Issue No. 384 24th SEPTEMBER 2026 **CEYLON INDEPENDENT** @+94 77 230 0305

"Questioning The Answers"

260 YEARS. NOW WE KNOW WHO GOT WHAT.

Yesterday NEWSLINE reported the convictions in the Easter Sunday trial. The detailed sentences came too late for that edition. We now know that the 15 men convicted did not receive identical terms. Five were sentenced to 200 years, five to 220 years, four to 240 years and one, Abdul Manaf Mohamed Firdous, to 260 years rigorous imprisonment. Their movable and immovable property is also to be confiscated by the State.

5 MEN	5 MEN	4 MEN	1 MAN
200 YEARS RIGOROUS IMPRISONMENT	**220** YEARS RIGOROUS IMPRISONMENT	**240** YEARS RIGOROUS IMPRISONMENT	**260** YEARS RIGOROUS IMPRISONMENT Abdul Manaf Mohamed Firdous

ALL 15 MEN

MOVABLE AND IMMOVABLE PROPERTY TO BE CONFISCATED BY THE STATE.

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NEWSLINE

The verdict was already enormous, but the sentencing details now make its scale considerably clearer.

The Colombo Permanent High Court Trial-at-Bar has imposed terms ranging from 200 to 260 years of rigorous imprisonment on the 15 men convicted in the mammoth prosecution arising from the 2019 Easter Sunday terrorist attacks.

Abdul Manaf Mohamed Firdous received the heaviest punishment, 260 years rigorous imprisonment. Mohamed Saribu Adam Lebbe, also known as Gafoor Mama, Hayathu Mohamed Ahmed Milhan, Mohamed Ibrahim Sadiq Abdullah and Mohamed Ibrahim Zahid Abdul Haq were each sentenced to 240 years.

Mohamed Ibrahim Mohamed Naufar, better known as Naufar Moulavi, received 220 years. Mohamed Rameez Mohamed Sajith, Abdul Latheef Mohamed Safi, Mohamed Mustafa Mohamed Haris and Rasiq Raza Hussein were also sentenced to 220 years each.

The five 200-year sentences were imposed on Mohamed Anwar Mohamed Rizkan, Mohamed Mansoor Mohamed Samsudeen, Huseinul Rizvi Khalid Sameer, Mohamed Hanifa Zainul Abdeen and Kachchi Mohamed Mohamed Jemsith. The result is therefore five sentences of 200 years, five of 220 years, four of 240 years and one of 260 years.

That detail is important because some of the earliest information emerging after the judgment suggested that all 15 convicted men had received identical 220-year terms.

The fuller sentencing information subsequently established that the court differentiated substantially between the defendants.

There was another significant order which deserves attention.

The movable and immovable property belonging to all 15 convicted men is to be confiscated by the State, adding a substantial financial consequence to prison terms which already amount, in practical terms, to incarceration for the remainder of their lives.

The sentences followed one of the largest criminal prosecutions Sri Lanka has ever conducted.

The Attorney General's case contained 23,270 charges and the proceedings lasted almost five years, with more than 2,300 prosecution witnesses giving evidence before the three-member bench comprising High Court Judges Navaratne Marasinghe, Ramanathan Kannan and Sujeewa Nissanka.

The 15 men were convicted over their involvement in the coordinated suicide attacks of 21 April 2019, when churches and luxury hotels were targeted on Easter Sunday. Hundreds were killed or injured, but seven years later there is little purpose in NEWSLINE retelling today what Sri Lanka already knows painfully well about that morning.

What is new is the punishment imposed on the men whose guilt this particular court found proved.

The difference between the lowest and highest sentences is 60 years, demonstrating that the court did not simply attach one enormous number uniformly to everyone before it.

Equally important is what happened to nine other defendants. They were acquitted because the prosecution failed to establish the charges against them to the standard required by criminal law, and they were released.

That should not be regarded as an inconvenient footnote to the convictions.

In a case carrying the enormous public emotion of Easter Sunday, the ability of a court to distinguish between those against whom guilt was proved and those against whom it was not is part of the integrity of the judicial process itself.

Fifteen convictions and nine acquittals emerged from the same trial.

Justice requires both outcomes to be respected because a criminal court exists to determine individual guilt on evidence, not to satisfy a predetermined expectation that everyone placed before it must be convicted.

The prison terms themselves are so large that their ordinary mathematical meaning becomes almost irrelevant. Whether a person receives 200, 220, 240 or 260 years, the practical expectation is imprisonment for life, subject of course to whatever rights of appeal or other legal processes remain available.

That does not mean every question surrounding Easter Sunday has now been answered.

Questions concerning advance intelligence, institutional failures and allegations concerning other actors are separate from the criminal responsibility established against these 15 men and should remain separate unless evidence and the courts bring them together.

This judgment establishes what was proved against the defendants who stood before this court. It should neither be diminished by unresolved questions elsewhere nor artificially enlarged into proof of matters the court was not deciding.

Yesterday the important news was that 15 men had been convicted and nine acquitted. The information that arrived afterwards completes that part of the picture: the punishment ranges from 200 years to 260 years, together with confiscation of the property of those convicted.

For the 15 men the court found guilty, the arithmetic is extraordinary. Its practical meaning is considerably simpler: barring a successful legal intervention, they face spending the rest of their lives in prison.

Be that as it may, the scale of the punishment should not obscure the principle demonstrated by the verdict itself.

