Issue No. 372 10th SEPTEMBER 2026 CEYLON INDEPENDENT @+94 77 230 0305

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

RS 25 BILLION TO FIGHT POVERTY — NOW FOLLOW THE MONEY

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பிரஜாசக்தி
PRAJASHAKTHI

Stronger People
Stronger Villages
A Stronger Sri Lanka

Prajashakthi puts communities closer to decisions about what their villages need. It is an ambitious idea backed by serious public money. NewsLine begins following where the Rs.25 billion goes — village by village, district by district.

Big money. Bigger responsibility.

SAME PEOPLE.
SAME VILLAGES.
DIFFERENT FUTURE.
LET'S SEE.

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RS 25 BILLION TO FIGHT POVERTY - NOW FOLLOW THE MONEY

Prajashakthi puts communities closer to decisions about what their villages need. It is an ambitious idea backed by serious public money. NewsLine begins following where the Rs.25 billion goes - village by village, district by district.

NEWSLINE

There is much to commend in the principle behind Prajashakthi. People living in a village may understand what their community needs rather better than officials sitting behind desks in Colombo.

But when Rs.25 billion of public money enters the equation, good intentions are not enough. Accountability must travel with every rupee.

Prajashakthi is the Government's national poverty-eradication programme, designed around a significant change in the way development decisions are supposed to be made. Community Development Councils established at Grama Niladhari level are intended to identify local needs and propose projects rather than having every priority determined centrally.

The Government says these proposals can cover the social environment, food security, human-resource development, social protection, the production economy and supply chains and access.

Public officials assist the councils, while approved projects can ultimately be implemented through agreements involving the Community Development Council and the relevant public institution.

The thinking deserves serious consideration. When Cabinet originally approved Prajashakthi in February 2025, it acknowledged that despite decades of poverty-alleviation programmes and increasing expenditure, the number dependent upon assistance had continued to grow.

The Government said approximately one in six Sri Lankans was experiencing multidimensional poverty, with the overwhelming majority of those affected living in rural and estate communities.

Prajashakthi is intended to move people capable of participating in economic activity towards sustainable livelihoods while continuing protection for those genuinely requiring welfare.

Then comes the figure that turns an interesting social experiment into an important public-interest story.

The 2026 Budget allocated **Rs.25 billion** to Prajashakthi. Of that, **Rs.23 billion** is intended for projects at district level, with another Rs.2 billion earmarked for medium-scale national projects, training and research.

The Government has already launched its "A Thousand Projects in a Thousand Villages" initiative, under which 1,000 projects were scheduled to begin simultaneously around the country. Funds have been released to districts and projects are moving through the implementation machinery.

That means substantial amounts of public money are now travelling from the Treasury through different levels of government and ultimately into thousands of relatively small community projects.

And that is where NewsLine becomes interested.

Who decides which projects receive money? Who selects the members of the Community Development Councils? How are competing proposals assessed, and what safeguards prevent political influence, official favouritism or contractor influence from determining which village receives what?

There is another question once a project is approved. Who chooses the contractor, supplier or organisation that ultimately receives the public money, and can an ordinary citizen easily discover how much was paid, to whom and for what?

None of those questions suggests that something improper has happened. They are precisely the questions that should be asked before anything improper has the opportunity to happen.

Interestingly, the Government's own architecture for Prajashakthi recognises the need for scrutiny.

The programme envisages project identification, planning, monitoring and progress reviews across ministries, Provincial Councils, District and Divisional Secretariats, while specifically providing for community participation and social auditing.

Cabinet has also approved the drafting of legislation intended to give the Prajashakthi implementation mechanism statutory backing. If Parliament is eventually being asked to give this structure legal authority, both Parliament and the public have every reason to know precisely how the money flowing through it is being handled.

NewsLine therefore begins today what will be an continuing examination of Prajashakthi. We do so not because poverty alleviation should be opposed, but because a programme capable of genuinely improving livelihoods, creating sustainable village businesses and moving families permanently away from poverty deserves both support and rigorous scrutiny.

Success cannot be measured simply by how many projects were announced, how many ceremonies were held or even how many billions were "allocated".

The real measure comes afterwards: what was built, what did it cost, who received the money, who benefited and whether the project still works a year later.

