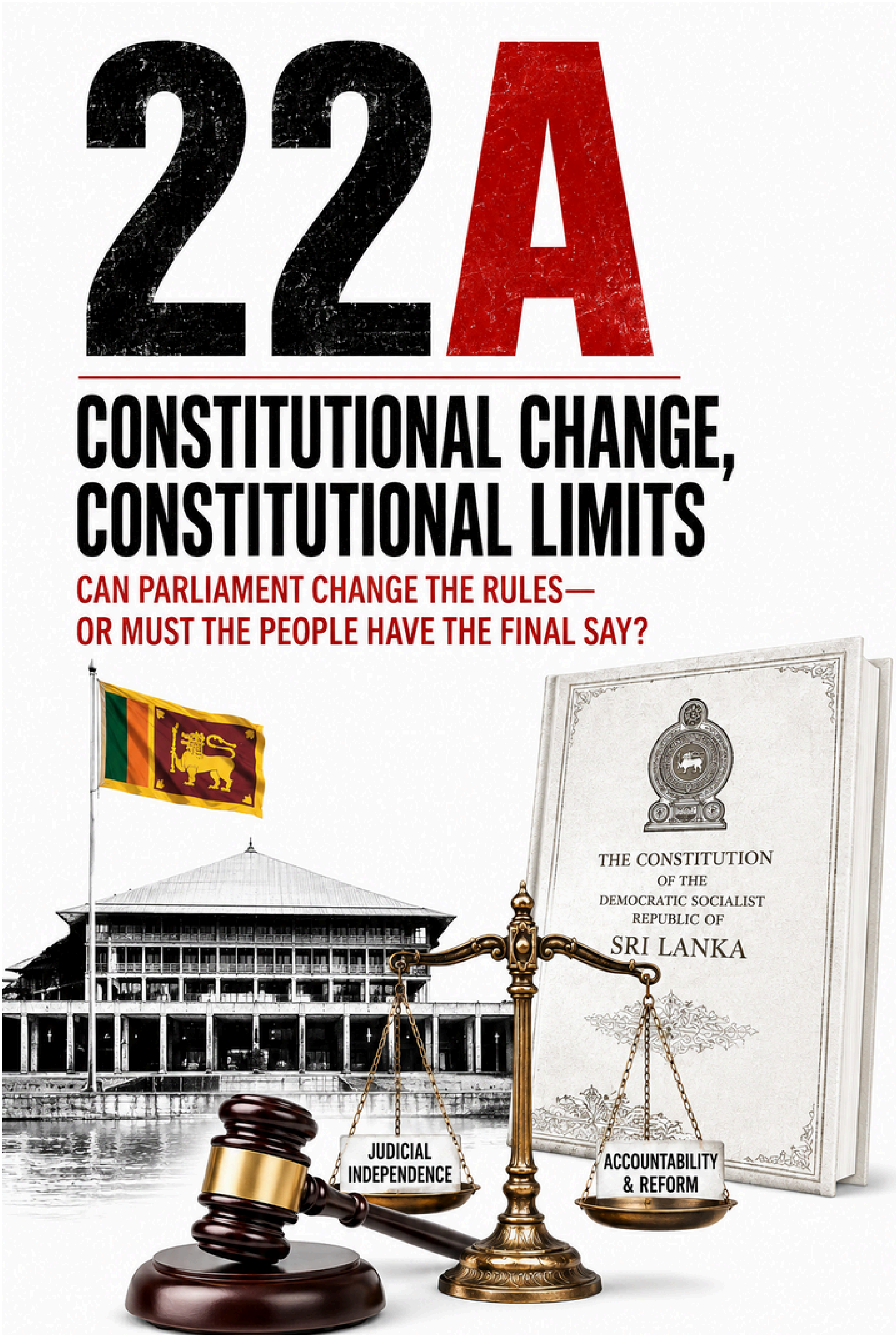
Issue No. 362 29th AUGUST 2026 **CEYLON INDEPENDENT** @+94 77 230 0305

"Questioning The Answers"



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"Questioning The Answers"

22A: TWO YEARS THAT CHANGE EVERYTHING

PARLIAMENT CAN CHANGE THE RETIREMENT AGE FOR TOMORROW'S JUDGES. BUT GIVING TWO MORE YEARS TO THE JUDGES SITTING THERE TODAY MAY REQUIRE SOMETHING PARLIAMENT CANNOT PROVIDE ON ITS OWN - THE CONSENT OF THE PEOPLE

By NewsLine Political & Legal Desk

COLOMBO - At first sight, the argument surrounding the 22nd Amendment appears almost absurdly simple. The Government wants Supreme Court judges to retire at 67 instead of 65 and Court of Appeal judges at 65 instead of 63.

Why, then, all the constitutional fuss over two years?

Because the real question before the Supreme Court is not whether Parliament can change a judicial retirement age. It is whether Parliament can change it for judges already holding office, thereby extending an existing constitutionally defined tenure.

That distinction between what lawyers call prospective and retrospective operation may ultimately determine whether 22A can be enacted by Parliament with the required special majority or must additionally be approved by the people at a referendum.

