

**NEWSLINE***Daily by Faraz***"Questioning
The Answers"**

SRI LANKA IS A SMALL COUNTRY WITH A BIG HEART. **HOW BIG?**

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a small country
with a big heart.

Foreign Minister
Vijitha Herath

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SRI LANKA IS A SMALL COUNTRY WITH A BIG HEART. HOW BIG?

Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath says Sri Lanka is a small country with a big heart. Somewhere beyond our southern coastline, around 20 Iranian vessels are reportedly caught in an extraordinary geopolitical predicament. If their crews genuinely need food, drinking water and medicine, Sri Lanka may soon have an opportunity to discover whether that big heart is strong enough to act.

There was something rather appealing about Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath's description of Sri Lanka as a small country with a big heart. We like to think of ourselves that way and, throughout our history, ordinary Sri Lankans have frequently demonstrated a generosity towards strangers that bears little relationship to the amount of money in their pockets.

But a big heart is easiest to display when there is no price attached to compassion. The more difficult test comes when doing the decent thing might irritate somebody considerably bigger and more powerful than ourselves.

That may now be the question presented by the Iranian vessels reported to be lying in international waters off Sri Lanka's southern coastline. Before anything else happens, the circumstances aboard those ships must be independently established because humanitarian action cannot be based upon rumour.

If reports that crews are running short of drinking water, food, medicines and sufficient fuel to maintain essential shipboard systems are correct, however, this ceases to be merely a question about Iran and American sanctions.

It becomes a question about people.

Sri Lanka has no reason to involve itself in the political confrontation between Washington and Tehran. We have important relationships with both countries and preserving those relationships is sensible foreign policy.

Neither should humanitarian assistance become a convenient disguise for sanctions-busting, supplying commercial cargo or providing sanctioned vessels with what they need to resume ordinary commercial operations.

There is, however, an enormous moral difference between helping a government evade sanctions and giving a sailor drinking water.

That distinction is where Sri Lanka should be prepared to stand its ground. If international sanctions permit genuinely humanitarian assistance, and appropriate legal advice establishes that Sri Lankan citizens and companies can provide it without violating applicable restrictions, why should we look away?

The United States should be asked the same question. Sanctions are intended to exert pressure upon

governments and economies in pursuit of foreign-policy objectives. Are they also intended to prevent an ordinary crew member aboard a vessel from receiving medicine, food or drinking water? If the answer is no, there should be no dispute. If the answer is yes, then Washington should be prepared to defend that position openly.

This need not become Sri Lanka standing up to “The Donald”, much as that might provide an irresistible headline. Trump is entitled to pursue the foreign policy he believes serves American interests.

Sri Lanka is equally entitled to determine what serves ours, provided we remain within international law. And importantly we are not, unlike Israel, a defacto American state like Israel is often likened to.

Friendship with powerful countries should never require smaller countries to abandon independent judgement. Neither should opposition to American policy automatically make somebody a supporter of Iran.

That increasingly fashionable demand that every international issue requires us to choose a camp is precisely how small countries surrender their foreign-policy independence.

Perhaps this is also an opportunity for Sri Lanka's private sector and ordinary citizens.

If the humanitarian need is verified and the legal position permits it, could Sri Lankan companies, charities, religious organisations and citizens assemble supplies of food, bottled water and essential medicines?

Could a properly authorised humanitarian flotilla carry those supplies from Sri Lanka to vessels whose crews genuinely require them, with every box declared, every donor identified and every transaction transparent?

There should be nothing clandestine about it. Invite the authorities to inspect everything. Invite international observers if necessary. Publish what was supplied and to which vessel it went. Humanitarian assistance conducted openly is rather different from sanctions evasion conducted secretly.

It would also answer an uncomfortable question about the world in which smaller countries increasingly find themselves. International order cannot mean that powerful countries establish the rules and everybody else quietly looks askance when those rules produce consequences that offend basic humanity.

America has been enormously important to Sri Lanka. Iran has been a longstanding friend too. Neither relationship requires us to surrender the elementary proposition that hungry people should be fed, thirsty people should receive water and sick people should have access to medicine.

The Government should therefore establish the facts first. If there is no humanitarian emergency aboard these vessels, there is nothing further to discuss. If there is, Sri Lanka should establish precisely what assistance can legally be provided and then have the confidence to provide it.

Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath has already given us the measure by which that decision can be judged. Sri Lanka, he says, is a small country with a big heart.

We agree.

Now we would like to know how strong that heart is. NEWSLINE would also like to hear from its readers. If the humanitarian need aboard these vessels is independently confirmed and assistance can lawfully be provided, should Sri Lanka's Government, private sector and ordinary citizens help provide food, water and essential medicines?

Send us just one word: YES or NO. SMS/WhatsApp 0772-300-305

Be that as it may.

WHEN SRI LANKA FORGETS ITS POLITICS

The effort to save Sivarasa Anojan from the death penalty in Saudi Arabia is becoming something rather more significant than the fate of one Sri Lankan facing the gravest punishment a state can impose.

It is becoming a rare demonstration of what Sri Lanka can do when politics is put aside and the country decides that the nationality of the person in trouble matters more than who receives the credit for helping him.

