NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

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15 GUILTY. NINE WALK FREE. SEVEN YEARS AFTER EASTER SUNDAY, THE COURT HAS SPOKEN.

Fifteen defendants have been convicted in Sri Lanka's principal Easter Sunday bombing trial. Nine have been acquitted. Sentencing was continuing as NEWSLINE prepared this edition.

Seven years after suicide bombers walked into churches and hotels on Easter Sunday and turned a morning of worship and celebration into one of the darkest days in Sri Lanka's modern history, a Colombo court has delivered its judgment in the principal criminal prosecution arising from the attacks.

The Permanent High Court Trial-at-Bar found **15 of the 24 defendants guilty** and acquitted the remaining **nine**, ordering their release. The case included Naufer Moulavi and arose from allegations that the defendants conspired with, aided or assisted those responsible for the coordinated attacks of April 21, 2019.

The scale of the prosecution was extraordinary. The Attorney General's case contained **23,270 charges**, including allegations of murder, conspiracy to commit terrorism and offences involving firearms and explosives.

Proceedings stretched across years before the three-judge bench comprising Navaratne Marasinghe, Ramanathan Kannan and Sujeewa Nissanka.

The attacks struck three churches and three major hotels during Easter services and celebrations, killing more than 260 people and injuring hundreds more. The men who actually carried out the suicide bombings died in the attacks.

But today's judgment does something important that years of political argument could not do: it determines the criminal responsibility of the people who were actually before this court, on the evidence placed before it.

It does **not**, however, necessarily close the larger Easter Sunday story.

Separate questions concerning intelligence failures, the conduct of state officials and allegations surrounding the wider circumstances of the attacks have generated other proceedings and investigations. Those matters should not be conflated with today's convictions, but neither should today's convictions be presented as answering questions that were not before this Trial-at-Bar.

For the families who buried husbands, wives, children and parents after April 21, 2019, the legal process has taken more than seven years to reach this point.

Fifteen men have now been convicted.

Nine have been acquitted.

The court has spoken on the case before it. Sri Lanka must now be equally determined to establish the truth wherever questions still remain.

SIVARASA ANOJAN: NOW THE LAWYERS AND A FORMER PRESIDENT STEP IN

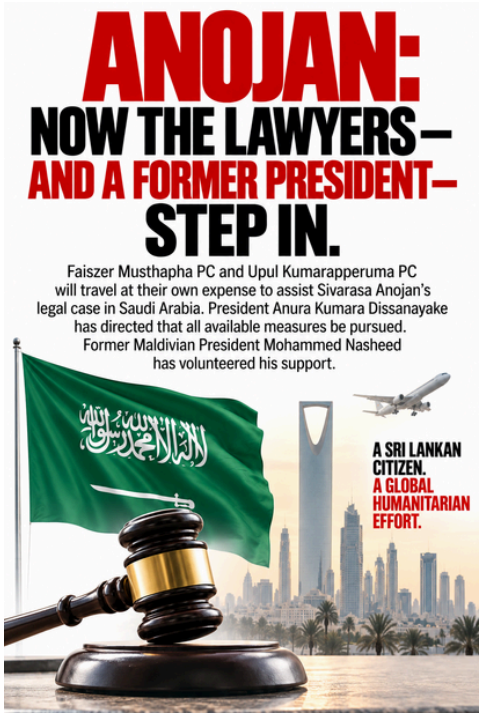
Two President's Counsel will travel at their own expense as Sri Lanka widens the legal and diplomatic effort to save Sivarasa Anojan from a death sentence in Saudi Arabia.

The effort to save Sivarasa Anojan has moved into a new phase,
with Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath telling Parliament yesterday that President's Counsel **Faiszer Musthapha and Upul Kumarapperuma** have undertaken to assist with his legal representation in Saudi Arabia.

Significantly, Herath said the two lawyers would travel using **their own personal resources**, while the Government has undertaken to meet the legal expenses associated with Anojan's case. The Sri Lankan Embassy in Riyadh remains in contact with Anojan and is examining the remaining avenues available under Saudi law.

The Government is also proposing a parliamentary delegation led by Deputy Speaker Rizvie Salih to carry an appeal from President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, while Herath intends to raise the case directly with his Saudi counterpart. The objectives include a pardon, commutation of the death sentence or another form of relief.

There is now another potentially important diplomatic dimension.



Former Maldivian President **Mohamed Nasheed has volunteered his assistance to Musthapha and Kumarapperuma** in pursuing a humanitarian appeal to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

NEWSLINE reliably understands that Nasheed has invited the two President's Counsel for discussions on how that intervention might be pursued.

For Anojan and his family, none of these interventions guarantees an outcome.

But something important has changed.

The lawyers are stepping forward. The Government is moving. A former President has offered to help.