In one of Sri Lanka's most emotionally charged criminal prosecutions, the court convicted where it found the case proved and acquitted where it did not.

"Questioning The Answers"

ANOJAN: THE HUMANITARIAN APPEAL HAS NOW REACHED THE MALDIVES

Faiszer Musthapha PC MP and Upul Kumarapperuma PC have met former Maldivian President Mohamed Nasheed as Sri Lanka's effort to save Sivarasa Anojan from a death sentence moves beyond Colombo. Nasheed has offered to assist on humanitarian grounds. The two lawyers are expected to travel onwards to Saudi Arabia, at their own expense, to pursue the legal avenues still available.

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NEWSLINE

The effort to save Sivarasa Anojan from a death sentence in Saudi Arabia has entered another stage, with President's Counsel Faiszer Musthapha MP and President's Counsel Upul Kumarapperuma meeting former Maldivian President Mohamed Nasheed to discuss possible humanitarian intervention.

Nasheed has offered his assistance after meeting the two Sri Lankan lawyers in the Maldives. While describing the conduct that led to Anojan's case as deplorable, the former President indicated that he was prepared to assist on humanitarian grounds as Sri Lanka attempts to secure relief for the expatriate worker.

The distinction is important. The effort is not an attempt to defend the social-media material that resulted in Anojan's prosecution, nor is it an attempt to challenge Saudi Arabia's sovereign right to enforce its laws.

The objective is to use the legal, diplomatic and humanitarian avenues available within the Saudi system to prevent the death sentence from being carried out.

Musthapha and Kumarapperuma are expected to travel onwards to Saudi Arabia, where they intend to work with Anojan's Saudi legal representatives and examine the remaining possibilities for intervention.

Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath told Parliament that both President's Counsel had volunteered their services and would meet their own travel expenses.

The Government, however, is not leaving the financial burden of Anojan's formal legal defence to the two lawyers or his family.

Herath told Parliament that Sri Lanka will meet the legal costs because Anojan is a registered worker with the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, while expenses already incurred by the family are also to be reimbursed.

The Sri Lankan Embassy in Riyadh remains directly involved and is maintaining contact with Anojan while examining the legal avenues available before the higher Saudi courts. The Foreign Ministry has said it continues to engage Saudi authorities through diplomatic channels and will provide all possible assistance.

The case has escalated dramatically from the original punishment imposed on Anojan. A Saudi criminal court initially sentenced him to five years imprisonment, imposed a fine of three million Saudi riyals, ordered confiscation of the relevant device and directed closure of the social-media account concerned after finding him guilty under Saudi cybercrime legislation.

An appeal was subsequently lodged seeking a reduction of that punishment. Saudi prosecutors, however, separately appealed for a more severe penalty under Sharia law. The appellate court accepted the prosecution's position, treated the conduct as an offence involving insult to the Prophet Muhammad and imposed the death sentence.

That sequence is significant because the legal effort has not ended with the appellate judgment. Sri Lanka is now examining what further review may be available within Saudi Arabia's judicial system while simultaneously pursuing clemency through diplomatic channels.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake is preparing a formal appeal to Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud seeking clemency.

The Government is also proposing a cross-party parliamentary delegation led by Deputy Speaker Rizvie Salih to carry the appeal, while Foreign Minister Herath intends to raise Anojan's case directly with his Saudi counterpart.

Nasheed's involvement now adds another dimension.

As a former President of the Muslim-majority Maldives and an internationally recognised political figure, his intervention could provide an additional humanitarian channel at a moment when careful diplomacy matters considerably more than public confrontation.

There is also a lesson here from Sri Lanka's own history. The execution of Rizana Nafeek in Saudi Arabia in 2013 remains deeply embedded in the country's memory.

Whatever the legal differences between the two cases, that experience demonstrates why diplomatic and legal intervention must begin while avenues remain open rather than when they are almost exhausted.

There can be no guarantee of success in Anojan's case. Saudi Arabia's judicial processes must be respected, and ultimately any judicial review, commutation or act of clemency lies within Saudi authority.

But Sri Lanka can determine the quality of its own response. It can ensure that competent lawyers are involved, that every remaining legal remedy is examined, that diplomatic relationships are used intelligently and that a citizen facing the ultimate punishment is not left to navigate a foreign legal system alone.

That is what is now beginning to happen. Two President's Counsel have stepped forward at their own expense, the Foreign Ministry and Sri Lankan Embassy are engaged, the President is preparing an appeal, a parliamentary delegation is proposed and a former President of the Maldives has now offered his assistance.

The next stage will be Saudi Arabia, where legal representation and humanitarian diplomacy will have to work together. For Anojan and his family, what matters now is not how many people say they are concerned, but whether that combined effort can convert concern into the one outcome that matters most: saving his life.

22A: SO WHO EXACTLY GETS TWO MORE YEARS?

Parliament begins its two-day debate today on the Twenty-Second Amendment after the Supreme Court determined that no referendum is required. But tucked inside the Court's determination is something considerably more interesting than the headline. It specifically protects the person holding office as Chief Justice when the new law comes into operation from a proposed six-year limit. The constitutional argument may be settled. The question of who actually benefits deserves a much closer look.

NEWSLINE

The Twenty-Second Amendment moves from the courtroom to Parliament today, and this time the argument is no longer about whether Sri Lanka must hold a referendum.

The Supreme Court has answered that question.

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22A: SO WHO EXACTLY...