We intend to establish how the **Rs.23 billion district allocation** was divided among Sri Lanka's 25 districts, which projects received funding, who proposed them, how they were evaluated and, wherever possible, who received the contracts or payments.

Then comes the most important question of all: did those projects actually improve people's lives?

There is an enormous difference between **Rs.25 billion allocated to eradicate poverty** and Rs.25 billion successfully used to eradicate poverty.

Prajashakthi could become an important experiment in genuinely community-driven development. It could equally become another enormous government programme in which thousands of relatively small allocations make the overall expenditure extraordinarily difficult for citizens to follow.

The difference will be transparency.

The Government says Prajashakthi belongs to the community. The community should therefore be able to see every rupee spent in its name.

Be that as it may, NewsLine intends to follow those rupees - **all Rs.25 billion of them.**

THE PEKOE TRAIL: WHO OWNS A PATH THAT NOBODY OWNS?

A 300-kilometre trail created with international donor support crosses State land, plantation estates, forests, villages and old public tracks. A private not-for-profit now owns its name, route and brand and charges for trail passes. That may be perfectly legitimate - but it raises a public-interest question worth answering clearly: where does stewardship end and ownership begin?

NEWSLINE

The Pekoe Trail may be one of the most imaginative additions to Sri Lanka's tourism product in years. Stretching roughly 300 kilometres across 22 stages through the Central Highlands, it joins tea estates, villages, forests, plantation roads and historic tracks into an internationally marketable walking experience.

But the very success of the project has produced an increasingly important question. Who exactly owns the Pekoe Trail?

The answer, intriguingly, depends upon what is meant by "the trail".

The organisation presently managing it, The Pekoe Trail Organisation, says emphatically that it **owns no land**. According to its own recently published explanation, every metre of the route lies on estate, State, forest or village land.

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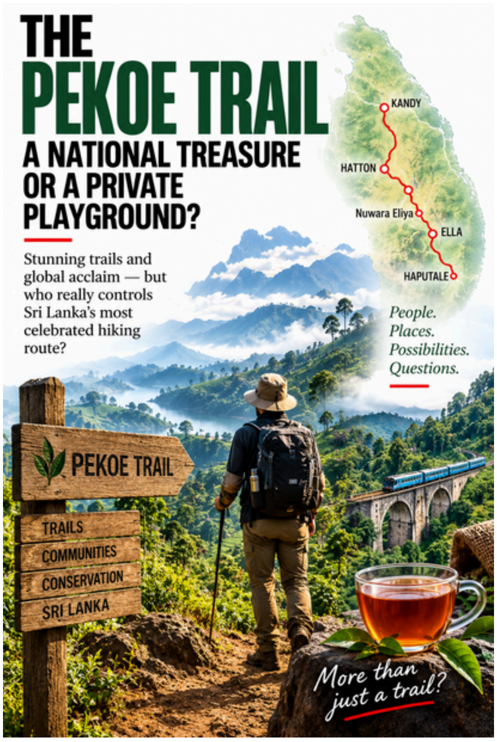
THE PEKOE TRAIL...

Yet the same organisation says that it owns the **Pekoe Trail name, route and brand**. It manages the trail, controls its digital assets and requires hikers to obtain trail passes for authorised access along sections of the route.

That distinction sits at the heart of the controversy.

The Pekoe Trail Organisation is formally the Pekoe Trail Company (Guarantee) Limited, incorporated in April 2024. It is not a conventional profit-making company with shareholders. It says it has no shareholders, pays no dividends, has unpaid directors and reinvests any surplus in maintaining the trail.

Its chairman is Malik J. Fernando of the Sri Lanka Tourism Alliance. The board also includes representatives associated with regional plantation companies and specialists in sustainable tourism and community impact.



The organisation says its two members were deliberately structured so neither plantation interests nor the tourism industry could control the trail alone. One is a guarantee company representing regional plantation companies and the other is the Sri Lanka Tourism Alliance, itself a private-sector not-for-profit body.

There is therefore an important distinction between **private ownership of land** and **private-sector stewardship of a tourism product**.

The Pekoe Trail was developed under the Tourism Resilience Project, a three-year programme financed by the European Union with additional support from USAID. Existing plantation tracks, village footpaths and heritage routes were mapped and joined into the tourism product now marketed internationally as The Pekoe Trail.