The Bill proposes to replace Article 107(5), raising the two retirement ages. In the case of the Chief Justice, retirement would occur at 67 or after six years as Chief Justice, whichever comes first. Crucially, however, the proposed provision does not expressly say that the new ages apply only to judges appointed after the amendment takes effect.

That is where the difficulty begins.

If Parliament were to provide that every judge appointed after the new law comes into operation retires at the higher age, it would be laying down the conditions applying to future judicial appointments. No sitting judge would receive another day in office.

But if the new retirement ages apply immediately to judges already serving, Parliament would be altering the tenure under which identifiable judges were appointed. A Supreme Court judge presently due to retire at 65 could remain until 67; a Court of Appeal judge due to leave at 63 could remain until 65.

The difference is not merely grammatical. It goes to the old legal distinction between procedural and substantive law.

Procedural law generally governs the machinery through which the law operates: how proceedings are conducted, how claims are brought, how evidence is dealt with and how courts administer cases. Changes of procedure can often apply to matters already under way because they do not necessarily alter an existing substantive right or legal status.

Substantive law is another matter. It creates, removes or alters rights, liabilities, powers and legal status. Courts consequently approach retrospective interference with established substantive positions far more cautiously.

The retirement date of a constitutional judge is difficult to describe as mere procedure. It defines how long that judge may exercise judicial office.

And judicial tenure carries an additional constitutional importance because security of tenure is one of the protections surrounding judicial independence.

That takes the argument directly to Articles 3 and 4 of Sri Lanka's Constitution.

Article 3 declares that sovereignty is in the people and is inalienable. Article 4 establishes how that sovereignty is exercised, including the exercise of the people's judicial power through courts and other institutions created or recognised by the Constitution.

Article 83 then supplies the formidable lock. Where legislation infringes certain entrenched constitutional provisions, including Article 3, Parliament cannot complete the job by itself. Approval by the people at a referendum is also required.

That is the foundation of the challenge now before the Supreme Court. Petitioners argue that extending the tenure of incumbent judges affects judicial independence, thereby impinging upon the judicial power belonging ultimately to the people.

It is an argument made considerably more powerful by an earlier Supreme Court determination which addressed this very territory.

In that determination, the Court said that a constitutional amendment concerning retirement age or period of office which impacts incumbent judges, directly or indirectly, would impinge upon judicial independence and violate Article 3, thereby requiring a referendum.

That is an unusually pointed precedent for the challengers to place before the present Court.

It also produces a rather obvious solution.

The Government need not necessarily abandon its policy that judges should serve longer. It could make the higher retirement ages prospective, applying them expressly to judges appointed after the amendment comes into force.

That would not automatically dispose of every conceivable constitutional objection. But it would remove the central complaint that Parliament is changing the tenure of judges already occupying judicial office.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has vigorously defended the proposal, arguing that Sri Lanka's enormous delays in dispensing justice demand reform. That is a legitimate policy argument. Courts taking years, sometimes decades, to conclude litigation plainly cannot be regarded as satisfactory justice.

But whether judges should serve longer and whether the tenure of sitting judges should be extended are two separate questions.

A two-thirds parliamentary majority is enormously powerful. It is not, however, unlimited.

The Constitution deliberately reserves certain decisions to the people themselves. If the Supreme Court concludes that retrospective application of 22A interferes with judicial independence sufficiently to engage Article 3, Parliament may pass what it likes by two-thirds and still be unable to make that provision law without a referendum.

The difference could therefore come down to two years - and who gets them.

For tomorrow's judge, Parliament is establishing the finishing line before the race begins.

For today's judge, it may be moving that finishing line while the race is already being run.

Be that as it may, there is a remarkably simple test of the Government's stated purpose. If 67 and 65 are the right retirement ages for Sri Lanka's future judiciary, make them the retirement ages of Sri Lanka's future judges.

The factual framework is grounded in the Bill itself, Parliament's record of its presentation and the current Supreme Court challenges. The Bill does indeed replace Article 107(5) without an express future-appointees-only transitional provision, while the challenges specifically argue that application to serving judges engages judicial independence and Article 3.

SRI LANKA PUTS US$1 MILLION ON THE TABLE FOR NEPAL

PRESIDENT ORDERS HUMANITARIAN CONTRIBUTION AS DEATH AND DESTRUCTION FROM CATASTROPHIC FLOODS STUN THE HIMALAYAN NATION

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka will provide US$1 million in humanitarian assistance to Nepal following devastating floods and landslides that have caused widespread destruction, displacement and a heavy loss of life.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake directed the Government to make the contribution as an expression of Sri Lanka's solidarity with Nepal, with the money intended to support immediate relief and humanitarian assistance to communities affected by the disaster.

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SRI LANKA PUTS US$1 MILLION...

Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath has also spoken with his Nepalese counterpart Shisir Khanal, conveying Sri Lanka's condolences and offering support as Nepal struggles with the aftermath of one of the region's most serious recent natural disasters.