Now every available legal, diplomatic and humanitarian door must be tried. And Sri Lanka's President is very much behind this initiative.

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22A: NO REFERENDUM. NOW THE DECISION BELONGS TO PARLIAMENT.

The Supreme Court has cleared the central constitutional hurdle facing the proposed extension of judges' retirement ages. But it has also required changes to the Bill.

Sri Lanka will **not require a referendum** to enact the proposed 22nd Amendment to the Constitution extending the retirement ages of superior court judges.

Speaker Jagath Wickramaratne announced the Supreme Court determination in Parliament yesterday. The Court held that neither the 22nd Amendment nor any part of it requires approval by the people at a referendum under Article 83 of the Constitution. The constitutional amendment can therefore proceed with the required special parliamentary majority.



But the Court did not simply wave the legislation through unchanged.

It directed a wording change concerning the age of 67 and required a second proviso specifying that the proposed six-year term limit would **not apply to the person holding the office of Chief Justice when the amendment comes into operation**.

The accompanying Judicature (Amendment) Bill was found not inconsistent with the Constitution and can be passed by a simple majority. Parliamentary debate on the legislation is scheduled for September 24 and 25.

That changes the argument.

For weeks the question was whether the Constitution itself would require the people to decide.

The Supreme Court has answered that question.

Now Parliament must decide whether extending the tenure of serving judges is something it should do simply because constitutionally it can.

ANTI-CORRUPTION BILL: THIS TIME THE COURT DRAWS A MUCH HARDER LINE

Most of the Government's amendments can proceed. But one provision cannot become law in its present form without both a two-thirds majority and the approval of the people.

On the same morning that the Government received an important constitutional clearance on 22A, the Supreme Court delivered a considerably more complicated answer on its proposed changes to Sri Lanka's Anti-Corruption Act.

Much of the Anti-Corruption (Amendment) Bill can proceed by simple parliamentary majority. But the Court identified several provisions requiring greater constitutional protection.

Most significantly, **Clause 17 in its present form cannot become law merely through an ordinary parliamentary vote**.

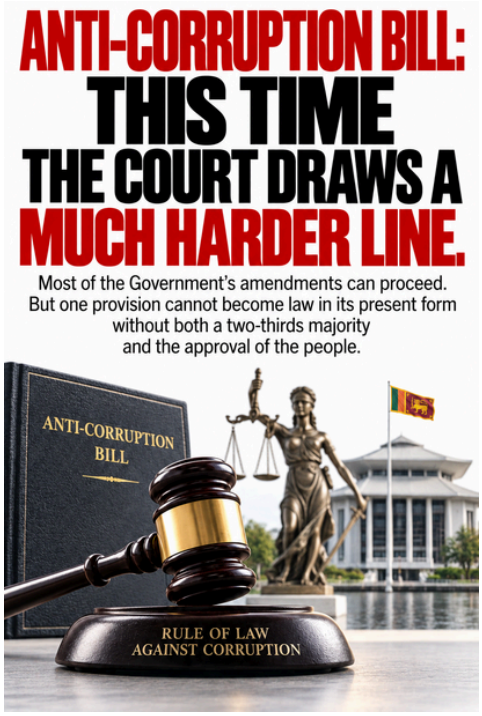
The Supreme Court determined that the provision is inconsistent with the Constitution and would require both the special majority contemplated by Article 84(2) **and approval by the people at a referendum**.

Clause 6(7) requires a special parliamentary majority, while the Court found Clause 7 inconsistent with the equality guarantee in Article 12(1), determining that the proposed repeal involved should be withdrawn unless supported by the required special majority.

Other specified provisions can proceed with a simple majority.

That distinction matters.

Sri Lanka has spent years strengthening its anti-corruption architecture while simultaneously trying to convince its own citizens and international partners that the rules of public accountability are becoming stronger rather than weaker.



Parliament can amend those rules.

But yesterday the Supreme Court reminded it that there are constitutional limits to how far some of those changes can go without asking the people themselves.

RS 17.2 BILLION FOR ELECTRICITY RELIEF. WHO EXACTLY GETS THE RELIEF?

Government is putting another Rs 17.213 billion before Parliament for electricity-bill relief. The number is large. What matters to households is what actually disappears from the bill.

