly and whether all personnel had immediate access to appropriate survival equipment.

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NAVY CRAFT...

Military confidentiality cannot be used to suppress legitimate questions about safety, maintenance and accountability. Those questions are especially important where a serviceman remains missing.

For the officer's family, this is not merely a damaged vessel or a maritime incident. It is an agonising wait for an answer.

Source: Sri Lanka Navy, August 2026.

EDITORIAL

A BILLION DOLLARS DOES NOT SIMPLY WALK OUT OF A BANK

The alleged outflow demands an inquiry into the entire institutional chain - not merely the customers who presented the documents.

Sri Lanka is being asked to contemplate an extraordinary allegation: that nearly US$1 billion may have been transferred out of the country through accounts opened for companies that claimed to import goods which, investigators say, never arrived.

The figure is sufficiently enormous to require caution. Allegations made during an investigation are not convictions, and every person arrested is entitled to the presumption of innocence.

Be that as it may, the institutional question cannot be postponed.

Money of this magnitude does not leave a country in a suitcase. It moves through banks. It passes accounts, forms, authorisations, compliance desks, foreign-exchange controls and electronic monitoring systems.

Somebody initiates the payment. Somebody verifies the customer. Somebody examines the import documentation. Somebody authorises the release of foreign currency. Somebody is supposed to ask whether the goods ever entered the country.

Banks spend considerable sums telling the public that their compliance procedures are rigorous. Ordinary customers are asked to explain deposits, identify the source of funds and provide documents for comparatively modest transactions. Businesses regularly complain of delays while payments are examined.

That is precisely why this case matters.

If investigators ultimately establish that approximately US$1 billion was transferred for non-existent imports, the response cannot stop with the alleged organiser and several branch-level officials. It must examine the entire chain of institutional responsibility.

Were the companies connected through common addresses, directors, telephone numbers or beneficial owners? Were repeated payments sent to the same overseas recipients? Did transaction-monitoring systems generate warnings? Were suspicious-transaction reports submitted to the Financial Intelligence Unit? Did Customs data confirm that the claimed imports had arrived?

If warnings were generated, who overruled them? If none were generated, why not?

The timing makes the allegation still more disturbing. Sri Lanka's people endured fuel queues, medicine shortages, import bans and the collapse of their currency. Families were told that every dollar mattered. Businesses were unable to obtain foreign exchange for essential inputs.

Against that history, an alleged outflow approaching US$1 billion is not simply another fraud file. It is an accusation against the integrity of the system that guarded the country's scarce reserves.

The banks concerned must cooperate fully. Regulators must establish whether the failure was individual, institutional or systemic. Their identities cannot be concealed indefinitely if evidence shows that customer-protection and compliance responsibilities were breached.

The public is entitled to more than arrests followed by silence.
It is entitled to know how the gates were opened, who held the keys and why no one appeared to notice a billion dollars leaving.

OIL PRICES RISE AMID TRUMP WARNING, UAE MOVES AGAINST IRAN

Crude oil prices have risen in global markets amid heightened tensions over Iran, following a warning by U.S. President Donald Trump that Washington would launch an economic war against Iran and moves by the United Arab Emirates to suspend commercial activities with Iran.

According to foreign media reports, the price of a barrel of Brent crude has risen to around $94, while West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude has increased to around $87 a barrel.

The rise comes amid growing concerns over potential disruptions to regional trade and energy supplies linked to the developments involving Iran.

POLICE WARN OF IMMEDIATE ARREST FOR POINTING LASER BEAMS AT ELEPHANTS DURING ESALA PERAHERA

People who point laser beams at elephants taking part in the Kandy Esala Perahera will be arrested immediately, Central Province Deputy Inspector General of Police Sudath Masinghe said.

Speaking at a media briefing held at the Central Province Deputy Inspector General's office, Masinghe said the use of loud horns that could frighten elephants, as well as bringing such items along the procession route, was strictly prohibited.

He also said no permission would be granted to place seats in a manner that obstructs the pavements reserved for devotees attending the procession.

Masinghe urged the public not to treat the religious procession held in honour of the Sacred Tooth Relic and the Four Great Gods as a carnival. He also requested spectators to refrain from cheering or whistling while the procession is under way.

He said there had been reports last year of some drug addicts posing as tourist guides and charging foreign visitors excessive amounts of money under the pretext of providing seats.

He added that additional officers had been deployed to the Tourist Police as part of a special security arrangement for this year's procession.