The original donor programme ended in 2024.

The organisation says the EU required that the route, brand, website and app be transferred to a dedicated not-for-profit destination-management organisation capable of sustaining the trail after donor funding ended.

There is nothing inherently improper about that arrangement. Indeed, without somebody maintaining signage, dealing with landowners, operating the digital infrastructure, marketing the product and keeping routes usable, an internationally recognised trail could quickly deteriorate.

But public-interest questions remain.

If part of a named tourism trail follows a road, track or pathway belonging to the State or already available to the public, does ownership of the **brand and mapped route** confer any proprietary right over the underlying path? Plainly, according to TPTO itself, it does not own the land.

And if walkers are being asked to purchase passes, the precise legal basis of those passes deserves to be understood. TPTO says a pass confirms authorised use because significant portions of the trail cross private estates and other land where access depends upon agreements with landowners.

That is considerably different from claiming ownership of a State road.

There is another important development. Since November 2025, TPTO says it has operated under the guidance of a Government-chaired Steering Committee created to coordinate the numerous ministries, departments, plantation interests and other bodies whose land or jurisdiction the route encounters.

That is significant because it brings the State formally into the governance structure.

Criticism of the trail's administration has nevertheless surfaced. A Sri Lankan publication reported in July that the project's creator, Miguel Cunat, had raised serious governance concerns in a resignation letter, including questions about transparency and the future direction of the project.

Those allegations require independent examination and a response from those presently managing the organisation before conclusions are drawn.

NEWSLINE therefore sees no justification at present for the simplistic allegation that Malik Fernando or Dilmah has somehow "taken ownership" of 300 kilometres of Sri Lankan land. The available documentation does **not** establish that.

But neither should a valuable tourism product built partly upon State land, public pathways and substantial international donor support be insulated from scrutiny merely because the entity managing it is not-for-profit.

There are straightforward questions that should be answered publicly: what precisely was transferred at the end of the donor-funded programme; who owns the intellectual property; what rights accompany ownership of the mapped route; what agreements permit access across State and plantation land; how trail-pass income is accounted for; and what powers ultimately reside with the Government-chaired Steering Committee.

Those answers may demonstrate that the structure is entirely appropriate.

If so, publishing them comprehensively would strengthen rather than weaken the Pekoe Trail.

Sri Lanka has something potentially exceptional here. The object should not be to destroy it with suspicion. It should be to make certain that an internationally recognised national tourism asset operates with a governance structure every stakeholder - Government, estates, communities, donors, walkers and taxpayers - can understand.

The trail may belong to nobody in the conventional sense. Its reputation, however, belongs very much to Sri Lanka.

Be that as it may.

THE TAXMAN IS COLLECTING - NOW SHOW US WHAT WE GET FOR IT

Government revenue jumped 27.2 per cent in the first half of 2026. That is good news for the Treasury. For taxpayers carrying the burden, the next question is what the State is doing with the money.

NEWSLINE

Sri Lanka's tax and non-tax revenue climbed to approximately **Rs.2.954 trillion during the first six months of 2026**, compared with Rs.2.322 trillion during the corresponding period last year, according to figures presented to Parliament by Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya.

That represents an increase of 27.2 per cent. Tax revenue alone rose by 25.9 per cent, from approximately Rs.2.152 trillion to Rs.2.711 trillion.

Collections by the Inland Revenue Department increased by 20.2 per cent to approximately Rs.1.248 trillion, while the Government attributed the broader improvement to stronger collections by Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise.

Non-tax revenue showed an even larger percentage increase, rising from Rs.169.6 billion to Rs.243.6 billion. But that number requires some qualification: approximately Rs.42 billion came from dividends transferred by the Central Bank.

On the face of it, this is welcome news.

A State that collects revenue more efficiently is better equipped to reduce deficits, service debt and provide public services without continually borrowing its way out of trouble.

But Sri Lanka's fiscal recovery cannot ultimately be measured merely by how efficiently the Government extracts revenue.

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THE TAXMAN...