It determined that neither the Bill as a whole nor any part of it requires approval by the people at a referendum under Article 83 of the Constitution. The Government can therefore proceed with the constitutional amendment if it secures the required two-thirds majority in Parliament.

That is important, but it is not the most interesting part of the determination.

The Supreme Court has required a specific addition to Clause 2 dealing with the Chief Justice. The Bill proposes increasing the retirement age of Supreme Court judges from 65 to 67, while also providing for a six-year limit applicable to the office of Chief Justice.

The Court has directed that a second proviso be inserted stating that this six-year limit will not apply to any person holding the office of Chief Justice on the date the Act comes into operation. It has also required a wording change so that the relevant retirement provision refers to completing the age of 67 rather than reaching that age.

That is not an insignificant drafting adjustment. It means Parliament is now being asked to enact a constitutional amendment whose application expressly distinguishes the incumbent Chief Justice from someone appointed to that office after the law comes into force.

The present Chief Justice is Preethi Padman Surasena.

He also presided over the five-member Supreme Court bench which considered the 67 petitions challenging the Twenty-Second Amendment, together with Justices Achala Wengappuli, Arjuna Obeyesekere, Sampath Abeykoon and Gihan Kulatunga.

The Court's determination was unanimous.

That does not establish anything improper. It does, however, make transparency around the practical application of the amendment particularly important.

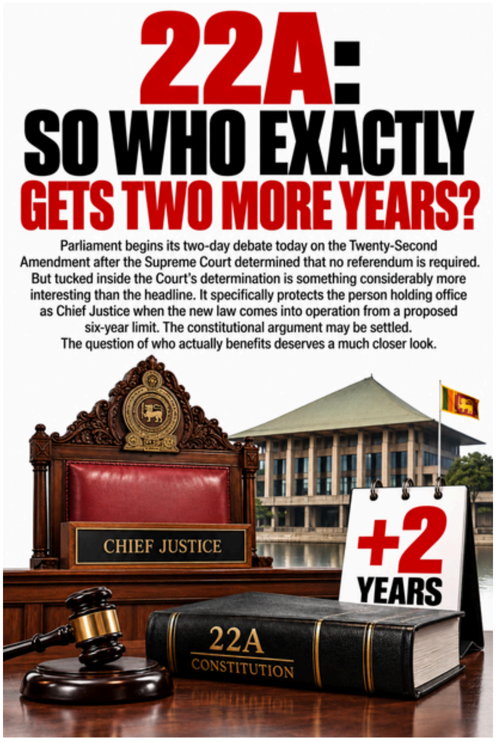
The proposed changes extend beyond the Chief Justice. Supreme Court judges would retire at 67 instead of 65, while Court of Appeal judges would move from 63 to 65. The linked Judicature Amendment Bill changes retirement arrangements in the lower judiciary and can, according to the Supreme Court determination, be enacted by a simple parliamentary majority.

The Government's argument is that Sri Lanka needs judicial reform, greater capacity and the retention of experienced judges.

During the Supreme Court proceedings, the Attorney General's Department argued that extending retirement ages would not undermine judicial independence and pointed to considerably higher judicial retirement ages in countries including the United Kingdom.

Those arguments deserve to be heard on their merits. Sri Lanka's court system faces serious delays, and losing experienced judges simply because they reach an age fixed decades ago is a legitimate matter for Parliament to reconsider.

But Parliament should also answer the other side of the question clearly.



Does the two-year extension apply immediately to every serving Supreme Court and Court of Appeal judge who would otherwise retire under the existing constitutional provisions?

If so, which scheduled retirements will now be postponed? How does that affect the sequence of future appointments and promotions through the superior courts?

Those are not questions about personalities. They are questions about institutional design.

Judicial independence is protected partly by ensuring that judges know the conditions under which they take office and leave it.

Altering those conditions while judges are already serving inevitably creates questions about retrospectivity, even where the purpose of the amendment may be entirely defensible.

The Supreme Court has now determined the constitutional route Parliament may follow. It has not ordered Parliament to enact the amendment. That decision belongs to the country's elected representatives.

The Bar Association of Sri Lanka has called on MPs to consider their constitutional and representative responsibilities and to vote according to their conscience.

The Opposition, meanwhile, is expected to continue campaigning against the amendment despite losing its argument that a referendum is constitutionally required.

The parliamentary arithmetic heavily favours the Government. The NPP entered Parliament with 159 seats, already above the two-thirds threshold in a 225-member House if its parliamentary strength remains intact.

The debate begins today and continues tomorrow, with the vote expected on Friday.

That makes the debate more important, not less.

When a government possesses enough votes to amend the Constitution largely from its own parliamentary strength, scrutiny cannot stop at whether it has the numbers. Parliament must establish precisely what the amendment does, whom it affects immediately and what precedent it creates for future changes to judicial tenure.

The Supreme Court has settled one question. Sri Lanka does not constitutionally require a referendum to enact 22A in the form permitted by the Court.

Today Parliament begins answering another.

Who exactly gets the extra two years, and from when?

NAMAL STAYS IN REMAND. NOW UNTIL SEPTEMBER 30.

Namal Rajapaksa will spend at least another week in remand custody after the Colombo Magistrate's Court yesterday extended his detention until September 30. The investigation concerns an alleged Rs 100 million payment linked to the SriLankan Airlines purchase of Airbus aircraft. The allegations remain unproved, but the case has now moved beyond the drama of an arrest into the more important question of what evidence investigators actually possess.

"Questioning The Answers"

NAMAL STAYS IN ...