The tragedy has particular resonance across South Asia. Nepal and Sri Lanka share longstanding diplomatic and cultural links, including their common Buddhist heritage, while Nepal remains a destination for Sri Lankan pilgrims and travellers.

Sri Lanka was also among several countries which offered search-and-rescue assistance. Nepal said Friday, however, that its own security agencies were presently handling the operation and that foreign rescue teams were not required.

For Sri Lanka, itself only recently emerging from a foreign-exchange crisis in which every dollar became precious, committing US$1 million abroad is not insignificant.

There are nevertheless moments when national balance sheets must make room for something rather more human.

Nepal needs help. Sri Lanka has decided to help.

Be that as it may, friendship between countries is perhaps best measured not by what is said when everything is going well, but by who turns up when everything has gone terribly wrong.

Sri Lanka's Foreign Ministry confirms the US$1 million contribution and says it was directed by the President. Reuters reports that Sri Lanka was also among the countries offering rescue assistance, which Nepal has for now declined because its own agencies are conducting the operation.

THE RAIN HASN'T COME - NOW THE BILL IS ARRIVING

MORE THAN 84,000 HIT BY THE DRY SPELL AS GOVERNMENT SETS ASIDE Rs.3 BILLION FOR FARMERS AND VEGETABLE PRICES FACE FRESH PRESSURE

COLOMBO - The number of people affected by Sri Lanka's worsening dry spell has climbed beyond 84,500 as El Niño conditions tighten their grip across large parts of the country, damaging crops, straining water supplies and threatening another rise in food prices.

Latest Disaster Management Centre figures put the number affected at 84,546 people from 24,144 families, with the dry conditions extending across the Northern, Eastern, North Central, Southern and North Western provinces.

The agricultural damage is already substantial enough for the Government to allocate Rs.3 billion to compensate farmers affected by the drought.

Around 8,000 acres belonging to approximately 7,000 farmers have been reported damaged across Monaragala, Polonnaruwa, Hambantota, Anuradhapura and Ampara. Compensation of Rs.100,000 per hectare is to be made available for affected paddy, maize, big onions, potatoes, soybeans and chilli cultivation, subject to a maximum of five acres per farmer.

The next impact may arrive at the market.

Vegetable traders are warning that reduced water available for cultivation could begin pushing prices higher as supplies tighten. Beans were already selling at around Rs.300 a kilogram, carrots at Rs.200 and capsicum at around Rs.400, according to prices cited by market representatives.

That makes this more than a weather story.

Sri Lanka has spent much of the past several years fighting inflation and attempting to restore household purchasing power after the economic crisis. A prolonged drought capable of simultaneously damaging farmer incomes and raising food prices would strike both sides of that recovery.

Compensation can help farmers after a crop has failed. It cannot manufacture the food which the failed crop was supposed to put into the market.

Nor is this an unfamiliar Sri Lankan problem. Drought arrives, reservoirs fall and water conservation suddenly becomes a national priority. Then the rains return, reservoirs refill and much of the urgency disappears with the drought.

Climate volatility is making that habit increasingly expensive.

The country therefore needs to think beyond compensating farmers for the rain that did not fall and towards capturing considerably more of the rain when it does.

Be that as it may, the rain will eventually come. The real question is whether, when it does, Sri Lanka will once again allow enough of tomorrow's water to run straight into the sea.

The latest reported DMC figure is 84,546 people affected. Separately, the Government has allocated Rs.3 billion for crop compensation, with nearly 8,000 acres belonging to around 7,000 farmers reported affected.

IRAN'S TANKERS ARE WAITING OFF SRI LANKA

ELEVEN US-SANCTIONED IRANIAN OIL TANKERS ARE BEING MONITORED OFF THE SOUTHERN COAST - THEY ARE OUTSIDE SRI LANKAN WATERS, BUT AN ESCALATING AMERICAN ECONOMIC WAR AGAINST TEHRAN HAS ARRIVED UNCOMFORTABLY CLOSE TO GALLE

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka has found itself an unlikely spectator to the intensifying confrontation between the United States and Iran, with 11 US-sanctioned Iranian oil tankers now being monitored just beyond the country's southern territorial waters.

The vessels have gathered in international waters off the island as the American blockade and sanctions campaign against Iran leaves sections of the country's merchant fleet effectively stranded.

Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath has made Sri Lanka's position clear. The vessels remain outside the country's 12-nautical-mile territorial limit and Colombo has neither control over them nor facilitated their presence. Sri Lankan reconnaissance aircraft and naval patrol vessels are nevertheless monitoring the tankers.

Authorities say there is presently no evidence of ship-to-ship oil transfers or illegal discharge of pollutants which would provide grounds for Sri Lankan intervention. The vessels have also not sought permission to enter Sri Lankan territory.

That may settle the immediate legal question. It does not make their presence strategically insignificant.

The United States this week dramatically widened its economic campaign against Iran, targeting vessels, entities and individuals while warning countries and businesses against helping Tehran circumvent sanctions. Washington's pressure on Iranian shipping has become an important component of its attempt to squeeze the country's economy.

The Strait of Hormuz crisis has meanwhile become one of the world's most serious threats to energy security. Before the present conflict, roughly one-fifth of global oil supply passed through the waterway.

