

**NEWSLINE***Daily by Faraz***"Questioning
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SURESH SALLAY IS BACK WITH THE CID. DID SRI LANKA LOSE FOUR MONTHS?

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SURESH SALLAY IS BACK WITH THE CID. DID SRI LANKA LOSE FOUR MONTHS?

Former intelligence chief Suresh Sallay has been discharged from the National Hospital and returned to CID custody after a medical board concluded that he was fit to leave hospital. His hospitalisation lasted 119 days. Now comes the question that matters: what happens to the investigation?

Former Director of the State Intelligence Service, retired Major General Suresh Sallay, is back in the custody of the Criminal Investigation Department after spending almost four months at the National Hospital in Colombo.

A 10-member medical committee informed the Colombo Magistrate's Court that Sallay had completed his treatment and was fit to be discharged. Additional Solicitor General Dileepa Peiris subsequently told court that Sallay would be returned to CID custody.

The dates matter. Sallay was arrested on February 25 in connection with continuing investigations arising from the 2019 Easter Sunday terrorist attacks.

He was admitted to the National Hospital on June 7 and remained there until October 6, a period of 119 days. Remarkably, it was alleged that he was also kept in the hospital for dental treatment.

We wonder how many prisoners – either on remand or convicted – spend time at the national hospital for dental treatment. Be that as it may, He remains detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

His medical treatment cannot simply be dismissed as an inconvenience to investigators. Evidence presented during the proceedings included information concerning a heart condition, and the eventual decision that he was fit for discharge was made by a 10-member medical committee rather than the CID.

That distinction matters.

But something else matters just as much. The prosecution has previously indicated to court that Sallay's hospitalisation affected the CID's ability to question him and progress aspects of its investigation.

If that is so, Sri Lanka is entitled to know what was delayed.

An investigation into the Easter Sunday attacks is not an ordinary criminal inquiry.

More than seven years after 269 people were killed, the country is still attempting to establish whether every person who knew something, facilitated something, failed to act or may have been connected in some other way has been properly investigated.

In Sri Lanka some media networks were critical whilst others offered crocodile fears of brand protection. None of that has stopped this investigation.

Sallay has not been convicted of any offence arising from these allegations.

Detention is not guilt, an investigation is not a conviction and the presumption of innocence applies to him as it does to anybody else, including of course Namal Rajapaksa, the so-called 'Prince'.

But the same principle of fairness requires accountability from investigators.

If the CID says its work involving Sallay was impeded while he was in hospital, it should be possible to identify what remained outstanding when he entered hospital on June 7.

Was further questioning required? Were investigators seeking clarification of statements already made? Were confrontations with other evidence or witnesses necessary? Were documents or communications awaiting explanation?

And, crucially, could other parts of the investigation have continued without him?

A 119-day hospital stay does not automatically mean a 119-day suspension of an investigation.

Documents can be examined. Other witnesses can be questioned. Telephone and financial records can be analysed. Other investigative avenues can continue.

That is why the next few weeks will be important.

Sallay is now back with the CID. If his medical condition was the principal obstacle to completing an important part of the investigation, that obstacle has at least partly been removed. The clock therefore starts again.

Sri Lanka has spent seven years asking what really happened before Easter Sunday 2019. Another four months have now passed while one of the most significant figures being questioned in the continuing investigation was in hospital.

The issue is no longer whether Suresh Sallay was sufficiently ill to remain there. A medical committee has dealt with that question.

The question now belongs to the CID.

What exactly remains to be investigated, and how much longer will it take?

FUEL QUEUES ARE BACK. THIS TIME WE KNOW WHY.

Private fuel companies have reduced supplies while motorists increasingly turn to CPC filling stations. Sri Lanka opened its fuel market to competition to reduce the burden on the State. So why is the State once again being required to carry the market?

Sri Lanka has seen this picture before: vehicles lining up outside filling stations and motorists wondering whether the next station will have fuel.

But this is not 2022.

There is fuel in the country. The problem now appears to be who is prepared to sell it, at what price and who ultimately carries the loss.

Energy Minister Kumara Jayakody told Parliament that private petroleum companies have reduced supplies because the prevailing regulated retail prices make sales commercially difficult.

The numbers are substantial. Compared with February, Lanka IOC's auto-diesel releases have reportedly fallen by around 45 percent while Sinopec's diesel supply has fallen by approximately 66 percent. Reductions have also been reported across other petroleum products.

The consequence is predictable. Consumers who cannot obtain fuel from private operators migrate towards Ceylon Petroleum Corporation filling stations.