For the businessman paying corporate tax, the employee facing PAYE, the family paying VAT and the consumer paying taxes embedded in almost everything purchased, there is a corresponding question: **what are we receiving for it?**

Better revenue collection becomes a genuine national achievement only when accompanied by better expenditure discipline, less waste, transparent procurement and demonstrably improved public services. The Treasury's numbers are moving strongly in the right direction.

Now the expenditure side of the ledger deserves exactly the same scrutiny.

NEW MAN IN THE COCKPIT - BUT CAN HE FIX SRILANKAN?

Vipul Misra takes over as CEO of the national carrier from inside the airline. The appointment is easy. Turning SriLankan into a commercially defensible national asset is considerably harder.

NEWSLINE

SriLankan Airlines has appointed **Vipul Misra as its new Chief Executive Officer with effect from September 9**, placing an existing senior executive in charge of one of the State's most politically sensitive commercial enterprises.

Misra previously served as the airline's Head of Engineering and Accountable Manager.

The appointment gives SriLankan a chief executive already familiar with the airline's aircraft, operations and internal structure.

That may shorten the learning curve, but familiarity alone will not resolve the larger problem confronting the national carrier.

SriLankan has for years occupied an uncomfortable position between national strategic importance and commercial reality.

Every new management team inherits essentially the same challenge: improve reliability, strengthen the fleet, grow commercially sensible routes and demonstrate that taxpayers are not being asked indefinitely to underwrite decisions taken without corresponding accountability.

The timing is particularly important.

Sri Lanka is trying to rebuild tourism while simultaneously coping with a Gulf conflict that has driven fuel prices upwards, disrupted aviation economics and complicated travel through one of the world's most important aviation regions.

Misra's engineering background may prove valuable in an airline where fleet availability and technical reliability go directly to revenue.

But his real test will not be his résumé.

It will be whether SriLankan can put more aircraft reliably into the air, carry passengers profitably and disclose enough information for its ultimate owners - the people of Sri Lanka - to judge whether the airline is finally travelling in the right direction.

RS.10 MILLION TO BUILD A HOME - BUT WILL THE MIGRANT WORKER GET A FAIR DEAL?

A new State-backed housing loan scheme for Sri Lankans working overseas offers up to Rs.10 million, with part of the interest subsidised by the Foreign Employment Bureau. It could be one of the more useful migrant-worker initiatives in years - provided access is simple, transparent and not swallowed by bureaucracy.

NEWSLINE

Sri Lankan migrant workers are to be offered housing loans of between **Rs.500,000 and Rs.10 million** under a new programme titled **"Ethera Diriya"**, scheduled for formal launch on September 10.

The scheme will be implemented through the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, with loans available through both State and private-sector banks. A portion of the interest cost will be reimbursed by the Bureau, reducing the burden on workers borrowing to build or purchase homes.

Repayment periods may extend up to ten years.

The broader lending initiative is aimed at Sri Lankans working overseas who can demonstrate formal employment and remittances through recognised banking channels. Housing is only part of it: financing may also be available for business development, vehicles and children's education.

It is difficult to quarrel with the principle.

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RS.10 MILLION...

Migrant workers have been treated for decades as a source of foreign exchange while the social and financial cost of migration has often been borne almost entirely by their families. If a worker spends years abroad earning the dollars Sri Lanka desperately needs, helping that worker convert those earnings into a permanent home is sound economic policy.

The test, however, will be in the fine print.

NewsLine would like to see clarity on the effective interest rate after the subsidy, eligibility requirements, collateral demanded by participating banks, how long the subsidy continues, and whether a worker returning permanently to Sri Lanka remains entitled to the concession.

There is also the perennial danger that an attractive Government announcement becomes far less attractive by the time it reaches a bank counter.

The people this programme is intended to assist are not merely foreign-exchange statistics. They are Sri Lankans who frequently leave spouses, parents and children behind for years at a time in order to earn what they cannot earn at home.

If Ethera Diriya genuinely helps them return to a house of their own, it deserves support.

But the measure of success will not be the number of press releases issued tomorrow.

It will be the number of migrant-worker families who actually receive the keys.

SOMETIMES SRI LANKA GETS IT RIGHT

WHO has recognised Sri Lanka for keeping malaria away and protecting mothers and newborns from tetanus for ten straight years. In a country accustomed to hearing about institutional failure, this is a reminder of what sustained public policy can achieve.