Faiszer Musthapha PC MP and Upul Kumarapperuma PC are moving towards the Saudi capital - at their own personal cost - as efforts intensify on several fronts. State lawyers are also expected to coordinate the legal effort surrounding Anojan's appeal before the Kingdom's highest judicial authorities, while separate humanitarian representations are understood to be directed towards Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

There will be time enough to examine the legal case, the avenues available under Saudi law and precisely what intervention may still be possible. Nothing about a death-penalty case should encourage false hope. Saudi Arabia is a sovereign jurisdiction and Sri Lanka cannot dictate the outcome of proceedings before its courts.

What Sri Lanka can do, however, is use every legitimate legal, diplomatic and humanitarian avenue available to it. And that appears increasingly to be what is happening.

There is something else worth recognising.

The effort has crossed political boundaries. Government officials, parliamentarians, lawyers and others who would ordinarily find themselves on very different sides of Sri Lanka's political arguments appear united around one objective: if there remains a lawful way of saving a Sri Lankan life, it should be pursued.

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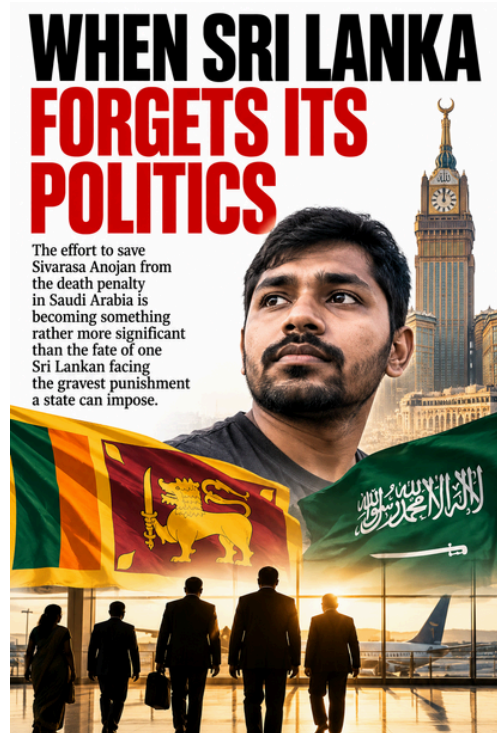


WE ARE BUYING 24% ...

That should not be remarkable. Unfortunately, in our deeply divided politics, it sometimes is.

Sri Lanka has repeatedly demonstrated this capacity to forget its divisions when confronted by a genuine national crisis. We saw versions of it during natural disasters and moments of national tragedy. We see it too, in a rather happier form, when a Sri Lankan athlete or team achieves something extraordinary overseas.

For a few hours, sometimes a few days, Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim cease to be the first description. Government and Opposition matter a little less. Colombo and Jaffna, Hambantota and Batticaloa can celebrate the same victory or worry about the same tragedy.



We simply become Sri Lankan.

There is an important lesson in the Anojan effort, irrespective of its eventual outcome. National unity does not require political uniformity. Faiszer Musthapha does not have to agree politically with Upul Kumarapperuma.

The Opposition does not have to endorse the Government. Nor does anybody have to abandon legitimate criticism of the state.

They merely have to recognise that sometimes the national interest is larger than the political contest.

Saving the life of a Sri Lankan citizen facing execution abroad is surely one of those occasions.

And perhaps Sri Lanka could do with rather more reasons to experience that feeling of collective purpose.

The last time Sri Lanka's men's cricket team won the ODI World Cup was in 1996. More than thirty years later, we are still waiting for another World Cup victory of that magnitude to produce the sort of nationwide celebration

that makes almost every other distinction temporarily disappear. The art may well be to turn that away from temporary to permanent and sustainable unity.

A country should not need a death sentence to discover its unity. Neither should it have to wait three decades for a cricket trophy to rediscover its national pride.

But when those moments come, they remind us of something easily forgotten amid the daily political noise: underneath all the arguments, Sri Lanka retains an extraordinary capacity to come together.

The immediate task now is Anojan.

Let the lawyers argue every available point. Let the diplomats open every available door. Let political leaders use whatever relationships they possess. And let humanitarian appeals reach whoever has the authority to exercise mercy.

Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath put it rather beautifully: Sri Lanka he said, is a small country with a big heart. Iranian sailors stuck on the high seas closer to Sri Lanka than anywhere else, must be waiting to see how big that heart is. Not to fight sanctions – but to survive another day.

There can be arguments about who did what later. For now, there is a Sri Lankan life to try to save.

Be that as it may.

THE ICE IS NOT THE ONLY THING THAT NEEDS TO BE BROKEN

Sri Lanka has seized 471 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine worth nearly Rs. 8 billion. That should have been an unqualified victory for the country's war against narcotics. Instead, an investigation into the investigation has created questions which cannot be answered by political accusation, police silence or social-media speculation.

The seizure of 471 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine from two containers at the Colombo Port ought to have been one of the Government's strongest exhibits as it prepares to mark the first anniversary of its *Ratama Ekata* anti-narcotics programme.

Instead, it is rapidly becoming a test of the programme itself.