Sri Lanka sits close to the principal east-west shipping routes connecting the Gulf with Asia. What happens in Hormuz therefore has consequences extending far beyond Iran and the United States, particularly for an island economy dependent upon imported petroleum.

"Questioning The Answers"

IRAN'S TANKERS...

There is another reason for vigilance. Sanctioned and so-called shadow fleets have generated increasing international concern over insurance, vessel condition, ownership transparency and environmental liability. An accident involving a tanker does not respect a line drawn 12 nautical miles from shore.

For the moment, Sri Lanka is doing what international law permits it to do: watching.

But the sight of 11 sanctioned Iranian tankers waiting beyond Galle is an extraordinary reminder that a geopolitical conflict several thousand kilometres away can suddenly appear on Sri Lanka's doorstep.

Be that as it may, they may be outside our territorial waters - but eleven sanctioned oil tankers sitting off the southern coast are far too close for Sri Lanka to look the other way.

Sri Lankan authorities confirm that 11 sanctioned Iranian vessels are being monitored outside territorial waters, while the latest Reuters reporting shows Washington continuing to intensify economic pressure on Tehran amid attempts to restore normal navigation through Hormuz.

GREGORY LAKE: BEAUTIFUL TO LOOK AT – BUT DON'T DRINK THE WATER

CEA FINDS SERIOUS POLLUTION AT ONE OF NUWARA ELIYA'S BEST-KNOWN TOURIST ATTRACTIONS AS AUTHORITIES FINALLY LAUNCH AN URGENT CLEAN-UP PLAN

NUWARA ELIYA - Gregory Lake remains one of the postcard images of Sri Lanka's hill country: cool air, green mountains, boats on the water and thousands of visitors drawn to its banks.

The picture below the surface is considerably less attractive.

The Central Environmental Authority has found that pollution in the lake has reached levels capable of posing a serious health risk if its water is consumed, prompting authorities Friday to launch an urgent joint programme to arrest its deterioration.

The problem appears to have developed over years rather than overnight.

Agricultural runoff carrying fertilisers, pesticides and other chemicals has entered the lake, while wastewater and other urban pollution have contributed to declining water quality.

One measurement presented from CEA findings is particularly striking. Phosphate levels were reported at 1.04 milligrams compared with a normal level cited as 0.20 milligrams.

Authorities have now decided to establish a management committee involving the Navy, CEA, Nuwara Eliya Municipal Council and District Secretariat.

Among the measures proposed is the reactivation of a 13-pond natural treatment system intended to filter agricultural runoff and urban wastewater before it reaches Gregory Lake. Natural aeration and filtration are also expected to be improved to reduce odours and excessive nitrogen and phosphorus.

Longer-term work will seek to prevent wastewater from the municipal sewerage network and other waste entering the lake.

That action is welcome. The more uncomfortable question is why one of Sri Lanka's most famous recreational lakes was allowed to reach this condition before an urgent programme became necessary.

Gregory Lake is not some forgotten waterway hidden from public view. It is one of Nuwara Eliya's principal tourist attractions, used for boating and other recreational activities and promoted as part of the city's visitor experience.

Protecting it therefore concerns public health, the environment and tourism.

Sri Lanka spends considerable sums attempting to persuade visitors to travel beyond its beaches. Allowing one of the hill country's best-known attractions to become seriously polluted is hardly the advertisement required.

The clean-up must consequently deal not merely with the polluted water but with the sources continuously feeding pollution into it.

Otherwise Sri Lanka will simply be cleaning a lake while continuing to dirty it.

The good news is that somebody has finally decided Gregory Lake needs saving. The rather less flattering question is why we waited until it needed rescuing.

The CEA findings and the new action plan were reported on August 27 and 28. The programme includes restoring the 13-pond treatment system and tackling wastewater entering the lake.

DENGUE: 94,666 CASES – AND 72 LIVES LOST

MORE THAN 9,300 CASES RECORDED IN AUGUST AS SRI LANKA'S WORST DENGUE OUTBREAK IN YEARS REFUSES TO GO AWAY

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka's dengue outbreak has now infected 94,666 people and claimed 72 lives this year, with health authorities continuing to confront a disease which has already placed substantial pressure on hospitals.

Latest surveillance data available up to midnight on August 26 show another 9,330 infections recorded so far this month. The figures reveal just how dramatically the epidemic accelerated during the middle of the year.

July produced 29,962 cases, the highest monthly figure so far in 2026, after 21,533 infections were recorded in June. By comparison, May recorded 8,590 cases and April 5,651.

The numbers mean Sri Lanka is now approaching 100,000 reported dengue infections in eight months. When Reuters examined the outbreak in June, the country had recorded slightly more than 44,000 cases and 28 deaths. In little over two months, the cumulative caseload has more than doubled and the number of deaths has risen to 72.

Dengue is particularly difficult to contain because the principal weapon remains prevention.

Mosquito breeding sites around homes, construction sites, workplaces and public spaces must be eliminated, while early diagnosis remains critical in preventing severe disease and death.