NEWSLINE

Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna MP Namal Rajapaksa has been further remanded until September 30 as investigators continue their inquiry into an alleged Rs 100 million transaction connected to the controversial SriLankan Airlines Airbus procurement.

The Colombo Fort Magistrate's Court extended the remand order yesterday after Rajapaksa was produced before court. He had originally been remanded following his arrest by the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption in connection with the investigation.

The allegation centres on approximately Rs 100 million which investigators say was received by a company connected to Rajapaksa. The money is alleged to have originated from funds associated with the Airbus transaction involving SriLankan Airlines.

Rajapaksa has denied wrongdoing. No finding of guilt has been made against him, and the allegations being investigated by CIABOC remain allegations unless proved through the judicial process.

That distinction becomes particularly important in a case involving one of Sri Lanka's best-known political families.

The Rajapaksas dominated the country's politics for much of the period following the end of the civil war. Namal Rajapaksa is not merely another suspect appearing before a magistrate.

He is a serving Member of Parliament, the son of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa and a significant figure in the SLPP.

None of that should make prosecution more difficult if evidence exists. Equally, none of it reduces the evidentiary burden on investigators.

The Airbus controversy itself stretches back years and concerns SriLankan Airlines' decision to acquire aircraft as part of an ambitious fleet-renewal programme.

International investigations into Airbus subsequently exposed corrupt payments and arrangements in several jurisdictions, placing transactions connected with SriLankan Airlines under renewed scrutiny.

The current investigation concerns the alleged movement of money connected to that wider transaction. What matters now is establishing the documentary trail.

If Rs 100 million was transferred, investigators should be able to demonstrate where it originated, through which accounts it travelled, which company ultimately received it and what commercial explanation, if any, existed for the payment.

Those are questions that banking records, company documents, contracts and communications should be capable of answering.

That is why the extension of remand should not become the story in itself.

Sri Lankan politics has repeatedly treated arrest and remand as though they were synonymous with conviction. They are not.

Remand is a procedural decision made while an investigation or prosecution continues. It is not a judicial declaration that the accused committed the offence alleged.

The opposite mistake is equally dangerous. Political status should not create a presumption that an investigation is politically motivated merely because the person under investigation belongs to a former ruling family or sits in opposition.

The appropriate standard is much simpler. Follow the money and follow the evidence.

If investigators possess evidence linking Rajapaksa to an unlawful payment, that evidence should ultimately be presented before a court and tested. If the evidence does not establish criminal responsibility, the legal process must say so.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and his Government have repeatedly emphasised that no person should stand above the law. That principle will be tested not by how many prominent political figures are arrested, but by whether investigations are conducted professionally and prosecutions are capable of surviving judicial scrutiny.

The same principle protects Rajapaksa.

Equality before the law means neither immunity because of a famous surname nor guilt because of one.

It means the State must prove its case against Namal Rajapaksa exactly as it would have to prove its case against anyone else.

There is another public-interest dimension. SriLankan Airlines has consumed enormous amounts of public money over the years. Any allegation that money connected to aircraft procurement was improperly diverted therefore concerns more than the reputation of an individual politician.

It concerns taxpayers.

The next important date is September 30, when Rajapaksa is due to be produced before court again. By then the question should not simply be whether another remand order is requested.

The more important question is whether the investigation is moving closer to establishing what happened to the Rs 100 million at the centre of the allegation.

For now Namal Rajapaksa remains in remand, not convicted. The State has made a serious allegation against a serving Member of Parliament.

It must now prove it.

THE IMF CAME. THE IMF LEFT. THE SEVENTH REVIEW IS NOT DONE.

There is plenty in Sri Lanka's economic numbers for the Government to welcome. Growth is 4.2 per cent, reserves have reached US$6.9 billion and the IMF says the economy has shown remarkable resilience. But after almost two weeks of talks in Colombo, there is still no staff-level agreement on the Seventh Review. More strikingly, the IMF has warned that parts of the Government's proposed anti-corruption amendments could weaken transparency and accountability.

NEWSLINE

The International Monetary Fund ended its latest mission to Sri Lanka yesterday with plenty of praise for the country's economic recovery, but without the one announcement Colombo might have preferred to hear.

There is no staff-level agreement yet on the Seventh Review of Sri Lanka's Extended Fund Facility programme.

"Questioning The Answers"

THE IMF CAME...

The IMF team, led by Mission Chief Evan Papageorgiou, was in Sri Lanka from September 10 to 23 for discussions on the Seventh Review and the 2026 Article IV Consultation.

At the conclusion of the visit, the Fund said discussions would continue in the near term with the objective of reaching agreement on the policies and parameters required to complete the review.

That does not mean the review has failed, nor has the IMF announced a breakdown in negotiations. The language is considerably less dramatic than that. It does mean, however, that almost two weeks of discussions ended without the staff-level agreement that normally marks the next major step towards completion of a review.

The economic assessment accompanying that unfinished business is considerably more encouraging.

Sri Lanka's economy grew by 4.2 per cent in the second quarter of 2026, marking eleven consecutive quarters of growth. Gross official reserves reached US$6.9 billion at the end of August, banks remain well capitalised and profitable, first-half fiscal performance was strong and debt restructuring is described by the IMF as largely complete.

Those are substantial achievements for a country that only four years ago defaulted on its sovereign debt and struggled to finance basic imports.

There is, however, another number in the IMF statement which deserves equal attention. Headline inflation reached 8 per cent year-on-year in August, driven by the global oil-price shock.