On August 31, officers from the Police Narcotics Bureau, Central Crime Investigation Bureau and Sri Lanka Customs opened two containers at the CICT Terminal after obtaining judicial authority to inspect them.

What they allegedly found was extraordinary: 471 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine, commonly known as “ice”, with an estimated street value approaching Rs. 8 billion.

Seven suspects have subsequently been arrested and the investigation continues.

On the face of it, this is precisely what an effective anti-narcotics operation should look like. Intelligence is received. Investigators act upon it. Judicial authority is obtained. Customs and police agencies cooperate. Hundreds of kilograms of dangerous narcotics are prevented from entering the country.

Then something unusual happened.

Inspector General of Police Priyantha Weerasooriya ordered the Police Special Investigation Unit to investigate what police themselves described as “certain shortcomings and omissions” in the original investigation.

That changes the story.

The public is now entitled to know exactly what those shortcomings and omissions were.

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This is where both Government and Opposition must exercise some restraint. Opposition politicians cannot simply convert suspicion into evidence and declare that officers are being targeted because the narcotics belonged to somebody politically connected. That is an extremely serious allegation and requires extremely serious evidence.

Equally, the Government and police cannot dismiss the resulting questions merely because some of them are being asked by political opponents.

There is a very simple way to end speculation.

Tell the country what went wrong.

Was evidence improperly handled? Was the chain of custody compromised? Were investigative procedures ignored? Were suspects not pursued quickly enough? Was information withheld? Did officers act outside their authority?

Was there disagreement about which police unit should control the investigation?

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THE ICE IS NOT...

Or did the internal inquiry arise from something entirely different?

These are not operational details that necessarily require suspects, informants or intelligence methods to be exposed. They are fundamental questions about the integrity of an investigation involving nearly half a tonne of narcotics.

There is another question that deserves attention.

Police say the original information about the containers was received by Senior DIG Ranmal Kodithuwakku, who was responsible for Crimes and Traffic.

If that information ultimately resulted in one of the country's largest recent methamphetamine seizures, the public deserves to understand how that intelligence travelled through the police system, who authorised what happened next and precisely where the alleged “shortcomings and omissions” occurred.

That is not an argument for protecting any police officer.

Quite the opposite.

If officers mishandled an investigation involving Rs. 8 billion worth of narcotics, investigate them without fear or favour. Rank should offer no immunity. Neither should a successful seizure erase misconduct that may subsequently be discovered.

But if officers acted properly, they should not have their reputations destroyed by insinuation, political theatre or an unexplained internal investigation hanging indefinitely over their heads.

The same standard must apply upwards.

If anybody attempted to influence this investigation, whether politician, businessman, police officer, public official or intermediary, that person must be identified and investigated. It should make absolutely no difference whether the telephone call came from Government, Opposition or somewhere considerably more powerful than either.

That is what Ratama Ekata ultimately has to mean.

An anti-drugs campaign cannot be measured merely in kilograms seized, suspects photographed and press conferences conducted. Its credibility depends upon what happens when an investigation becomes inconvenient.

Sri Lanka has seen enough spectacular narcotics seizures to understand the problem. The drugs appear on television. The suspects are marched before cameras. Enormous street values are announced.

Then the public hears considerably less about who financed the shipment, who arranged it, who expected to receive it, where the money came from, where it was going and whether the people at the top of the operation were ever prosecuted.

Finding 471 kilograms of ice is important.

Finding out who owns 471 kilograms of ice is considerably more important.

And discovering whether anybody tried to prevent investigators from answering that question may be more important still.

The Government therefore has an opportunity rather than merely a problem.

If there were shortcomings in this investigation, disclose their nature and correct them. If police officers committed misconduct, proceed against them.

If the allegations circulating about political interference are false, establish that through facts rather than indignation. If there was interference, expose it regardless of whose name appears at the end of the trail.

That would strengthen Ratama Ekata, not weaken it.

The worst possible outcome would be ambiguity: a massive narcotics seizure, an unexplained investigation into the investigators, political accusations flying in every direction and eventually silence.

Rs. 8 billion worth of methamphetamine did not accidentally climb into two containers and make its own way to Colombo.

Somebody financed it. Somebody shipped it. Somebody expected it. Somebody stood to make an enormous amount of money from it.

Those are the people Sri Lanka needs to find. The 471 kilograms have already been caught. Now catch the network.

Be that as it may.

NEWS

DEEWARA: WHEN THE COMMUNITY BECOMES PART OF THE DESTINATION

Thema Collection's Deewara has opened near Tangalle amid the sort of southern coastal landscape that belongs in the pages of Condé Nast. But the more interesting story may be the people who were there long before the tourists arrived.

There is something wonderfully calm about 'Deewara'.

The sea, the boats, the palms and the fishing community provide a picture of southern Sri Lanka that tourism brochures have been selling for decades. But Thema Collection is attempting something rather different here.

It is not asking the local fishing community simply to become part of the scenery.

Too often tourism arrives in beautiful places and the people who made those places what they are become silent spectators. They wave at visitors, offer the occasional shy hello and then watch prosperity pass their front doors.

At Deewara, the intention is that they participate in it.