NEWSLINE

Sri Lanka has received formal recognition from the World Health Organization for maintaining two major public-health achievements for a full decade: its **malaria-free status**and the elimination of **maternal and neonatal tetanus**.

WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus presented the citation to Health and Mass Media Minister Dr Nalinda Jayatissa during the 79th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia in Dili, Timor-Leste.

Sri Lanka was formally certified malaria-free by WHO in 2016, four years after the country's last indigenous malaria cases were reported in 2012. It has now maintained that status for ten years despite imported cases and the continued presence of mosquitoes capable of transmitting the disease.

The country has also maintained the elimination of maternal and neonatal tetanus for a decade, supported by high vaccination coverage, safe-delivery practices and a primary healthcare network that, despite all its shortcomings, continues to deliver extraordinary outcomes relative to Sri Lanka's income level.

This is not a glamorous success story.

There are no megaprojects, ceremonial openings or ribbon-cuttings behind it.

There are instead public-health nurses, midwives, doctors, laboratory workers, epidemiologists, vaccination programmes, surveillance systems and decades of institutional memory.

That may be precisely why the achievement matters.

Sri Lanka came desperately close to eliminating malaria in the 1960s, only for the disease to return with devastating consequences.

WHO therefore warns that elimination cannot be treated as a permanent victory: surveillance must continue because malaria remains endemic in nearby countries and imported infection could re-establish local transmission.

That history contains a lesson considerably wider than healthcare.

Institutions work when expertise is respected, systems survive changes of government and programmes are allowed to continue long enough to produce results.

Sri Lanka spends a great deal of time discussing what is wrong with the country.

Today it is worth acknowledging something that went remarkably right.

EVERY 5,000 KM: IS THIS THE SAFETY CHECK OUR BUSES NEEDED?

Passenger vehicles are to face mandatory fitness requirements, including servicing every 5,000 kilometres or within three months. The intention is overdue. The harder question is whether Sri Lanka can enforce it without creating another certificate-for-sale industry.

NEWSLINE

Sri Lanka is preparing to make fitness testing mandatory for vehicles engaged in passenger transport as part of a wider attempt to improve roadworthiness and passenger safety.

Commissioner General of Motor Traffic Vice Marshal (Retd.) Thushara Idunil Fernando says passenger transport vehicles will be required to undergo a full service every 5,000 kilometres or within three months, with legal provisions to support the new regime.

The proposal comes ahead of a broader reform planned for 2028, when the existing emissions-test regime is expected to evolve into a more comprehensive roadworthiness system covering brakes, lights, tyres and other safety-critical components.

Few passengers who regularly travel in Sri Lankan buses will argue against tougher vehicle standards.

The more interesting question is whether the system will test vehicles or merely paperwork.

Sri Lanka has no shortage of regulations. Its recurring problem is enforcement.

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EVERY 5,000 KM...

A genuinely independent fitness regime could identify dangerously worn tyres, defective brakes, steering problems and poorly maintained suspension before they become the subject of a police report after an accident.

But if certificates become obtainable without meaningful inspection, the entire exercise risks becoming one more cost imposed on operators while doing little for passengers.

There is another practical question.

A service every 5,000 kilometres may sound generous to the private motorist. A bus operating continuously between major towns can cover that distance remarkably quickly. For high-mileage commercial vehicles, enforcement will therefore require reliable mileage records and a system capable of preventing manipulation.

The Department of Motor Traffic has already indicated that hundreds of qualified personnel and technicians are being recruited as the broader roadworthiness programme is developed.

That is encouraging.

But road safety will not improve because Sri Lanka introduces another certificate.

It will improve only when a dangerously unroadworthy bus cannot obtain one.

Be that as it may.

HORMUZ ON A KNIFE EDGE

US and Iran trade attacks on tankers as traffic through the world's most important energy chokepoint plunges - and 47 vessels off Sri Lanka suddenly take on greater significance

NEWSLINE

The Strait of Hormuz moved considerably closer to the edge yesterday as the United States and Iran traded attacks on shipping, oil surged back above US$100 a barrel and traffic through one of the world's most important maritime chokepoints fell to a fraction of normal levels.