The Fund says inflation expectations remain broadly anchored, but the return of price pressure will be considerably more tangible to households than the improvement in several macroeconomic indicators.

The IMF also sees significant risks ahead. It identifies uncertainty over the duration and intensity of the Middle East war, global trade policy and the possible effects of El Niño as threats to the recovery.

Its prescription remains familiar: rebuild fiscal and external buffers, maintain price stability, strengthen social protection and continue reforms. For taxpayers, that means the pressure is not disappearing.

The IMF wants a medium-term revenue strategy, a broader tax base, fewer exemptions and incentives and stronger revenue administration.

For electricity and fuel consumers, it continues to insist on cost-recovery energy pricing as a means of preventing State-owned enterprises from once again creating large fiscal liabilities.

The Fund is also calling for greater exchange-rate flexibility and recommends retaining the present 5 per cent inflation target and accountability band for now. It argues that Sri Lanka needs room to absorb food and energy-price volatility before considering movement towards a lower inflation target.

But perhaps the politically most significant sentence in yesterday's IMF statement concerned neither debt nor inflation.

The Fund warned that preserving the integrity of Sri Lanka's anti-corruption legislative framework is critical to maintaining public trust and said selected clauses in the amendments recently tabled by the Government could weaken transparency and accountability.

That deserves attention because anti-corruption reform is not some peripheral condition attached to Sri Lanka's IMF programme.

Governance reform became an important part of the country's post-crisis programme precisely because corruption vulnerabilities, procurement weaknesses and institutional failures were recognised as economic problems as well as political ones.

It is also politically sensitive for the present administration.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and the NPP came to office with corruption and accountability at the centre of their appeal to voters.

An IMF warning that amendments proposed under that Government could weaken parts of the anti-corruption framework therefore deserves a detailed response from Colombo.

The Government may have legitimate reasons for changing the law.

If it disagrees with the IMF's interpretation, it should explain why.

What would be difficult to reconcile with its own mandate is any change that demonstrably reduces transparency or weakens the independence and effectiveness of institutions created to investigate corruption.

The IMF's wider message is that Sri Lanka now needs to move from stabilisation to transformation.

It wants trade liberalisation, modernised business and labour regulation, wider access to finance, digitalisation and an environment capable of attracting investment and creating jobs.

During the mission, its team also travelled to Jaffna and identified agriculture, fisheries, tourism, renewable energy and improved connectivity as potential sources of Northern economic growth.

Sri Lanka can therefore legitimately take considerable encouragement from this IMF visit. An economy growing for eleven consecutive quarters with US$6.9 billion in reserves is a profoundly different economy from the one that collapsed in 2022.

But yesterday's statement also provides a useful antidote to premature celebration.

The Seventh Review has not yet reached staff-level agreement, inflation has returned to 8 per cent, external risks remain substantial and the Fund is questioning parts of the Government's anti-corruption amendments.

The recovery is real, but so are the conditions attached to preserving it.

Sri Lanka has travelled a considerable distance from the queues, shortages and default of 2022, but the IMF's departure yesterday makes one thing clear: the programme has not reached the point where either the Government or the country can declare the difficult part over.

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THE PTA MAY DIE. HOW MUCH OF THE PTA WILL SURVIVE?

After 47 years, Sri Lanka is preparing to repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Its proposed replacement contains explicit protections for journalism, protest, trade union activity and dissent, together with greater judicial supervision. But it would still allow a person to be held under detention orders for as long as one year. The question is therefore not whether the letters PTA disappear. It is what powers remain after they do.

NEWSLINE

Sri Lanka may finally be preparing to remove one of the most controversial laws on its statute book.

The Government has gazetted the Protection of the State from Terrorism Bill, legislation intended to repeal and replace the Prevention of Terrorism Act of 1979. If Parliament eventually approves it, a law introduced nearly half a century ago as a temporary measure will finally cease to exist.

The word temporary has survived rather well.

The PTA outlived the government that introduced it, the civil war for which its extraordinary powers were repeatedly justified, several presidents and numerous promises of reform. It has also attracted sustained criticism from human rights organisations, lawyers, civil society groups, international institutions and communities whose members have experienced prolonged detention under it.

The new Bill therefore deserves to be judged against something more demanding than whether it is better than the PTA. After 47 years, the relevant question is whether Sri Lanka is creating a counter-terrorism law appropriate for a democratic state operating under the rule of law.

There are significant changes.

Under the proposed legislation, an arrested person would generally have to be produced before a magistrate within 48 hours.

The person must be informed of the reason for arrest and of the right to legal representation, while next of kin and the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka must also be notified.

Magistrates would have responsibility for monitoring the welfare of detainees, while the Human Rights Commission would be permitted to inspect approved detention facilities without prior notice. An Independent Review Committee chaired by a retired Supreme Court or Court of Appeal judge is also proposed to review detention orders.

These are not cosmetic safeguards. Judicial supervision, access to lawyers, notification of relatives and independent inspection can materially alter the position of a person detained by the State. But extraordinary detention powers remain.

A detention order can initially operate for up to two months. Further extensions beyond that period would require High Court approval, and the total period for which a person can be held under detention orders cannot exceed one year.

One year is substantially easier to write into legislation than it is to experience inside a detention facility.

The Government will argue, with justification, that terrorism investigations are not ordinary criminal investigations. Terrorist organisations can operate through complex networks, encrypted communications, international financing and multiple jurisdictions.