That philosophy has become something of a signature

across Thema Collection properties: tourism should have roots in the community in which it operates. Local people are not props added to create “authenticity”.

They are stakeholders in the experience.

And nowhere could that matter more than in a place called Deewara.

DEEWARA: WHEN THE COMMUNITY BECOMES PART OF THE DESTINATION

Thema Collection's Deewara has opened near Tangalle amid the sort of southern coastal landscape that belongs in the pages of Condé Nast.



The fishing community provides the rhythm of this coastline. Boats leave and return. Nets are prepared. Fish comes ashore. Generations of knowledge about the sea exist within families living beside it.

For the international traveller seeking something beyond another beautiful room beside another beautiful beach, that human connection may ultimately become Deewara's greatest luxury.

The surroundings are spectacular. The setting is wonderfully calm. The photographs will almost certainly be irresistible.

But the real picture is bigger.

Tourism works best when the visitor goes home richer for the experience and the community next door is richer for having welcomed them.

Be that as it may.

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DON'T PUNISH HAMBANTOTA FOR THE RAJAPAKSAS

The Rajapaksas are facing perhaps their greatest legal and political reckoning. Let the investigations go wherever the evidence takes them. But Hambantota and Monaragala belong to Sri Lanka, not to a political family.

For two decades it was almost impossible to separate Hambantota from the Rajapaksas.

The port, Mattala airport, highways, cricket stadium and other enormous investments transformed a previously neglected part of the country while simultaneously becoming monuments to a political dynasty. Some worked. Some struggled. Some became symbols of questionable economics and extravagant political ambition.

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But there is a danger in confusing the two.

The Rajapaksas can be investigated. Their decisions can be examined. Contracts can be scrutinised. Where evidence establishes wrongdoing, prosecutions should follow. Where public money was wasted, the country deserves answers.

None of that changes the geography.

Hambantota Port remains where it is. Mattala Airport remains where it is.

The expressway already reaches the South. Monaragala remains one of Sri Lanka's potentially important agricultural and industrial hinterlands.

Those assets do not belong to Mahinda Rajapaksa,

Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Basil Rajapaksa or Namal Rajapaksa.

They belong, directly or indirectly, to Sri Lanka. That distinction matters enormously.

A new Government understandably wants to distance itself from the excesses associated with its predecessors. But development policy cannot become an exercise in political archaeology where projects associated with yesterday's rulers are neglected simply because nobody wants to be photographed completing them.

The question should be brutally simple. Can the asset make money, create jobs or improve people's lives?

If Mattala can become commercially useful, make it useful. If Hambantota Port can attract industry, logistics and manufacturing, pursue them aggressively.

If Monaragala can supply agriculture, processing, renewable energy and industry into that southern economic corridor, build the connections necessary to make it happen.

And if a project genuinely has no economic justification, stop pouring money into it.

That is not Rajapaksa economics or NPP economics. It is elementary economics.

There is an even larger issue here. Hambantota and Monaragala contain hundreds of thousands of Sri Lankans who had nothing whatsoever to do with decisions made in Colombo's Cabinet rooms.

They cannot become collateral damage in somebody else's political reckoning. Investigate the Rajapaksas without fear.

Prosecute wrongdoing without favour. But develop Hambantota and Monaragala without prejudice.

Governments come and governments go. Districts cannot.

Be that as it may.

| ECONOMY

MAS WENT TO INDIA. WHY NOT SRI LANKA?

MAS Holdings is committing ₹8.8 billion, roughly US\$90–100 million, to expansion in Tamil Nadu, with around 7,000 jobs reportedly attached to the project. The story caused a brief stir in Sri Lanka and then quietly slipped from view. The investment has not disappeared, however, and neither has the question that really matters: why not Sri Lanka?

There is no reason to make MAS Holdings the villain of this story. A company born in Sri Lanka has grown into one of the country's most successful multinational businesses and is perfectly entitled to invest wherever its directors believe the best commercial opportunities exist. Indeed, the ability of a Sri Lankan company to make an investment of this magnitude overseas should itself be regarded as evidence of corporate success.

That, however, is not the end of the story. Tamil Nadu did not simply wake up one morning to discover MAS on its doorstep carrying nearly US\$100 million and looking for somewhere to put it. The state has been aggressively competing for investment, and MAS formed part of a much larger investment drive involving scores of agreements, international companies and the promise of more than 100,000 jobs.

Sri Lanka therefore needs to ask a question which appeared briefly after the announcement and has since become strangely quiet. What did Tamil Nadu offer MAS that Sri Lanka could not, or did not, offer?

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The answers may be perfectly straightforward. India offers an enormous domestic market, Tamil Nadu possesses a formidable textile and manufacturing ecosystem, and the state has the labour, suppliers, infrastructure and industrial depth that can make expansion commercially attractive.

There may also be compelling strategic reasons for MAS to increase its manufacturing footprint in India irrespective of what Sri Lanka offered.

But that is precisely why the answers matter. If electricity costs, land availability, taxation, regulatory certainty, labour, logistics, incentives or the speed at which government approvals can be obtained influenced the decision, Sri Lanka needs to know.

If none of those factors mattered and this was simply an investment designed specifically for the Indian market, that is worth establishing too.