For Sri Lanka, thousands of kilometres away from the fighting but sitting astride the Indian Ocean's great shipping routes, this is no longer a distant Middle Eastern confrontation.

Iran said it attacked 10 vessels near Hormuz after US forces struck five Iran-linked oil tankers. Washington said its action followed Iranian ballistic missile attacks against a US Navy vessel, while the US military disputed Iranian claims that American ships had been damaged.

The confrontation represents one of the most serious maritime escalations of the six-month conflict. At least one seafarer was reported killed and another missing as attacks spread across shipping routes already operating under extraordinary pressure.

The numbers from Hormuz tell their own story.

Only **six commodity vessels** were recorded passing through the Strait on Tuesday, according to preliminary Kpler data cited by Reuters. That was down from nine the previous day and a ten-day average of about 12.

Before the war began, the Strait typically handled around **125 large commercial vessels every day**, carrying oil, liquefied natural gas and other cargo. Approximately 20 per cent of the world's daily crude oil and LNG supply traditionally passed through this narrow stretch of water.

Some vessels may be crossing with their tracking transponders switched off, making precise measurement difficult. But even allowing for these so-called dark crossings, Reuters reports that roughly one-third of Gulf oil exports remain missing compared with normal flows.

Markets are beginning to price the danger accordingly.

Brent crude climbed above **US$100 a barrel yesterday for the first time in six weeks**, having risen roughly 25 per cent since early August. An estimated 10 million barrels a day of oil exports remain absent from the market as a consequence of the conflict, according to shipping-data estimates cited by Reuters.

That matters enormously to Sri Lanka.

A country dependent upon imported fuel does not need a tanker to be attacked in Colombo harbour to feel the consequences of Hormuz. Sustained oil above US$100 eventually works its way through fuel costs, electricity generation, transport, aviation, manufacturing, inflation and the country's foreign-exchange requirement.

And now there is a specifically Sri Lankan dimension.

Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath has confirmed that approximately **47 vessels are being monitored in international waters near Sri Lanka**, including several Iranian vessels.

The United States Embassy in Colombo contacted the Foreign Ministry about the Iranian vessels and asked whether Sri Lankan authorities were aware of their presence and monitoring them.

Herath has been equally clear about what those 47 vessels are not.

They are **not inside Sri Lankan territorial waters**. None has sought permission or assistance from the Sri Lankan Government and Colombo says it has provided no logistical or operational support.

The Navy is monitoring their movements.

That distinction is important and should not be blurred.

But so is the timing.

Iranian-linked shipping is under direct American military and economic pressure.

Five Iran-linked tankers have just been rendered inoperable in attacks attributed to US forces, while Iran is retaliating against vessels it regards as violating restrictions around Hormuz.

Against that background, the presence of Iranian vessels among a much larger group of ships in international waters near Sri Lanka inevitably attracts attention from Washington.

Sri Lanka must therefore do something simultaneously simple and difficult: protect its sovereignty, comply with international law, maintain freedom of navigation and avoid becoming entangled in somebody else's war.

The immediate danger remains centred on Hormuz. But every tanker diverted, every ship waiting for instructions, every vessel attempting to avoid a blockade and every cargo searching for an alternative route pushes the consequences further into the Indian Ocean.

That is why the **47 ships off Sri Lanka matter**.

They do not mean Iran has entered Sri Lankan waters. They do not mean Colombo is assisting Tehran.

And they certainly do not justify turning ordinary commercial shipping activity in international waters into something more sinister without evidence.

But Washington is watching.

Colombo is watching.

And after yesterday's attacks on tankers around Hormuz, shipowners, insurers and energy markets are watching too.

Be that as it may, the Strait of Hormuz is no longer merely threatening the world's energy lifeline.

The shooting has reached the ships carrying it.

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"Questioning The Answers"

GOVERN, DON'T JUST PROSECUTE

Justice for yesterday matters. But a government is ultimately judged by what it builds for tomorrow. As for cancer-afflicted "Kanthi" all she wants is to live another day.

NEWSLINE EDITORIAL

There is more to governing Sri Lanka than prosecuting those who governed it before.

That does not mean corruption should be forgotten, wrongdoing excused or public money stolen with impunity. If politicians or officials have broken the law, investigate them, charge them where the evidence warrants it and let independent courts decide their guilt.