Investigators sometimes require time to establish who did what before an attack occurs rather than reconstructing the network afterwards.

Easter Sunday demonstrated the catastrophic consequences of failing to identify and act effectively upon a genuine terrorist threat.

But Easter Sunday also demonstrates why the answer cannot simply be unlimited State power. Sri Lanka possessed extensive national security laws in 2019. The problem was not an absence of legal authority. Intelligence warnings existed and the institutions responsible for acting upon them failed disastrously.

A strong terrorism law is therefore necessary, but strength should be measured by whether it catches terrorists rather than by how easily it can deprive citizens of liberty.

The new Bill contains important protections in that regard. Participation in peaceful protest, strikes, trade union activity, advocacy, dissent and humanitarian activity would not by themselves establish terrorist intent.

Journalism, academic and scientific research, civil society work, legal representation, artistic expression, satire and political criticism also receive explicit protection provided they do not intentionally incite terrorism.

That is especially important in Sri Lanka, where laws created for national security have repeatedly generated fears that their reach could extend into political dissent.

The protection for journalism deserves close examination when the Bill reaches Parliament.

A journalist investigating an extremist organisation must be able to communicate with sources, possess documents and report claims without the ordinary functions of journalism becoming evidence of participation in terrorism.

The same principle applies to lawyers representing unpopular defendants and researchers studying extremist movements.

Definitions will therefore matter enormously.

What constitutes terrorism? What constitutes intentional incitement?

What evidentiary threshold is required before a detention order is issued? How quickly can the detainee challenge it? What information must the State place before the reviewing court?

Those details will determine whether the safeguards operate in practice or simply decorate the legislation.

There is another useful test Parliament should apply before approving the Bill.

Do not ask whether the present Government can be trusted with these powers.

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THE PTA MAY DIE...

Ask whether the same powers would be acceptable in the hands of the worst government Sri Lanka could conceivably elect.

That is the proper way to design exceptional State authority because legislation survives governments. The minister who introduces a power today does not control who exercises it ten or twenty years from now.

Repealing the PTA would be significant. A temporary law surviving for 47 years is itself evidence of how difficult extraordinary powers are to surrender once a State acquires them.

But Sri Lanka should resist celebrating an acronym.

The real measure of reform will be whether a person arrested under the new law receives stronger protection from arbitrary detention, whether courts exercise genuine control over the process and whether journalists, protesters, trade unionists and political opponents can exercise lawful democratic freedoms without terrorism legislation hanging unnecessarily over them.

The PTA may finally disappear.

What matters now is ensuring that the habits which grew around it disappear as well.

THE DOLLAR IS BACK AROUND RS 333. WHEN DO PRICES COME DOWN?

The rupee has strengthened, with several commercial banks yesterday quoting the US dollar at around Rs 333 for selling. That is welcome for an economy dependent on imported fuel, medicines, food, machinery and raw materials. But consumers have heard repeatedly that a weaker rupee makes imports more expensive. They are entitled to ask whether the argument works in the opposite direction too.

NEWSLINE

The Sri Lankan rupee strengthened further against the US dollar yesterday, bringing the selling rate at several commercial banks back to around Rs 333.

Commercial Bank quoted the dollar at approximately Rs 328.25 for buying and Rs 333.25 for selling, while Sampath Bank was around Rs 328.50 and Rs 333.50 respectively.

People's Bank quoted approximately Rs 329.25 for buying and Rs 333.25 for selling.

Currency movements of a rupee or two on an individual day are not, by themselves, an economic revolution. Exchange rates move in both directions, and businesses cannot reasonably be expected to change retail prices every morning because the rupee has strengthened slightly overnight.

But the direction matters.

Sri Lanka imports enormous quantities of what it consumes and what its industries need to produce. Fuel, pharmaceuticals, machinery, vehicles, food, chemicals, industrial inputs and technology all carry a foreign-currency component somewhere in their cost.

That relationship became painfully familiar during the economic crisis.

When the rupee collapsed, importers explained that prices had to rise because the dollars required to purchase goods overseas had become dramatically more expensive. Freight charges, insurance, international commodity prices and shortages added further pressure.

Consumers understood the argument because they could see the exchange rate moving against them.

The question now is whether the transmission mechanism works with similar enthusiasm when the currency moves in their favour.

It will not happen immediately and it will not happen uniformly.

A supermarket shelf today may contain goods imported weeks or months ago at an earlier exchange rate.

A pharmaceutical importer may have purchased stock when the dollar was more expensive. A manufacturer may have forward contracts, existing inventory and other costs that do not fall simply because the rupee strengthens.

There are also taxes, duties, electricity, wages, transport, finance costs and profit margins.

Exchange rates are only one component of the final retail price.

But over time the currency matters.

If an importer repeatedly replenishes stock at a lower rupee cost and the international price of the product has not increased sufficiently to cancel that benefit, some reduction in cost should eventually enter the domestic supply chain.

That is why consumers need more transparency. When prices rise, businesses frequently explain the reasons. The dollar has moved. Fuel is more expensive. Freight has increased. International commodity prices have risen. Taxes have changed.

Those explanations can be entirely legitimate. But if those variables later move in the opposite direction, consumers should be able to see where the benefit goes.

The issue is particularly important because household finances remain under pressure despite the improvement in Sri Lanka's macroeconomic indicators. GDP grew 4.2 per cent in the second quarter, official reserves have reached US$6.9 billion and the country has received a sovereign credit-rating upgrade.