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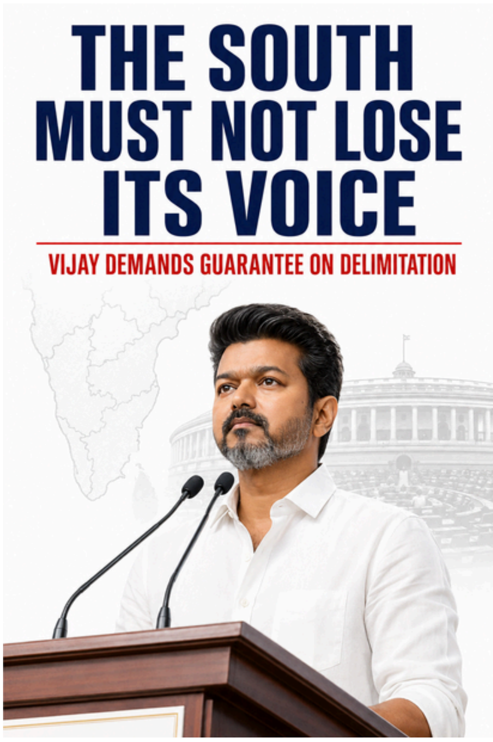
VIJAY DEMANDS PROTECTION FOR THE SOUTH'S VOICE IN DELIMITATION

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister uses Southern Zonal Council meeting to press the Centre on parliamentary representation, NEET, Cauvery water and fiscal autonomy

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay has demanded a legislative guarantee that no state will lose parliamentary representation as a consequence of India's proposed delimitation exercise.

Addressing the 31st Southern Zonal Council meeting in Mahabalipuram on Thursday, Vijay warned that a predominantly population-based redistribution of parliamentary seats could punish southern states for successfully reducing population growth.



The meeting, chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, brought together representatives of five southern states and three Union Territories.

Vijay argued that Tamil Nadu and its neighbours had contributed substantially to India's economic expansion while improving education, health care and family welfare. Their success, he said, should not lead to a reduction in their political influence in New Delhi.

The Chief Minister also renewed Tamil Nadu's demand for exemption from the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test. He proposed that admission to MBBS, BDS and AYUSH courses under the state quota should be based on Class 12 results, arguing that NEET disadvantages rural students and those from socially and economically weaker households.

River-water disputes featured prominently. Vijay reiterated Tamil Nadu's opposition to Karnataka's proposed Mekedatu reservoir and called for compliance with established directions governing Cauvery and Mullaperiyar waters.

He also pressed for compensation for revenue losses associated with the Goods and Services Tax and sought greater fiscal autonomy for states.

Regional cooperation was another theme. The Chief Minister proposed coordinated action against narcotics trafficking, describing the objective as a "drug-free South India." Transport, coastal security, logistics and disaster response were also discussed.

Zonal councils do not themselves settle constitutional disputes or rewrite national policy. They do, however, provide a forum through which states can place disagreements directly before the Union Government.

Vijay's test will be whether Thursday's 17-page intervention becomes the beginning of sustained negotiation-or simply another strongly worded speech filed away after the meeting.

Source: Southern Zonal Council reporting, 20 August 2026.

COURT BACKS SPEAKER OVER 21 AIADMK LEGISLATORS

Madras High Court dismisses challenge after party leadership condoned cross-voting that helped sustain Vijay's minority government

The Madras High Court has dismissed a public-interest petition challenging the Tamil Nadu Assembly Speaker's decision to end disqualification proceedings against 21 AIADMK legislators who voted in support of Chief Minister Vijay's government.

The legislators had defied an AIADMK whip during the confidence motion and supported the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam administration.

The petition argued that the MLAs had already violated the party whip and that their conduct could not subsequently be erased through political forgiveness. It asked the Court to quash a June 9 communication issued by the Assembly Secretary and direct the Speaker to revive the disqualification proceedings.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sushrut Arvind Dharmadhikari and Justice G. Arul Murugan dismissed the challenge.

The AIADMK's general secretary had withdrawn the request for action after the 21 legislators expressed regret and submitted written apologies. The Speaker then dropped the proceedings against them.

Four other AIADMK legislators who resigned and joined the ruling TVK were treated separately.

The judgment carries consequences beyond the immediate fate of the 21 members. Vijay's administration began as a minority government and depended upon support from legislators outside the TVK-led bloc. The cross-votes were therefore crucial to its survival.

India's anti-defection law is intended to prevent elected representatives from casually abandoning the mandate under which they entered the legislature. Yet the law also gives political parties considerable power over whether a breach is pursued, forgiven or strategically ignored.

In this instance, the AIADMK leadership chose condonation rather than expulsion. The Court has declined to compel the Speaker to continue proceedings after the party itself withdrew its complaint.

The legal dispute may have been closed. The political question remains.

Were the legislators forgiven because the party genuinely accepted their apologies-or because continued action no longer suited the AIADMK's evolving relationship with the Vijay Government?

CARS, DRIVERS AND ASSISTANTS FOR ALL 234 TAMIL NADU MLAS

Government says the package will improve constituency service-but estimated recurring and vehicle-purchase costs have produced an immediate debate over priorities

All 234 members of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly are to receive government-provided cars, monthly transport support and publicly funded assistants under a package announced by Chief Minister Vijay.

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Each MLA will receive Rs.75,000 a month for a driver, fuel and vehicle maintenance. A further Rs.25,000 per month will be provided to employ an assistant and meet related salary expenses.