There is another question which should be directed not at MAS but at Sri Lanka's investment machinery. Did anyone seriously attempt to persuade the company to put some or all of this expansion here?

Did somebody sit across a table from MAS and ask what Sri Lanka would have to do to secure those factories, that capital and those thousands of jobs,

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MAS WENT TO INDIA...

or was the first serious conversation about the investment held only after we discovered it was going somewhere else?

Sri Lanka spends considerable time and money telling foreign investors why they should come here. Presidents and ministers travel, investment forums are organised and presentations remind audiences about our strategic location, educated workforce and access to important markets.

Yet some of the most obvious potential investors already understand Sri Lanka because they were created here, and when one of them decides that its next major expansion belongs somewhere else, that decision deserves considerably more attention than another investment seminar.

There is also an uncomfortable media and corporate-governance question.

The MAS announcement initially attracted attention, generated questions and produced the inevitable debate about whether Sri Lanka was losing investment and jobs to India.

Then the subject slowly slipped away from the national conversation without those underlying questions ever really being answered.

That does not establish that anybody suppressed anything, and NEWSLINE makes no such allegation.

But large corporations have become exceptionally skilled at managing reputational discomfort, while governments are rarely enthusiastic about stories suggesting that their investment environment may have lost a competition.

Journalism should be particularly careful that legitimate questions do not simply expire because everybody concerned would find it more comfortable to move on.

MAS should therefore be encouraged to explain the commercial reasoning behind the decision, not because it owes Sri Lanka an apology but because its experience could tell policymakers something valuable. Government should be equally willing to explain whether Sri Lanka competed for this investment and, if it did, why Tamil Nadu won.

There is a much bigger issue beneath all of this. Capital has no sentimental obligation to remain where it was born.

It will increasingly travel towards the combination of cost, market, skills, infrastructure, certainty and opportunity that produces the best return, and governments that fail to understand that competition will eventually discover that investment announcements are being made somewhere else.

Tamil Nadu appears to understand the contest very well. It is not merely waiting for investors but actively building an industrial ecosystem around them and competing with other Indian states and countries for the next factory, the next technology centre and the next thousand jobs.

Sri Lanka says it wants precisely the same thing.

The question Sri Lanka still has not adequately answered is why almost US\$100 million and thousands of potential jobs made greater commercial sense across the Palk Strait than they did here.

Until we know that, “Why Not Sri Lanka?” remains a question worth asking.

Be that as it may.

INDIA'S TRAWLERS ARE STILL COMING. THE TALKS ARE NOT.

Indian fishing boats continue to cross the maritime boundary while Sri Lanka's northern fishermen continue to complain that their livelihoods and fishing grounds are being damaged. The latest official talks intended to address the problem were postponed at India's request. There is still no new date. The fish, unfortunately, are not waiting for diplomacy.

Sri Lanka's fishermen in the North have heard almost every possible description of the Indian fishing dispute. It has been called sensitive, complicated, historic, humanitarian and politically difficult.

All of those descriptions may be true, but none changes what happens when a bottom trawler crosses the International Maritime Boundary Line and begins dragging heavy fishing gear across waters upon which somebody else depends for a living.

The dispute has survived governments in Colombo and New Delhi, countless diplomatic exchanges, arrests, boat seizures, protests and repeated promises that a lasting solution must be found.

Yet Indian fishermen continue to enter Sri Lankan waters while the people who live along our northern coastline continue asking why protecting their livelihood appears to require quite so much patience. The latest development hardly inspires confidence.

A meeting of the Sri Lanka-India Joint Working Group on fisheries expected in September was postponed at India's request, and no replacement date has yet been announced. Diplomatic schedules inevitably change, but after years of unresolved confrontation it is reasonable to ask why finding another date for an issue affecting thousands of fishermen should prove particularly difficult.

This cannot be reduced to an anti-India argument. The fishermen crossing from Tamil Nadu are themselves part of a complicated economic problem, and many depend upon fishing for their survival. Governments on both sides of the Palk Strait must recognise the human consequences of enforcement, particularly when arrests leave families without breadwinners and expensive boats detained in another country.

But recognising hardship in Tamil Nadu cannot require Sri Lanka to ignore hardship in Jaffna, Mannar, Kilinochchi or Mullaitivu. Compassion does not stop at the International Maritime Boundary Line, but neither does sovereignty.

The particularly destructive element is bottom trawling.

Unlike a fisherman dropping a line or setting a net, bottom trawlers drag equipment across the seabed, disturbing habitats and catching marine life with relatively little discrimination.

Sri Lanka banned bottom trawling because the long-term consequence of repeatedly scraping fishing grounds is not merely fewer fish today but potentially fewer fish tomorrow.

That makes this an environmental issue as much as a diplomatic one. Northern fishermen emerging from decades of conflict should not discover that the sea which survived the war cannot survive the peace because somebody with a larger boat can extract more from it before they can.

There is also an uncomfortable imbalance in the politics. Tamil Nadu matters enormously in Indian domestic politics, and the treatment of its fishermen inevitably attracts political attention there. Northern Sri Lankan fishing communities do not possess anything approaching that influence in New Delhi, leaving Colombo with the responsibility of ensuring that their interests do not become negotiable simply because the bilateral relationship with India is important.