Yet the IMF says headline inflation reached 8 per cent year-on-year in August, driven significantly by the global oil shock.

That means many families are experiencing the recovery through two very different lenses. The macroeconomic numbers say the country is stronger. The weekly household bill may say life remains expensive.

A strengthening currency can help narrow that gap, but only if lower import costs eventually reach the consumer.

There is also a policy dimension. Sri Lanka cannot simply engineer a permanently stronger rupee to make imported goods cheaper.

An exchange rate that is artificially maintained can damage reserves, exports and competitiveness. The IMF itself continues to call for greater exchange-rate flexibility.

The objective should therefore not be a particular politically attractive number for the dollar.

It should be a functioning market in which movements in costs are transmitted reasonably through the economy.

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"Questioning The Answers"

THE DOLLAR IS BACK...

That principle should apply in both directions.

If a depreciating rupee is accepted as a reason to increase prices, an appreciating rupee must eventually become a reason to examine whether some prices can fall.

Businesses are entitled to recover genuine costs and earn reasonable profits. Consumers are equally entitled to ask whether reductions in those costs are being passed through.

Rs 333 is not a magic number and tomorrow's exchange rate may be different. But the rupee's recent strengthening provides a useful opportunity to ask a question that tends to disappear whenever the currency moves in the consumer's favour.

Sri Lankans became very familiar with how quickly a falling rupee could reach the cash register.

They are entitled to discover how quickly a rising one can get there too.

95% OF OUR EXPORT GROWTH CAME FROM SELLING MORE OF THE SAME THINGS

Sri Lanka's exports have passed US$12 billion for the first eight months of 2026. That is good news. But new research from the Institute of Policy Studies reveals the uncomfortable number behind the celebration: nearly 95 per cent of export growth since 2008 has come from selling more of products we already exported. Nearly 1,000 new products were introduced. Only 43 became competitive.

NEWSLINE

Sri Lanka's exports have just crossed US$12 billion for the first eight months of this year, giving the country another encouraging economic number to place alongside 4.2 per cent GDP growth and improving foreign reserves.

Total exports reached approximately US$12.01 billion between January and August, compared with US$11.52 billion during the corresponding period last year. That represents growth of 4.26 per cent. Merchandise exports increased by 3.63 per cent to US$9.41 billion, while services exports performed better, increasing by 6.59 per cent to approximately US$2.60 billion.

August itself produced exports of approximately US$1.60 billion. Services were particularly encouraging, increasing 13.97 per cent year-on-year to US$331.87 million, while merchandise exports amounted to approximately US$1.27 billion.

There are individual sectors producing impressive numbers too. Electrical and electronic components have expanded strongly this year. Processed food and beverages, spices, rubber products and coconut-based exports have also recorded growth, while ICT and business-process services continue to provide an increasingly important source of foreign exchange.

So far, so good.

Then comes the number that should make Sri Lanka considerably less comfortable.

Research by the Institute of Policy Studies shows that nearly 95 per cent of Sri Lanka's export growth since 2008 has come from selling greater quantities of products the country was already exporting.

Over that period, nearly 1,000 new export products were introduced, but only 43 became competitive.

That is a very different picture of export growth.

There is nothing wrong with selling more of something Sri Lanka already produces well.

If the country can sell more garments, tea, rubber products, coconut products or spices competitively and profitably, it should do precisely that.

The problem arises when increasing volumes of existing exports becomes the principal engine of expansion for almost two decades.

It means Sri Lanka remains heavily dependent on an export structure that has proved remarkably difficult to change. New products are appearing, but very few are successfully establishing themselves as internationally competitive exports.

That matters because the Government has considerably larger ambitions than maintaining the present export base.

Sri Lanka's National Export Development Plan 2026 to 2030 has set an export revenue target of **US$36 billion by 2030** and describes the objective as transforming the country into a competitive, knowledge-based export hub. The Government has also spoken of achieving medium-term economic growth of around 7 per cent.

Those ambitions require something more than simply selling additional quantities of what Sri Lanka already sells.

The IPS analysis points to another vulnerability. Sri Lanka continues to depend on non-reciprocal preferential arrangements such as GSP+, while competing exporters including India and Indonesia have reciprocal trade agreements with major destinations such as the European Union and United Kingdom. Preferential access granted unilaterally can be withdrawn because of income status or compliance issues.

A negotiated trade agreement provides a different degree of certainty.

The United States adds another layer of uncertainty because of its changing trade policy and tariff environment. IPS argues that Sri Lanka has a strong incentive to pursue arrangements that provide favourable and predictable access to the American market.

But trade agreements alone will not create competitive products.

Sri Lanka also has to confront what happens inside its own borders. IPS points to tariff complexity and para-tariffs which can increase the effective tax burden on imports beyond the statutory VAT rate. Inputs imported by Sri Lankan manufacturers ultimately become part of the cost of the goods those manufacturers attempt to sell overseas.

There is a difficult balance here. Removing protective tariffs exposes domestic businesses,

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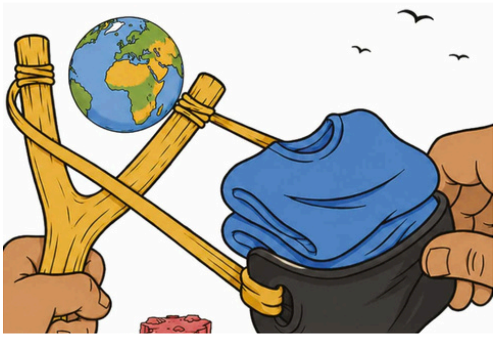
particularly smaller manufacturers, to stronger foreign competition.