That makes dengue partly a health-system problem and partly an enormous exercise in public behaviour.

Sri Lanka has fought this battle before. The danger is that familiarity with dengue has made extraordinary numbers begin to appear ordinary. They are not.

Ninety-four thousand infections are not simply another health statistic, and 72 deaths should not become a number read out occasionally before the country moves on to something else.

Dengue may have disappeared from the headlines. Unfortunately, dengue appears not to have received the message.

National Dengue Control Unit data reported on August 28 put the 2026 total at 94,666 cases and 72 deaths, with 9,330 cases during August up to August 26.

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SRI LANKA'S EXPORT CLOCK IS TICKING TOWARDS 2028

GOVERNMENT PREPARES FOR POSSIBLE LOSS OF GSP+ AS THE COUNTRY'S GRADUATION FROM LOWER-MIDDLE-INCOME STATUS FORCES EXPORTERS TO CONFRONT LIFE WITHOUT EUROPEAN TRADE CONCESSIONS

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka is beginning preparations for a potentially important change in its relationship with the European market as the country looks towards the eventual loss of preferential access under the European Union's GSP+ scheme.

The issue matters because Europe remains one of Sri Lanka's most important export destinations, particularly for apparel, while GSP+ provides preferential tariff treatment across thousands of product categories.

The Government's challenge is to ensure that exporters do not reach the end of the concession period and only then begin asking what comes next.

Sri Lanka's improving economic status creates an unusual paradox. Moving upwards from the income classification which helped qualify the country for trade preferences is evidence of economic progress, but that same progress can eventually remove concessions from which exporters have benefited.

The answer cannot therefore be to remain poor enough to retain preferential treatment.

It must be to use the remaining period to make Sri Lankan exports competitive enough to succeed without depending indefinitely upon it.

That means widening the country's export base, improving productivity, reducing the cost and bureaucracy of doing business, attracting investment into higher-value manufacturing and negotiating stronger long-term trading arrangements with major markets.

The apparel industry is particularly exposed because Europe is a critical destination for Sri Lankan garments and even modest tariff differences can matter in a fiercely competitive global industry.

Bangladesh's changing trade status has already demonstrated how graduation from preferential arrangements forces export economies to reconsider competitiveness rather than simply celebrate higher income classifications.

Sri Lanka should therefore regard 2028 not as a cliff but as a deadline.

Economic recovery has restored reserves and stability after the crisis. The harder stage is transforming that stability into an economy capable of earning substantially more foreign exchange through exports.

Preferential access helped Sri Lanka compete.

The next test is whether Sri Lanka can compete when preference is no longer the reason somebody buys from us.

Graduating from concessions should be a sign that a country has succeeded. The trick is making certain that success does not become the reason its exports subsequently fail.

MAS TAMIL NADU DEAL: THE MOU IS REAL

REUTERS REPORTED ₹880 CRORE. NEWSLINE WAS THEN TOLD THE INFORMATION WAS INCORRECT. NOW A MEMBER OF THE MAS INDIA LEADERSHIP TEAM HAS PUBLICLY CONFIRMED THAT MAS INDIA DID INDEED SIGN AN MoU WITH THE TAMIL NADU GOVERNMENT

COLOMBO - The substance underlying a Reuters report on a major MAS investment in Tamil Nadu has received important independent corroboration from within MAS India itself, raising questions over an earlier attempt to persuade NewsLine that the reported information was incorrect.

Reuters reported on August 13 that Sri Lanka's MAS Holdings had committed ₹8.8 billion, or ₹880 crore, to Tamil Nadu as part of a much larger package of investment agreements secured by the newly elected state government.

The report was specific. MAS was identified alongside major investors including Saint-Gobain, Daimler and Titan.

Indian reporting subsequently went considerably further. The Times of India reported that MAS India had signed an MoU worth ₹880 crore covering apparel, textiles and wearable-technology manufacturing across multiple districts, with an anticipated 7,000 jobs.

NewsLine was subsequently contacted by Adfactors PR, purporting to represent MAS, challenging the accuracy of the information and seeking removal of the report.

There is now an important additional piece of evidence.

Kam Raghavan, who describes himself as a member of the MAS India leadership team and says he represented the company at the Tamil Nadu event, has publicly confirmed the underlying transaction.

"MAS India has signed an MoU with the TN govt to facilitate mutual growth in apparel manufacturing," Raghavan wrote in a public LinkedIn post following the investment event.

That statement requires one important qualification. Raghavan does not state the ₹880 crore figure in his post. NewsLine therefore does not suggest that he has personally confirmed the value attributed to the investment by Reuters and Indian media.

What he does confirm is something rather fundamental: **MAS India signed an MoU with the Tamil Nadu Government.**

That substantially corroborates the central basis of the original Reuters report.

The ₹880 crore figure, meanwhile, does not rest on Reuters alone. The Times of India separately reported the same amount and supplied additional details about the proposed investment and employment creation.

NewsLine is therefore left with a straightforward question.

If MAS India did sign an MoU with the Tamil Nadu Government, as a member of its own leadership team now publicly confirms, precisely which substantive element of the Reuters report was incorrect when NewsLine was asked to remove it?