CPC must then increase supply.

That raises a question Sri Lanka should have anticipated when it liberalised the petroleum market.

Competition works when companies compete for customers. It works rather differently when competitors can reduce supply because margins are unattractive and the State-owned company must ensure that the country keeps moving.

Sri Lanka brought new international operators into the petroleum market after the catastrophic shortages of 2022. The argument was persuasive. Greater competition would diversify supply, reduce dependence on CPC and introduce private capital and commercial discipline.

But competition cannot mean private operators participate when margins are attractive while CPC assumes the national obligation when they are not.

There is another complication.

The Government has intervened to cushion consumers from higher international petroleum prices.

That is understandable when fuel prices feed directly into transport costs, food prices, electricity, production and inflation.

But somebody pays the difference.

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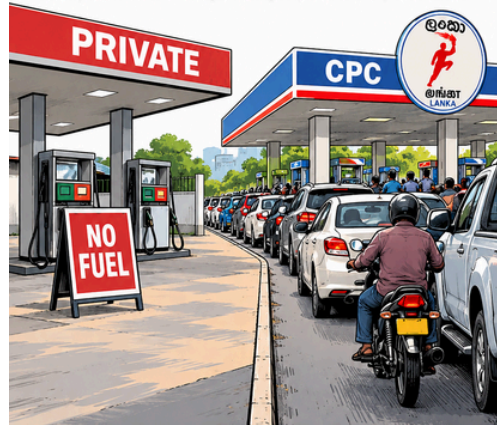
FUEL QUEUES ARE BACK ...

If the consumer does not pay it at the pump and the private supplier will not absorb it, the cost ultimately moves elsewhere in the system.

If CPC carries that burden, Sri Lanka risks recreating precisely the financial weaknesses that previously left State-owned enterprises accumulating enormous losses.

FUEL QUEUES ARE BACK. THIS TIME WE KNOW WHY.

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There is no suggestion that private operators should be compelled indefinitely to sell fuel at a loss. Nor can Sri Lanka simply expose households and businesses overnight to every movement in international oil prices.

The problem is therefore not solved by choosing one side. It requires a pricing mechanism that is transparent, commercially sustainable and capable of protecting genuinely vulnerable consumers without quietly transferring an unlimited liability back to the taxpayer.

Sri Lanka did not liberalise the petroleum market merely to change the logos above filling stations.

It did so because the old system failed spectacularly.

If CPC is once again becoming the supplier of last resort whenever the economics become uncomfortable, then the Government needs to explain what competition in Sri Lanka's fuel market actually means.

THE ECONOMY IS BACK TO 2018. ARE SRI LANKANS?

Sri Lanka's economy has finally recovered the output it lost during the crisis. GDP is growing, the country has returned to upper-middle-income status and the World Bank has raised its growth forecast. Yet poverty remains substantially above where it was before the crisis. Economic recovery has arrived. For many households, recovery has not.

There is finally a number Sri Lanka can celebrate. The economy has returned to its pre-crisis size after twelve consecutive quarters of growth, with real GDP expanding by 4.7 percent during the first half of 2026.

The World Bank now expects the economy to grow by 4.4 percent this year, an improvement on its earlier forecast. Industry has performed strongly, services have remained resilient and Sri Lanka has regained the economic output lost during the extraordinary collapse that culminated in 2022.

Those are significant achievements. A country that defaulted on its foreign debt, ran desperately short of foreign exchange and endured fuel queues, power cuts and inflation of extraordinary proportions is growing again.

But there is another set of numbers.

The World Bank estimates poverty at 16.9 percent in 2025, compared with 11.5 percent in 2019. On its revised methodology, poverty reached 20.7 percent at the height of the crisis in 2023, meaning that approximately two million Sri Lankans were pushed into poverty between 2019 and that peak.

The Bank projects the rate falling to 15.8 percent this year, but even by 2028 it expects poverty to remain above its pre-crisis level.

There is an even more revealing figure. The World Bank estimates that around two-fifths of Sri Lankans in 2026 are either poor or vulnerable to falling into poverty.

That is where the economic argument changes.

GDP measures the value of what an economy produces. It does not measure whether a pensioner can afford dinner, whether a family has stopped buying meat, whether a parent has postponed a child's dental treatment or whether a household that survived the crisis has rebuilt the savings it consumed while doing so.

Nor does an economy returning to its 2018 size mean that individual Sri Lankans have returned to their 2018 circumstances.

Prices have changed. Taxes have changed. Electricity tariffs have changed. Interest rates have moved dramatically and household balance sheets have absorbed years of economic punishment.