That relationship is indeed important. India came to Sri Lanka's assistance during the economic crisis, remains one of our most significant trading partners and investors, and is geographically the neighbour we can neither replace nor ignore. Precisely because the relationship matters, both countries should be capable of discussing an unresolved dispute without treating every disagreement as an act of hostility.

The answer cannot be endless arrests either. Sri Lankan authorities can intercept boats, confiscate equipment and bring fishermen before courts, but enforcement alone addresses the symptom rather than the economics that continue sending trawlers across the boundary.

A durable settlement will require India, particularly Tamil Nadu, to accelerate the transition away from destructive bottom trawling while creating viable alternatives for fishermen whose livelihoods presently depend upon it. Sri Lanka, for its part, must demonstrate that its objective is protecting waters and livelihoods rather than punishing poor fishermen from another country.

There have been enough committees and working groups to understand the problem. What is missing is a timetable against which both governments can be judged: fewer illegal crossings, fewer arrests, fewer destructive trawlers and a measurable transition towards fishing practices that allow communities on both sides to survive.

Until then, postponing another meeting may appear like a minor administrative matter in New Delhi or Colombo. It looks rather different from a small fishing boat in the waters off northern Sri Lanka watching considerably larger vessels approaching in the darkness.

Good relations with India are firmly in Sri Lanka's

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INDIA'S TRAWLERS...

national interest. So is protecting Sri Lankan fishermen. A serious foreign policy should be capable of doing both.

Be that as it may.

WE KEEP TALKING ABOUT EXPORTS. WHAT EXACTLY ARE WE GOING TO MAKE?

Sri Lanka wants more exports, more dollars and more jobs. Those are targets, not an industrial strategy. The harder question is what this country intends to manufacture and sell to the world ten years from now, and whether anybody has actually decided.

Sri Lanka has become very good at discussing exports in numbers. We celebrate when merchandise exports rise, worry when they fall and repeatedly announce ambitious targets for the years ahead, but the conversation rarely spends enough time examining what will actually be inside the containers leaving our ports.

Apparel remains one of Sri Lanka's greatest industrial achievements. Companies built here have demonstrated that Sri Lankan management, engineering, design and manufacturing can compete at the highest international level, while tea, rubber products, coconut-based industries, gems and other established sectors continue to bring valuable foreign exchange into the country.

But an industrial economy cannot indefinitely depend upon yesterday's success.

Across Asia, governments are deliberately choosing industries around which they intend to build the next generation of economic growth.

Semiconductors, electronics, batteries, electric vehicles, aerospace components, medical devices, renewable-energy technology and advanced materials are not appearing accidentally. Governments are building infrastructure, developing skills, offering incentives and assembling supply chains around them.

Tamil Nadu is particularly relevant because this transformation is occurring almost within sight of Sri Lanka. A state traditionally associated with textiles and automobiles is now pursuing electronics, aerospace, defence manufacturing, advanced engineering and space technology while continuing to strengthen the industries it already possesses.

Sri Lanka should not imagine that it can replicate India. The difference in population, domestic market, capital and industrial scale makes that unrealistic, and attempting to manufacture everything would merely produce another collection of government strategies with impressive titles and very little commercial consequence.

A small country has to be more selective.

That means deciding which industries Sri Lanka has a realistic chance of becoming unusually good at and then concentrating national resources behind them.

Instead of announcing that we want “high-tech manufacturing”, identify the particular components, materials or services in which Sri Lankan companies could enter an existing international supply chain.

There are already clues.

Sri Lanka possesses a sophisticated apparel industry capable of moving further into technical textiles, wearable technology and advanced materials.

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Its rubber industry has manufacturing knowledge that can be pushed further into specialised industrial and medical products, while companies involved in activated carbon demonstrate that something as ordinary as a coconut shell can become a sophisticated material used in industries far removed from traditional agriculture.

Our location creates another opportunity. Southern India is rapidly industrialising, which should make Sri Lanka think less about competing with the entirety of India and more about becoming useful to the enormous manufacturing ecosystem developing next door.

A factory in Tamil Nadu does not necessarily have to be a factory Sri Lanka lost. It could also become a customer.

What can we manufacture here that those factories need? Which components can move efficiently through Colombo or Hambantota?

Which engineering, testing, design or technology services can Sri Lankan companies provide? Where can a smaller country insert itself into a supply chain without needing to own the entire industry?

Those are considerably more useful questions than simply declaring another export target.

There is also an uncomfortable human-capital issue. Sri Lanka regularly celebrates having an educated workforce, but an industrial strategy requires more than general education.

If we decide that electronics, medical devices, advanced materials or precision engineering are future industries, universities and technical colleges need to know because the people those industries require must be trained before the factories arrive.

Energy policy must know too. So must the ports, Customs, the tax authorities and the agencies responsible for industrial land.

That is what an industrial strategy actually means. It is not a document belonging to one ministry but an agreement across Government about what the country is trying to become.

The private sector has an equally important responsibility. Businesses cannot demand protection indefinitely while producing goods the world increasingly buys elsewhere.