There may well be a perfectly reasonable answer.

Perhaps MAS disputes the investment value. Perhaps the commitment is conditional. Perhaps the investment will be phased. Perhaps there is a distinction between MAS Holdings and its Indian operation which the company believes has been inadequately explained.

If so, that clarification would be useful and NewsLine would publish it.

But seeking removal of a report is rather different from explaining precisely what in that report is wrong.
Reuters reported the investment. Indian media reported the investment.

And now MAS India's own leadership has confirmed the MoU at the centre of it.

Be that as it may, the question is no longer whether there was an MoU. The better question for MAS and its representatives is what, precisely, they say Reuters got wrong.

The evidentiary trail is now unusually clear: Reuters reported **₹8.8 billion** from MAS Holdings; the Times of India independently reported an **₹880 crore MAS India MoU** and 7,000 projected jobs; and Kam Raghavan publicly says that MAS India signed an MoU with the Tamil Nadu Government and that he represented the company at the event.

NEWSLINE
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GOLDSMITHS COMES TO SRI LANKA WITH BCAS

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON INSTITUTION CHOOSES BCAS FOR ITS FIRST SRI LANKAN ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIP AS VETERAN BANKER RAJENDRA THEAGARAJAH LEADS THE NEXT PHASE

COLOMBO - Goldsmiths, University of London is entering Sri Lanka through a landmark partnership with BCAS Campus, giving local students the opportunity to study for Goldsmiths degrees without leaving the country.

The agreement represents Goldsmiths' first academic partnership in Sri Lanka and establishes a validation arrangement under which BCAS will deliver undergraduate programmes while Goldsmiths retains responsibility for academic standards, quality assurance and the awarding of degrees.

The first programmes will span business, computing, psychology and law, areas selected for both student demand and employment opportunities. The first intake is expected to begin studies in September.

The partnership also marks another stage in the development of BCAS under Chairman Rajendra Theagarajah, one of Sri Lanka's best-known veteran bankers, together with Chief Executive Teresh Amaratunga.

The agreement was formally signed with Goldsmiths Interim Vice-Chancellor Professor David Oswell, with Theagarajah and Amaratunga representing BCAS.

For Sri Lanka's private higher-education sector, the significance lies in the structure of the arrangement. This is not simply an overseas university lending its name to a locally delivered qualification.

Goldsmiths says it retains academic oversight and degree-awarding responsibility, with the partnership having passed through its institutional governance processes, including scrutiny by its Academic Board.

BCAS, established in 1999, already operates campuses in Colombo, Kandy, Kalmunai and Jaffna and has built much of its business around internationally recognised higher-education programmes.

Goldsmiths brings a considerably older academic pedigree. The institution traces its origins to 1891 and became part of the University of London in 1904, developing an international reputation particularly across the arts, humanities, social sciences, computing and creative disciplines.

The Sri Lankan partnership is also part of Goldsmiths' wider international strategy, which seeks to expand the institution's transnational education presence through selected overseas partnerships.

For Sri Lankan students, arrangements of this kind are becoming increasingly relevant as the cost of studying overseas rises sharply. A British degree delivered locally can reduce accommodation, travel and living costs while allowing students to remain within Sri Lanka.

There is a wider economic argument too. Every student able to obtain a credible international qualification locally represents foreign exchange which might otherwise have accompanied that student overseas.

The challenge for the expanding private higher-education industry is consequently straightforward: international names must be accompanied by international standards.

In this instance, Goldsmiths has explicitly retained responsibility for precisely that.

For Rajendra Theagarajah, who spent much of his career dealing with money leaving and entering Sri Lanka through banks, there is a certain symmetry in now helping build an institution capable of keeping some of Sri Lanka's education dollars at home.

Goldsmiths' official announcement confirms this is its **first academic partnership in Sri Lanka**, that Goldsmiths retains academic standards, quality assurance and degree-awarding responsibility, and that the first cohort is expected in September 2026.

"Questioning The Answers"

LAKE ONTARIO? NOT IF DONALD TRUMP CAN HELP IT

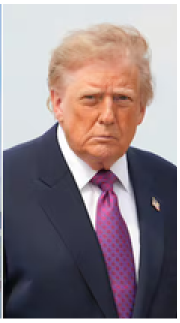
TRUMP RENAMES IT "LAKE AMERICA" - CANADA SAYS THANK YOU VERY MUCH, BUT IT REMAINS LAKE ONTARIO

WASHINGTON - Donald Trump has discovered a novel solution to one of the difficulties of sharing things with one's neighbours: rename them.

The US President on Thursday signed an executive order directing American federal agencies to refer to Lake Ontario as "Lake America", extending his enthusiasm for geographical rebranding after previously ordering the Gulf of Mexico to be called the Gulf of America for US federal purposes.

There is, however, a fairly substantial problem with the latest change. Lake Ontario is shared by the United States and Canada, and while an American President can instruct his own federal agencies what to call it, he possesses rather less authority over the Canadian half of the lake.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney duly made that point, saying Lake Ontario would continue to be called Lake Ontario in Canada. He also noted that the Ontario name long predates both Canadian Confederation and the American Declaration of Independence.