Employment and household incomes have not recovered at the same pace as headline GDP.

There is also a geographical dimension. Poverty outside the Western Province is estimated to be two to three times

higher than within it, while poverty in the estate sector is estimated at three times the national average.

That makes the next phase of economic policy rather more difficult than the first.

Stabilisation had identifiable targets. Restore reserves. Control inflation. restructure debt. Improve government revenue.

Remove some of the enormous losses accumulated within State enterprises and restore confidence in the currency and banking system.

Transformation is harder.

It requires productive jobs, investment, exports and businesses capable of paying wages that allow households to move permanently away from poverty rather than simply surviving immediately above it.

The World Bank itself is now making that distinction. Sri Lanka's recovery is real, but it describes it as incomplete and uneven.

That is perhaps the most useful description of where the country stands.

Sri Lanka has recovered the economy it had before the crisis. It now has to answer a considerably more difficult question.

When will Sri Lankans recover with it?

WE HAVE A BUDGET SURPLUS. WE ALSO HAVEN'T SPENT THE MONEY.

Sri Lanka recorded a rare budget surplus during the first half of 2026. Stronger tax collections played their part, but so did delayed government expenditure. Only around 8 percent of money allocated for Cyclone Dittwah reconstruction had reportedly been spent. A surplus is welcome. Achieving part of it by not doing what Parliament allocated money to do is something else.

For a country that has spent decades borrowing to cover the difference between what governments collect and what they spend, a budget surplus ought to be exceptionally good news.

Sri Lanka has recorded one.

The World Bank says fiscal performance during the first half of 2026 significantly exceeded expectations, with the primary budget balance improving sharply and the overall budget moving into a rare surplus.

Revenue performance has improved considerably.

After years in which governments reduced taxes, granted exemptions, tolerated leakages and borrowed to cover the resulting gap, Sri Lanka is collecting substantially more from its citizens and businesses.

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WE HAVE A BUDGET...

That is part of the economic correction demanded after the bankruptcy of 2022.

But there is another side to the surplus.

Government expenditure has also been delayed, including money intended for reconstruction following Cyclone Ditwah. According to the World Bank's latest assessment, only around 8 percent of the funds allocated for rebuilding had been spent.

That deserves rather more attention than the headline announcing a budget surplus.

There is a fundamental difference between saving money and failing to spend money that has already been allocated for necessary work.

If a government discovers that a project is unnecessary, cancels it and saves the taxpayer the money, that is fiscal discipline.

If Parliament allocates money to rebuild damaged infrastructure and months later only a fraction has been spent because procurement, administration or implementation has stalled, the resulting improvement in the fiscal balance is not quite the same achievement.

Some expenditure will inevitably take time. Reconstruction requires engineering assessments, procurement procedures, tendering and safeguards against precisely the corruption and waste Sri Lanka has repeatedly experienced in public projects.

Spending quickly is not automatically spending wisely.

But spending slowly has consequences too.

A damaged road does not repair itself while a tender is being processed. A family awaiting reconstruction does not experience an accounting surplus as an improvement in its living conditions. A business cut off by damaged infrastructure cannot deposit the Government's improved fiscal balance in the bank.

This matters particularly because Sri Lankans have already made a substantial contribution to the fiscal recovery.

Taxes have risen. VAT has increased. More people have been brought into the tax system and businesses face greater enforcement of their obligations.

Government therefore has an equal obligation on the other side of the ledger.

If it collects money efficiently, it must spend necessary money efficiently too.

The World Bank's figures should prompt a straightforward accounting. How much was allocated for Cyclone Ditwah reconstruction, how much has actually been spent, what has been completed, what remains outstanding and why?

Sri Lanka desperately needs fiscal discipline.

It also desperately needs functioning infrastructure, efficient public investment and a State capable of turning

an allocation in a Budget into something visible on the ground.

A budget surplus is worth celebrating when it reflects sustainable revenue and controlled expenditure.

It is less impressive if part of it exists because the Government simply hasn't got around to spending the money.

TWO MILLION SRI LANKANS FELL INTO POVERTY. A CHANGE IN THE CALCULATION DOESN'T CHANGE THAT.

The World Bank has revised its estimates of how badly poverty increased during Sri Lanka's economic crisis. The peak was lower than previously estimated, but the underlying conclusion remains grim. About two million people were pushed below the poverty line and the country is still years away from returning to its pre-crisis position.

Statistics can occasionally create the impression that reality has changed when only the method of measuring it has.

Sri Lanka has just received a useful example.