Government should create the environment, but companies must invest in technology, research, productivity and the difficult transition from making what we have always made to making what international markets increasingly want.

Artificial intelligence adds urgency to the question. Sri Lanka has sensibly promoted IT and business-process services as an important export sector, but AI is beginning to automate precisely some of the routine work on which lower-cost service economies have depended.

That does not mean IT/BPM disappears; it means the country has to keep climbing towards work requiring greater expertise and value.

Sri Lanka therefore needs something more specific than another promise to become an export economy.

Choose perhaps five or six industrial areas where we possess a genuine competitive possibility. Publish why they were chosen, what infrastructure each requires, what skills must be created, which international companies we intend to attract and what Sri Lankan businesses can participate.

Then measure the results every year. The world does not need another country that wants to export more. It needs products.

By 2035, Sri Lanka should already know which ones it intends to be exceptionally good at making.

Be that as it may.



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NEWSLINE

Daily by Faraz



**“Questioning
The Answers”**



THEY ARE COMING TO TAMIL NADU TO STEAL ITS INVESTORS

Tamil Nadu has become so successful at attracting industry that rival Indian states are reportedly coming into its own backyard looking for companies they can persuade to invest elsewhere. There is something almost indecently competitive about it. Sri Lanka should probably take notes.

Investment promotion can sound terribly dignified in Sri Lanka. There are conferences, presentations, delegations, memoranda of understanding and carefully arranged photographs in which everybody looks suitably pleased about something that may or may not happen several years later.

India's states appear to have discovered a rather more direct approach.

They compete.

Tamil Nadu has become one of the country's great industrial centres, building formidable positions in automobiles, textiles, electronics, engineering and increasingly advanced manufacturing. That success has created something else worth pursuing: companies already operating there which may be planning their next factory.

Rival Indian states are reportedly establishing a presence in Tamil Nadu and approaching businesses with precisely that opportunity in mind. The proposition is straightforward. You have succeeded here; now let us show you why your next investment should be with us.

There is nothing particularly polite about this form of economic competition, but there is nothing improper about it either. A government seeking employment and investment for its people has every reason to pursue businesses capable of providing both.

Tamil Nadu itself understands the game because it plays it extremely well. Its political leaders and investment agencies travel abroad, meet companies, offer industrial locations and attempt to secure projects before competitors do. When the investor finally makes an announcement, much of the work may already have taken place quietly over months or even years.

Sri Lanka tends to become excited rather later in the process.

We celebrate when an international company announces an investment here and become concerned when somebody announces one elsewhere. What is less visible is the machinery identifying investments before those decisions have been made.

That is where the real competition takes place.

A multinational does not wake up on Monday and decide to build a US\$100 million factory by Friday. Expansion plans are developed, markets studied, locations shortlisted and costs compared. Governments with serious investment-promotion systems attempt to enter that conversation before the shortlist becomes a decision.

Sri Lanka should be doing exactly the same thing.

If an electronics manufacturer in Tamil Nadu is reaching capacity, why should somebody from Sri Lanka not be sitting across the table explaining what Colombo, Hambantota or another industrial zone can offer? If an Indian company wants access to different export markets, why are we waiting for it to telephone the Board of Investment?

This does not mean Sri Lanka can simply copy an Indian state. Tamil Nadu operates inside an economy of more than a billion people, benefits from India's enormous internal market and possesses industrial clusters built over decades. Those are advantages Sri Lanka cannot reproduce.

But we can compete where our own advantages matter.

Sri Lanka sits beside major shipping routes, possesses established ports, has preferential access to some markets and remains geographically close to one of the fastest-growing economic regions in the world. A smaller country can also make decisions faster than a giant federation if it chooses to.

That last qualification is important.

There is little point sending investment teams around the world if the company they persuade to come here subsequently spends months moving files between ministries. Aggressive investment promotion only works when the salesman and the state machinery are selling the same product.

The MAS investment in Tamil Nadu makes the issue particularly relevant. One of Sri Lanka's most successful companies has demonstrated that capital created here can move towards a jurisdiction it finds commercially attractive. Other companies can make exactly the same calculation in reverse if Sri Lanka gives them sufficient reason.

Perhaps our investment agencies therefore require a slightly different scorecard. Instead of measuring how many meetings were held or agreements signed, publish how many companies were actively pursued, how many investment decisions Sri Lanka reached the final shortlist for, how many we won and, perhaps most importantly, why we lost the others.

That final category could teach us more than the successes.

If Vietnam repeatedly beats Sri Lanka because electricity is cheaper, address electricity. If Tamil Nadu wins because approvals are faster, fix approvals. If Malaysia wins because investors trust its policy environment more, understand why.

Economic competition becomes useful when losing hurts enough to make you improve.

There is something wonderfully revealing about rival Indian states apparently looking for investors inside Tamil Nadu. Nobody seems embarrassed about pursuing somebody else's potential factory because they understand that the factory represents jobs, taxes, exports and economic activity for their own people.

Sri Lanka wants those things too.

Perhaps it is time we became a little less dignified about going after them.

Be that as it may.