The episode might have been dismissed as harmless presidential theatre were relations between the two neighbours not already strained by a serious trade dispute. Canada has announced retaliatory tariffs on approximately US$20 billion of American goods following a deterioration in negotiations with Washington.

Against that background, changing the name of a shared lake begins to look rather less like cartography and rather more like politics conducted with a map.

The executive order does not, of course, physically change anything. Canadians looking south and Americans looking north will continue looking at precisely the same 18,960 square kilometres of water. Only the terminology used by their governments will differ.

Nor does an American executive order oblige international organisations, mapmakers, foreign governments or Canada to adopt Washington's preferred name.

There is nevertheless something splendidly childish about two neighbours arguing over trade only for one of them to announce that the lake between them has acquired a new name.

It also raises possibilities which the rest of the world might prefer not to explore. Shared seas, rivers, mountains and straits are scattered across international borders. If every government begins unilaterally renaming the portion it can see from its window, the world's atlas could soon require considerably more pages.

Sri Lanka, surrounded by the Indian Ocean and separated from India by the Palk Strait, might wisely avoid offering suggestions.

For now, American federal officials have Lake America. Canadians have Lake Ontario. Everyone else can decide for themselves.

The fish, mercifully, have not been asked.

Be that as it may, Donald Trump may have renamed America's half of Lake Ontario with the stroke of a pen. Convincing Canada, history and geography to follow him could take a little longer.

NEPAL DISASTER: TAMIL NADU SEARCHES FOR MORE THAN 90 OF ITS OWN

MORE THAN 140 PILGRIMS TRACED SAFE AND 21 BROUGHT HOME - BUT FAMILIES WAIT AS STATE GOVERNMENT SAYS IT STILL CANNOT CONTACT OVER 90 PEOPLE

CHENNAI - Tamil Nadu is racing to account for more than 90 of its residents believed to have travelled to Nepal as pilgrims following the catastrophic Himalayan floods, even as the first group of survivors returned safely to India on Friday.

State School Education and Information Minister A. Rajmohan said more than 400 people from Tamil Nadu may have travelled to Nepal and that over 140 had now been traced and confirmed safe. But contact had still not been established with more than 90.

The figures remain fluid because pilgrims travelled in organised groups as well as individually, leaving authorities attempting to build an accurate picture while communications remain badly disrupted in the disaster zone.

Tamil Nadu has established a control room and war room at Tamil Nadu House in New Delhi, coordinating with India's Ministry of External Affairs, Nepalese authorities and other agencies.

Four Tamil Nadu ministers have travelled to Delhi to oversee the effort, an indication of the scale the crisis has assumed for the state.

There was, however, some desperately needed good news on Friday.

Twenty-one Tamil Nadu pilgrims rescued by the Nepal Army arrived at Delhi airport, where they were received by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar. State Minister Rajmohan described their survival as nothing short of a miracle.

Their accounts provide some indication of the violence of the disaster. Survivors described escaping rising water and debris as the floods swept through pilgrimage routes near the Nepal-Tibet border.

The wider disaster is enormous. Reuters reported Friday that at least 547 people had died in Nepal and another five in Tibet, with nearly 1,000 people still missing as rescue operations resumed after fears surrounding a glacier-formed lake eased.

For families in Tamil Nadu, however, the enormity of the international disaster eventually reduces to something painfully personal.

They are waiting for a telephone to ring.

Until every pilgrim is accounted for, 21 people coming home is cause for enormous relief -but not yet celebration.

Tamil Nadu says more than 90 pilgrims remained uncontactable as of Friday evening, while more than 140 had been traced safe. Twenty-one rescued pilgrims returned to India after being rescued by the Nepal Army.

VIJAY TAKES THE FIVE-SEAT BATTLE TO COURT

TAMIL NADU CHIEF MINISTER ASKS MADRAS HIGH COURT TO LIFT STAY ON BY-ELECTIONS - ARGUES LAKHS OF VOTERS CANNOT BE LEFT WITHOUT REPRESENTATION

CHENNAI - Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay has moved the Madras High Court seeking to clear the way for by-elections in five Assembly constituencies, arguing that continuing to leave the seats vacant denies lakhs of people their democratic representation.

The Court had earlier imposed an interim restraint preventing the Election Commission from issuing by-election notifications for the five constituencies after the legislators returned from those seats resigned.

Vijay has now sought to have that order vacated.

His application challenges the maintainability of the public interest litigation which produced the interim order and argues that the petitioner lacks the standing required to prevent the electoral process from proceeding.

Behind the legal arguments lies an important political contest.

Vijay's TVK Government is still in the early stages of establishing itself after its breakthrough election victory transformed Tamil Nadu politics. Five by-elections would therefore amount to one of the first significant electoral tests of the Government since taking office.

"Questioning The Answers"

VIJAY TAKES...

For the opposition, the contests would provide an opportunity to measure whether the extraordinary momentum which carried Vijay into Fort St George has survived the transition from campaigning to governing.