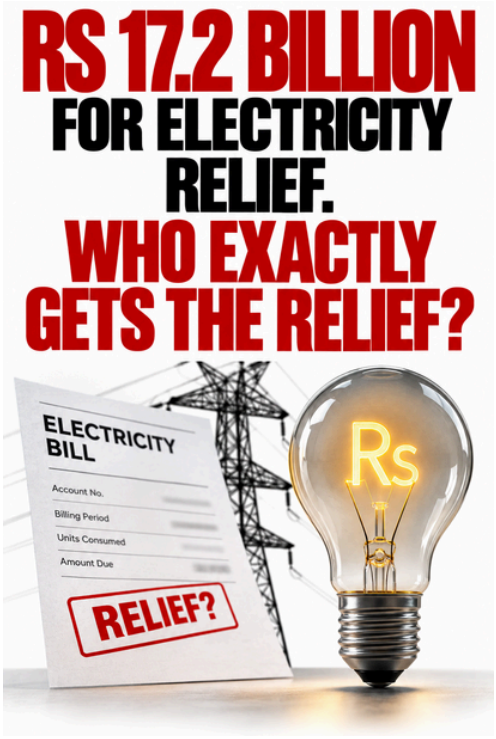
A supplementary estimate for **Rs 17.213 billion** was scheduled to be presented to Parliament yesterday to provide relief to consumers facing electricity bills. Parliamentary business was rearranged to accommodate the measure, with approval expected today.

That is a substantial amount of public money. But the test of electricity relief is not the size of the announcement.

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RS 17.2 BILLION...

It is the effect on the monthly bill paid by the household, the small shop, the restaurant and the struggling business.



Sri Lankans have lived through repeated electricity tariff increases during the economic crisis, followed by adjustments as the power sector recovered.

So there is a simple question worth following when the details emerge:

Rs 17.2 billion is being spent on relief. How much relief will the individual consumer actually feel?

TOURISM PASSES $2 BILLION. BUT THERE'S A PROBLEM INSIDE THE NUMBER.

Sri Lanka is attracting tourists. It is just not extracting as much income from each one and the country now has four months to chase an ambitious revenue target.

Tourism earnings passed **US$2 billion** during the first eight months of 2026, reaching US$2.061 billion.

At first glance, that is a welcome number.
Look closer.

Revenue was **10 per cent lower than during the corresponding period last year**, while arrivals declined by only about 2 per cent. Estimated spending per visitor dropped from approximately US$1,462 to US$1,343 - an 8.1 per cent fall.

Sri Lanka has already reduced its 2026 tourism revenue target from US$5 billion to **US$4.2 billion**. To reach even that revised target, the industry would need to generate approximately US$2.14 billion during the final four months of the year - more than it earned during the first eight months.

August did provide one encouraging signal: monthly tourism revenue increased 2.1 per cent year-on-year, the first such rise in ten months.

But visitor numbers alone cannot be the measure of tourism success.

Sri Lanka needs tourists. It also needs tourists who spend.

OIL AND GAS: SRI LANKA WANTS TO GO LOOKING AGAIN

A ministerial committee has approved the next step towards inviting investment for petroleum exploration as Sri Lanka once again looks beneath its own waters for energy.



Sri Lanka is preparing to seek investment for **oil and natural-gas exploration**, with a ministerial committee approving the calling of investment proposals.

The move revives one of the country's longest-running economic possibilities: whether commercially recoverable petroleum resources can finally be established and developed around Sri Lanka.

Current energy-sector reporting lists the decision among the Government's latest exploration initiatives.

Sri Lanka has been here before. Exploration interest has repeatedly produced expectations without creating a commercial petroleum industry.

This time the important questions will be the terms offered to investors, how exploration rights are awarded, what the State receives if commercially viable reserves are discovered and - crucially - how transparent the process will be.

Because finding oil would be important.

Knowing who gets what if we find it may be just as important.

100 MM OF RAIN POSSIBLE. THIS ONE IS WORTH WATCHING.

A depression in the Bay of Bengal is not expected to hit Sri Lanka directly, but the weather system is strengthening the conditions producing heavy rain over parts of the country.

The low-pressure area northeast of Sri Lanka has developed into a **depression** and is expected to strengthen into a deep depression within 24 hours.

The Department of Meteorology says the system itself is not expected to have a direct impact on Sri Lanka, but the associated wind flow means rainy conditions in the southwest are expected to continue.

Western, Sabaragamuwa, Central and North-Western provinces, together with Galle and Matara districts, can expect showers or thundershowers, with **falls of around 100 mm possible in some locations**.

Winds of around 40–50 km/h are also possible in several areas.

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100 MM OF RAIN...

For a country that repeatedly discovers the vulnerability of its drains, roads, slopes and flood-control infrastructure only after the rain arrives, this is the useful part of a weather warning:



We have been warned before the water comes.

HORMUZ: IRAN SAYS IT CAN REOPEN THE STRAIT IN SEVEN DAYS

After months of war and disruption to one of the world's most important energy routes, Tehran has put an offer on the table. The price: Washington must ease military pressure and lift its blockade of Iranian ports.

Iran says it could reopen the **Strait of Hormuz within seven days** if the United States takes initial steps to ease military pressure and lift its blockade of Iranian ports.