The recurring cost could reach approximately Rs.28 crore annually. Purchasing vehicles for all legislators could require an additional one-off expenditure estimated at between Rs.50 crore and Rs.70 crore.

The Government argues that MLAs must travel extensively through their constituencies, respond to public complaints and monitor the delivery of state programmes. Supporters say the package could particularly assist legislators who do not possess substantial personal resources or established political offices.

The announcement followed representations in the Assembly that elected members required better logistical and administrative support. It was warmly welcomed by several legislators.

That enthusiasm was predictable.

The more important issue is whether the package contains measurable obligations. If taxpayers provide a car, driver, fuel, maintenance and assistant, taxpayers are entitled to know what additional service they will receive.

The Government could require MLAs to publish constituency-office hours, attendance records, monthly public-meeting schedules and reports showing how complaints were received and resolved. Vehicle use should be recorded and audited, while the assistant should perform identifiable constituency work rather than become another political appointment.

Tamil Nadu is a large state, and the responsibilities of an MLA are considerable. Providing institutional support is not inherently unreasonable.

Be that as it may, public service cannot be demonstrated by the value of the vehicle parked outside the constituency office. It must be demonstrated by whether the office is open, whether the legislator is present and whether citizens receive answers.

Source: Tamil Nadu Government announcement and public reporting, 19–20 August 2026.

VIJAY'S FIRST INVESTMENT SUMMIT PROMISES MORE THAN 100,000 JOBS

Tamil Nadu signs 97 agreements worth Rs.67,452 crore, including an Rs.880 crore commitment from Sri Lanka's MAS Holdings

Tamil Nadu has signed 97 investment agreements worth approximately Rs.67,452 crore at the first major investor summit held under Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay.

The proposed projects are expected to create more than 100,000 jobs across manufacturing, technology, logistics, consumer goods and advanced industrial sectors.

Sixteen foreign-investor projects account for approximately Rs.15,050 crore-or US$1.58 billion-of the total announced investment.

Germany's Daimler India Commercial Vehicles has proposed a Rs.4,000 crore expansion of its Chennai operations, while France's Saint-Gobain intends to invest Rs.2,000 crore in a new facility and the expansion of its Kanchipuram plant.

American server manufacturer Super Micro Computer is among the technology investors. Indian companies signing agreements include Titan, the Hinduja Group, Agnikul Cosmos, Ultraviolette and TVS Industrial and Logistics Parks.

Sri Lanka's MAS Holdings has committed approximately Rs.880 crore, giving the investment drive a direct connection across the Palk Strait.

Tamil Nadu already possesses several advantages that other South Asian locations struggle to reproduce: an established automotive base, a sizeable engineering workforce, functioning supplier networks, ports, universities and a state administration experienced in negotiating large industrial projects.

That does not mean every memorandum of understanding will become a functioning factory.

Investment summits across the region frequently produce impressive headline figures that are later reduced by delays over land, environmental approval, financing, power supply and global market conditions.

The Vijay Government should therefore publish a project-by-project implementation tracker showing the land requirement, approval status, expected construction date, employment target and actual capital deployed.

One hundred thousand promised jobs will be politically valuable. One hundred thousand jobs actually created would be economically transformative.

The difference between those two numbers is delivery.

Source: Reuters, 13 August 2026.

CHENNAI METRO TO TAKE CONTROL OF THE MRTS

Railway Ministry approves transfer intended to bring the city's disconnected rail systems under more unified management

India's Railway Ministry has approved the transfer of Chennai's Mass Rapid Transit System to Chennai Metro Rail Limited, clearing the way for a major restructuring of the city's urban transport network.

The transfer will cover MRTS assets, operations and maintenance. It follows a memorandum of understanding between Southern Railway, the Tamil Nadu Government and Chennai Metro Rail Limited.

The MRTS links Chennai Beach with Velachery through an elevated and surface railway corridor. Although it serves important residential, commercial and institutional areas, the system has long suffered from poorly maintained stations, weak passenger facilities and inadequate integration with buses, suburban rail and the newer Metro network.

Bringing the MRTS under CMRL could allow common planning, coordinated timetables, improved stations and easier transfers between services.

The most important passenger benefit would be integrated ticketing. A commuter should be able to move from bus to Metro to MRTS without purchasing separate tickets or navigating disconnected fare systems.
Ownership transfer alone, however, will not improve the passenger experience.

Several MRTS stations require better lighting, toilets, lifts, security, signage and pedestrian access. The spaces beneath and around stations have often been underused or poorly maintained, while the distance between platforms and connecting transport can make interchange inconvenient.

CMRL will also inherit an operational railway-not an empty corridor awaiting development. Employees, maintenance obligations, fare policy and safety certification will require careful transition arrangements. The transfer is nevertheless an opportunity to treat Chennai's transport network as one system rather than a collection of competing agencies.

The real measure of success will not be the name placed on the station. It will be whether more residents decide that public transport is easier, safer and faster than taking a car.

Source: Railway Ministry approval reported on 19 August 2026.

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