For Vijay, there is a simpler constitutional argument: an Assembly constituency exists to be represented.

Where a member resigns, the ordinary democratic remedy is an election allowing the people to choose another.

The Court must now determine whether there are sufficient legal grounds to continue restraining that process.

The political parties, meanwhile, will already be doing their arithmetic.

Five seats may not decide who governs Tamil Nadu.

They could tell Tamil Nadu rather a lot about what its voters think of those who now do.

Vijay's application was filed Friday seeking to vacate the Madras High Court's interim order restraining by-election notifications in the five constituencies. He argues that the restraint deprives large numbers of voters of representation.

THE VANNIYAR QUESTION RETURNS TO THE ASSEMBLY

10.5 PER CENT INTERNAL RESERVATION DEMAND PUTS VIJAY GOVERNMENT UNDER PRESSURE - STATE PROMISES WIDER SOCIAL JUSTICE SURVEY AFTER NATIONAL CASTE CENSUS

CHENNAI - One of Tamil Nadu's most politically sensitive questions has returned to the floor of the Assembly, with the demand for 10.5 per cent internal reservation for the Vanniyar community placing the new TVK Government in the difficult territory where social justice, caste and electoral politics meet.

The issue produced heated exchanges in the Assembly on Friday as the Government was pressed over whether it would restore or otherwise provide a separate internal quota for Vanniyars within the reservation available to Most Backward Classes.

The Vanniyar reservation question has travelled through politics, legislation and the courts for years.

An earlier attempt to provide a 10.5 per cent internal reservation was struck down, leaving successive governments confronting both the demand from Vanniyar organisations and the competing interests of other communities within the broader reservation structure.

The Vijay Government is now attempting to approach the issue through data.

Social Justice Minister Vanni Arasu told the Assembly that the Government intends to conduct a comprehensive social justice survey after the Centre completes its caste enumeration as part of the national census.

The Government says its approach is based on Periyar's principle of ensuring equitable opportunity across society rather than advancing one community at the expense of another.

That is an admirable principle. Converting it into percentages acceptable to everybody is considerably harder.

Tamil Nadu has one of India's longest and most politically entrenched histories of affirmative action. Reservation is consequently not merely a welfare policy but an integral part of the state's political identity.
The Vanniyar demand therefore presents Vijay with an early test.

Move too slowly and the Government risks alienating a large and politically organised community. Move without sufficiently robust data and it risks repeating the legal problems which undermined the earlier quota.

The proposed survey may provide the Government with the evidence it needs.

It will not make the politics disappear.

In Tamil Nadu, arithmetic can be difficult enough. When the numbers represent caste, history, opportunity and votes, even 10.5 per cent can become a very large number indeed.

The 10.5 per cent Vanniyar internal-reservation demand was debated again in the Tamil Nadu Assembly on Friday. The Government says a comprehensive social justice survey will follow the Centre's caste-based enumeration.

VIJAY KILLS PARANDUR - BUT CHENNAI STILL NEEDS AN AIRPORT

₹27,400 CRORE PROJECT SCRAPPED AFTER YEARS OF FARMER PROTESTS - TAMIL NADU NOW SEARCHES FOR AN ALTERNATIVE SITE WITH LESS IMPACT ON AGRICULTURAL LAND

CHENNAI - Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay has fulfilled one of the promises which helped define his political rise, abandoning the proposed second Chennai airport at Parandur after years of resistance from farmers and villagers facing the loss of agricultural land.

The decision kills a project estimated at ₹27,400 crore, roughly US$2.86 billion, for which the previous administration had already obtained civil aviation clearance.

But cancelling an airport does not cancel the reason Chennai needed one.

Tamil Nadu is India's largest manufacturing state by several measures, accounting for roughly 15 per cent of the country's factories and manufacturing employment. Chennai and its industrial belt host Hyundai and Renault plants as well as major Apple suppliers including Foxconn and Tata Electronics.

Passenger demand is also growing. The existing Chennai airport handles around 30 million passengers annually and the Government plans to expand its capacity to approximately 55 million through terminal improvements and construction of another terminal.

Vijay says alternative locations for a second airport have already been identified and would have significantly less impact on agricultural land.

Industry wants the decision made quickly.

The Confederation of Indian Industry's southern leadership has warned that a new airport remains important to the rapid expansion of Tamil Nadu's manufacturing, logistics and services economy.

The argument has acquired another dimension this week after a new study reportedly questioned whether Tamil Nadu needs another airport immediately, suggesting greater use could first be made of existing aviation infrastructure.

Vijay therefore finds himself confronting the classic difficulty of moving from opposition to government.

It was relatively easy to stand with the farmers and say Parandur should not be built.

It will be considerably harder to find somewhere else to put an international airport.

The farmers of Parandur have won their battle. Tamil Nadu's aviation problem, however, remains firmly on the runway.

Reuters confirms the Parandur project has been abandoned and that alternative sites with less agricultural impact are under consideration. The project had been estimated at ₹274 billion, while industry has urged the Government to choose the replacement site quickly.

"Questioning The Answers"