OPINION

WE ONLY WANT WHAT'S BEST FOR YOU

When does the labour of love actually begin? Somewhere around conception, with the first scan, at birth, or perhaps long before any of them? Whatever the answer, parenthood has the peculiar habit of continuing long after the child has become perfectly capable of looking after himself or herself. That is when love, protection and something rather more uncomfortable called control can begin to overlap.

There is probably no definitive moment at which somebody becomes emotionally a parent. Biology can tell us when conception occurs and medicine can chart the development that follows, but neither can identify the instant at which another human being's welfare begins to matter more than your own.

For some it may arrive with confirmation of pregnancy, for others with the first scan or movement, and for fathers it may develop differently altogether, but once established the instinct appears remarkably reluctant to retire.

The early years make the arrangement uncomplicated. Children need decisions made for them, dangers identified before they recognise them and boundaries established precisely because they do not yet possess the experience to establish their own.

Parents feed, educate, protect, save, sacrifice and worry, usually while repeating a sentence that will accompany the family for decades: we only want what's best for you.

The interesting part begins when the child no longer requires somebody to decide what is best.

The eighteen-year-old becomes thirty, forty and eventually fifty, acquires a career, perhaps a spouse and children of his or her own, yet can still discover that an elderly mother wants to know whether lunch was eaten and a father has an opinion about a decision nobody actually asked him to make. The child has become an adult; parenthood apparently hasn't noticed.

There is something deeply affectionate about that and something occasionally suffocating too. "We only want what's best for you" can represent extraordinary selflessness, but it can also become the most persuasive justification ever invented for retaining influence over another adult's life. The difficulty is that the parent exercising control may genuinely experience it as love.

That distinction is becoming more visible because today's younger generation appears less willing to accept parental authority simply because it comes

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WE ONLY WANT...

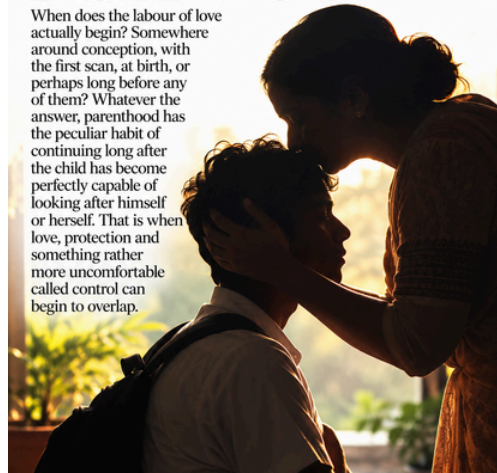
from a parent. They have grown up with access to information, cultures, relationships and career choices their parents often never encountered, and many regard adulthood as carrying a much stronger entitlement to personal autonomy.

They may welcome advice while rejecting the proposition that advice becomes an instruction merely because it originated from somebody older.

That can produce an extraordinary collision of good intentions. Parents look at experience accumulated over fifty or sixty years and wonder why their children insist upon learning lessons the difficult way, while the children look at a world dramatically different from the one their parents entered and wonder why yesterday's experience should automatically determine tomorrow's decision. Both may believe they are being entirely reasonable.

“WE ONLY WANT WHAT'S BEST FOR YOU”

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Sri Lankan and wider Asian family culture makes the question particularly interesting because independence has traditionally meant something rather different here than in many Western societies.

Families frequently remain closely involved in decisions about education, careers, marriage, money and children well into adulthood, and that closeness can provide an extraordinary support system when things go wrong.

The same closeness, however, can make it difficult to establish where parental concern ends and an adult child's right to make an unpopular decision begins.

Perhaps the most difficult adjustment in parenthood is therefore not raising the child but relinquishing authority over the adult that child becomes.

For nearly two decades responsible parenting requires intervention, correction and sometimes an emphatic no. Successful parenting must then gradually transform into

something almost opposite: offering experience without demanding obedience and remaining available without insisting upon being in charge.

That is considerably easier to describe than practise. Parents can often see a bad decision approaching because they made something remarkably similar themselves, and every instinct developed over decades says prevent the pain before it arrives.

Yet there comes a point when protecting an adult child from every mistake may also prevent that child from acquiring precisely the judgement the parent is attempting to provide.

The younger generation has responsibilities in this bargain too. Independence does not make experience irrelevant, and fashionable language about boundaries should not become an excuse for treating parental concern as an intrusion whenever the advice happens to be inconvenient.

The mother asking whether you have eaten may know perfectly well that you are capable of finding a sandwich; what she may really be saying is that after all these years she still needs to know you are all right.

There is no obvious retirement age for being a mother or father. The job description simply changes, often without anybody informing the people doing the job, and perhaps that explains why families spend so much time negotiating the difference between caring and controlling.

Parents are learning to let go at precisely the same moment their children are learning to stand without them.

The labour of love therefore does not end when the labour ward is left behind. It continues through school fees and examinations, broken hearts and first jobs, marriages and grandchildren, successes celebrated and disasters quietly repaired, until the people who once needed everything from their parents eventually need something much more difficult to give.

The freedom to decide for themselves.

Perhaps “we only want what's best for you” remains one of the most sincere sentences a parent can utter. The test of that love comes when the child answers, with equal sincerity, that what is best is now something he or she must be allowed to determine.

Be that as it may.

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