The proposal, disclosed by a senior Iranian official as world leaders gather for the UN General Assembly in New York, comes amid tentative signals from both Washington and Tehran that negotiations could resume. US President Donald Trump has said he would be open to meeting Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian.

But the situation at sea remains extraordinarily dangerous.

Preliminary shipping data showed that just **two commodity vessels crossed Hormuz on Monday**, compared with around 125 large commercial vessels a day before the conflict began. Two other vessels were reportedly struck in separate incidents around the strait, although responsibility has not been established.

The importance to Sri Lanka is difficult to overstate. Hormuz normally carries roughly **20 per cent of global crude oil and LNG supplies**, meaning disruption feeds directly into international energy prices and ultimately into the cost of fuel-dependent economies.



Markets immediately noticed the diplomatic opening. Oil fell to a two-week low as traders absorbed both Iran's Hormuz proposal and developments in Saudi Arabia.

There is still a very large distance between an offer and an agreement.

But after months in which Hormuz has largely been discussed in terms of missiles, ships and blockades, there is finally another word in the conversation:
Negotiation.



SAUDI ARABIA FINDS ANOTHER WAY OUT

With Hormuz strangled, Saudi Arabia has restarted the pipeline that takes its oil in the opposite direction - across the kingdom to the Red Sea.

Saudi Arabia has restarted its strategically vital **East-West oil pipeline**, potentially restoring a route capable of carrying millions of barrels of crude every day without relying on the Strait of Hormuz.

The pipeline transports oil from Saudi Arabia's eastern producing regions across the country to the Red Sea port of **Yanbu**. It had been shut since September 13 following drone attacks which halted crude loadings there.



The pipeline restarted yesterday at a relatively low pumping rate.

Saudi Aramco is seeking to restore flows to around **four million barrels a day**, although one security source told Reuters that a complete restoration could take weeks. One cargo was already scheduled to load at Yanbu for China.

The significance goes far beyond Saudi Arabia. Four million barrels a day represents roughly **4 per cent of global oil supply**. Restoring the route therefore gives Riyadh a substantial means of getting crude onto world markets while avoiding the severely disrupted Hormuz passage.

Oil prices responded quickly.

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SAUDI ARABIA FINDS...

Brent fell by more than $2 a barrel during trading as markets considered the prospect of additional Saudi supply alongside Iran's offer to reopen Hormuz.

For Sri Lanka, that movement matters. Every sustained fall in international oil prices potentially eases pressure on the country's import bill, foreign exchange requirements and eventually domestic fuel pricing - although the extent and timing of any local benefit depend on purchasing, pricing and exchange-rate conditions.

There is an interesting irony here.

One Middle Eastern development is raising hopes that **Hormuz itself might reopen**.

The other demonstrates why Saudi Arabia has spent years ensuring that, when necessary, **some of its oil does not have to pass through Hormuz at all.**

SHEIKH AHMED BIN RASHID AL MAKTOUM DIES AT 76

A member of the generation that helped build modern Dubai has passed away.

Dubai is mourning Sheikh Ahmed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, a senior member of its ruling family and the youngest brother of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai.



Sheikh Ahmed died aged 76, with Dubai declaring ten days of official mourning and flags ordered to be flown at half-mast.

But his story stretches considerably beyond membership of the Al Maktoum family.

Born in 1950, Sheikh Ahmed was the youngest son of Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, the former Ruler of Dubai whose leadership was central to transforming the emirate into a modern commercial centre.

Sheikh Ahmed served as Deputy Chairman of Dubai Police and Public Security and previously held military responsibilities. He was also active in business and property development.

Perhaps his most visible legacy, however, is in sport.

He was closely associated with Al Wasl Sports Club from its formative years and became one of the important figures in the development of horse racing in Dubai.

He founded Jebel Ali Racecourse in the early 1990s and became internationally known as a racehorse owner and breeder.

His sporting interests extended further. He established the Dubai International Marine Club and was associated with the development of the Victory Team, which helped put Dubai on the international offshore powerboat racing map.

Funeral prayers were held at Za'abeel Grand Mosque, led by his brother Sheikh Mohammed and attended by senior members of the ruling family.

Sheikh Ahmed belonged to a generation that witnessed an extraordinary transformation: from the early years of the United Arab Emirates to the emergence of Dubai as one of the world's most recognisable commercial, aviation, tourism and sporting centres.

His life was intertwined with much of that journey.

For Dubai, his passing therefore represents more than the death of a member of its ruling family.

It marks the passing of another figure from the generation that helped shape the emirate during some of the most consequential decades of its modern history.

Be that as it may, buildings and skylines may define modern Dubai to much of the world.

The story behind them is also the story of a generation of people who helped build the institutions that made that transformation possible.