Maintaining excessive protection can make the entire economy less competitive and discourage firms from developing products capable of surviving outside the protected domestic market.

That is why export diversification is considerably harder than announcing another target.

It requires capital, technology, research, reliable energy, efficient ports, competitive logistics, trade agreements, skilled workers and businesses willing to take the risk of developing products for markets where Sri Lanka receives no special treatment.



There are signs that diversification is possible. Electrical and electronic components recorded exceptionally strong growth during parts of this year, while activated carbon provides a useful example of taking a domestic raw material, coconut shell, and turning it into a higher-value industrial export.

ICT and business-process services demonstrate that export earnings need not arrive inside a shipping container.

Those examples matter because Sri Lanka cannot export its way to substantially higher living standards simply by producing more of everything it produced twenty years ago.

Crossing US$12 billion in eight months deserves recognition. Exporters have achieved that performance despite volatile global conditions, Middle East disruption and uncertainty in major markets.

But the IPS numbers prevent the celebration from becoming complacency.

Nearly 1,000 new products entered Sri Lanka's export story after 2008. Only 43 became competitive, while almost 95 per cent of export growth continued to come from existing products.

The question facing Sri Lanka is therefore no longer simply whether exports are growing.

It is whether the country is becoming better at creating new things the rest of the world actually wants to buy.

TRUMP WANTED GREENLAND. NOW AMERICA HAS A DEAL INSTEAD.

Months after Donald Trump's repeated demands for American control of Greenland triggered one of the strangest disputes between NATO allies, the United States, Denmark and Greenland have signed a new Arctic security agreement. Washington has not acquired Greenland. It has, however, secured a framework for greater military cooperation in a region rapidly becoming one of the world's most important strategic frontiers.

NEWSLINE

Donald Trump did not get Greenland.

What the United States has now obtained may prove considerably more practical.

The United States, Denmark and Greenland have signed an Arctic security agreement aimed at strengthening military cooperation and addressing growing security concerns in the far north, bringing a measure of resolution to a dispute that at one stage had the American President openly talking about acquiring territory belonging to a NATO ally.

The agreement was signed in New York on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly following months of negotiations between Washington, Copenhagen and Nuuk.

It establishes a framework for closer cooperation on Arctic security while leaving the fundamental constitutional position unchanged: Greenland remains a self-governing territory within the Kingdom of Denmark.

That distinction matters because Trump's earlier language went considerably further than seeking additional military access.

The President repeatedly argued that the United States needed Greenland for national and international security and refused for a time to rule out coercive measures to obtain it.

Denmark responded that Greenland was not for sale, while Greenland's own leaders made the more fundamental point that decisions about Greenland's future belong to Greenlanders.

The resulting confrontation was extraordinary because Denmark is not an American adversary.

It is a NATO member and longstanding US ally.

The strategic concern underneath Trump's rhetoric, however, was real.

The Arctic is changing rapidly. Melting ice is opening greater possibilities for shipping, access to minerals and military movement. Russia possesses an enormous Arctic coastline and substantial military infrastructure across the region, while China has increasingly sought economic and strategic involvement despite not being an Arctic state.

Greenland sits directly inside that competition.

Its location between North America and Europe gives it enormous importance for missile warning, surveillance and the defence of the North Atlantic. The United States already operates Pituffik Space Base in north-west Greenland under longstanding arrangements with Denmark.

Washington therefore did not need to own Greenland to have a significant military presence there. What it wanted was greater strategic flexibility as the Arctic became more contested.

The new agreement appears to move the three parties towards that objective without requiring Denmark to surrender sovereignty or Greenlanders to accept American ownership.

That represents an important shift from the confrontation that dominated the relationship earlier this year.

It also demonstrates the difference between political rhetoric and strategic negotiation. Threatening to acquire another country's territory produced headlines, anger and anxiety within NATO.

Negotiating a security framework has produced something Washington can actually use.

For Denmark, the agreement provides a route towards strengthening Arctic defence while preserving sovereignty. Copenhagen has itself acknowledged that the changing security environment requires significantly greater investment in the region.

For Greenland, the issue is more complicated.

"Questioning The Answers"

TRUMP WANTED...

Greenlanders have increasingly asserted their right to determine their own political future, including the possibility of eventual independence from Denmark. They have also made clear that independence from Copenhagen does not mean becoming part of the United States.

Any expansion of American military activity therefore has to accommodate Greenlandic political authority rather than treating the island simply as strategically useful territory on a map.

That may be one of the most important consequences of the dispute.

Trump's attempt to place ownership of Greenland at the centre of international debate inadvertently reinforced the principle that Greenlanders themselves must have a voice in decisions affecting their territory.

The new security agreement does not end American interest in the Arctic, nor should it. Russia and China are unlikely to reduce theirs.

What it may do is return the argument to a more conventional question: how three partners can defend strategically important territory without one of them claiming it should own the territory of another.

There is a lesson in that distinction.

The United States wanted greater security in Greenland.

Denmark wanted its sovereignty respected. Greenland wanted its people treated as participants rather than property.

After months of confrontation, the three have finally produced an agreement which attempts to accommodate all three objectives.

Trump did not get Greenland.

America may have obtained much of the security cooperation it actually needed.