Indeed, a country that repeatedly allowed political power to become protection from accountability desperately needed that change.

But there is an equally dangerous line that any government must be careful not to cross: the point at which justice begins to look like political revenge dressed in respectable clothes.

Investigations must follow evidence, not personalities. Prosecutions must follow the law, not the political calendar. And justice must be visibly even-handed enough that today's government would willingly submit itself to precisely the same standards tomorrow.

Because while Colombo talks endlessly about who is being investigated, summoned, arrested, remanded or charged, another clock is ticking.

It is the economy.

The latest figures cited in reporting on the UN High Commissioner's assessment are sobering. Interest payments alone account for about **49.38 per cent of Government revenue in the 2026 Budget**. Add debt repayments and the figure rises to approximately **82.59 per cent**.

Think about what that means.

For every hundred rupees the State collects, an extraordinary proportion is already spoken for by the financial consequences of yesterday.

The IMF says Sri Lanka has made genuine progress. Debt restructuring, fiscal discipline and higher revenues have improved the numbers. Public debt relative to GDP has fallen substantially from the depths of the crisis.

But the IMF also says debt vulnerabilities remain high. Sri Lanka is still exposed to external shocks, energy costs, climate events and policy mistakes.

And spreadsheets do not vote.
People do.

The political danger begins when the macroeconomic recovery celebrated in Colombo ceases to resemble the economy experienced in the kitchen.

A family does not measure economic recovery through debt-to-GDP ratios. It measures recovery at the supermarket, the electricity meter, the fuel pump, the pharmacy and at the end of the month when the bills have been paid and somebody looks inside the purse.

Energy prices matter. Tourism matters. The Middle East matters. Global instability matters. None of those things is necessarily within the control of the Sri Lankan Government.

But explaining hardship is not the same as relieving it.
Governments throughout our history have discovered that distinction rather late.

Sri Lanka has already seen what happens when economic pressure accumulates beneath apparently manageable politics. For months people grumble. They adjust. They borrow. They cut something from the shopping list. They postpone the doctor's visit. They blame the previous government, the present government, the IMF, the dollar, the weather and one another.

Then something changes.
The pressure reaches the kitchen.

That is where politics becomes dangerous.

When ordinary people conclude that sacrifice is endless, that improvement belongs mainly to statistics and that their lives are becoming harder rather than easier, discontent acquires a character of its own.

Sri Lanka has met that creature before.

The Government should therefore resist any temptation to believe that the prosecution of yesterday's rulers can substitute for the construction of tomorrow's country. Accountability is essential, but accountability does not create exports, attract investment, build factories, improve schools, produce affordable electricity or put disposable income into people's pockets.

Nor should anyone imagine that public anger can permanently be directed backwards.
Eventually people stop asking who caused their problems.
They ask who is governing now.
That moment is politically unforgiving.

This Government was given an extraordinary mandate partly because Sri Lankans were exhausted by corruption, privilege and the apparent immunity of the powerful. It therefore has both the authority and the responsibility to pursue genuine accountability.

But its greater historical test is whether it can transform that mandate into economic opportunity.

Prosecute corruption. Recover stolen assets where the law and evidence permit. Reform institutions so that tomorrow's corruption becomes harder than yesterday's.
Then govern.

Create jobs. Reduce the cost of doing business. Protect the vulnerable. Bring investment. Make energy competitive. Grow exports.

Strengthen tourism. Spend public money intelligently and demonstrate that every additional rupee extracted from an already burdened citizen is being put to productive use.

Above all, make certain that justice never becomes selective enough to be mistaken for vengeance.
Because another failure of government will not necessarily produce the same political response Sri Lanka witnessed before.

Public frustration is unpredictable. When economic pain, disappointment and distrust converge, nobody gets to choose what kind of political beast emerges from them.
Sri Lanka has already experienced its *déjà vu*.

It would be reckless to assume the next manifestation will look the same.
As for "Kanthi" cancer afflicted and stressed by the irregularity of the medicine she needs and trying to balance a household of three with RS 37,000 a month, all she wants is to live just another day.

Be that as it may, justice can punish the failures of yesterday. Only good government can prevent the anger of tomorrow.

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