The World Bank has revised its poverty estimates for the years surrounding the economic crisis after adopting more detailed household-level information from the Labour Force Survey.

Under the revised methodology, poverty is estimated to have risen from 11.5 percent in 2019 to a peak of 20.7 percent in 2023.

The previous estimate for 2023 had been considerably higher at 27.6 percent.

At first sight that appears to be very good news. Poverty at the worst point of the crisis was almost seven percentage points lower than previously believed.

Except that nobody suddenly became richer because an economist changed the methodology.

The World Bank itself makes that distinction clear. The revision does not mean poverty suddenly disappeared. It means the institution believes it can now measure what happened more accurately.

And what happened remains serious.

Poverty approximately doubled during the crisis and an estimated two million people were pushed below the World Bank poverty line between 2019 and the 2023 peak.

The revised estimate places poverty at 18.4 percent in 2024 and 16.9 percent in 2025. It is projected to fall to 15.8 percent this year, 14.8 percent in 2027 and 14 percent in 2028.

Even then Sri Lanka would remain above its 2019 level.

There is another caution required here.

These are World Bank estimates and projections rather than Sri Lanka's official poverty statistics. The country's official benchmark remains the Household Income and Expenditure Survey conducted by the Department of Census and Statistics.

New data will therefore matter.

But the broad direction is already difficult to dispute. Sri Lanka suffered an economic crisis that did considerably more than empty foreign reserves and force the Government into sovereign default. It damaged household finances on a scale that will take considerably longer to repair than the country's headline economic indicators.

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That should influence the way recovery is discussed.

The Government is entitled to point to growth, improved revenue, debt restructuring and restored economic stability. Those are real achievements of the country's recovery process.

But poverty statistics provide the necessary counterweight.

An economy can stabilise before a household does.

A government balance sheet can improve while a family remains indebted. Foreign reserves can rise while somebody's savings remain exhausted. Inflation can fall without reversing the increase in prices that occurred while inflation was high.

Sri Lanka should welcome every indication that poverty is declining.

But, be that as it may, changing the estimate of how many Sri Lankans became poor does not alter the central fact.

The crisis made approximately two million people poor who were not poor before it. The real measure of recovery will be how many of them can build their way back out.

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TWO MILLION SRI LANKANS...

The World Bank's new release supports the key figures here: 4.7% first-half growth, 4.4% projected 2026 growth, 16.9% estimated 2025 poverty, and a recovery to 2018 real-output levels. The separate reconstruction finding is also current as of October 6.

SHIRANTHI IS BACK. NOW LET THE INVESTIGATION DO ITS WORK.

Shiranthi Rajapaksa has returned to Sri Lanka and is seeking anticipatory bail while the FCID investigates transactions connected with Siriliya Saviya. The court has called for the FCID's response and she has been instructed to appear before investigators. There is plenty of political theatre available here. NEWSLINE is more interested in whether the investigation produces evidence.

Former First Lady Shiranthi Rajapaksa is back in Sri Lanka after travelling overseas for medical treatment while an investigation into transactions associated with Siriliya Saviya continues.

Her return has immediately moved the matter back into the courts.

The Maligakanda Magistrate's Court has issued notice requiring the Officer-in-Charge of the Financial Crimes Investigation Division to appear on October 12 and make submissions concerning an anticipatory bail application filed on her behalf.

SHIRANTHI RAJAPAKSA RETURNS TO SRI LANKA



Police have meanwhile informed Rajapaksa to appear before the FCID on October 13 to provide a statement.

Her lawyers have sought protection against arrest. Submissions made on her behalf maintain that she travelled abroad for medical treatment, that she has no intention of avoiding the investigation and that she is prepared to provide a statement.

Those submissions will now be considered through the proper judicial process.

The underlying investigation concerns financial transactions linked to Siriliya Saviya, an organisation associated with Rajapaksa during the presidency of her husband, Mahinda Rajapaksa.

That is where NEWSLINE believes attention should remain.

Whether somebody belongs to the Rajapaksa family cannot determine whether that person should be arrested. Neither should membership of that family prevent a lawful investigation.

The test is evidence.

Sri Lanka has developed an unfortunate political culture in which an investigation itself is frequently treated as a verdict.

A summons becomes a scandal. An arrest becomes a conviction. Remand becomes punishment. Political supporters and opponents then select whichever interpretation suits them.

The law is supposed to operate differently.

Investigators must be permitted to investigate. A person under investigation must be permitted to defend herself. A court must decide questions of bail and detention according to law rather than political appetite.

The Government has repeatedly promised that law enforcement institutions will operate independently.

This is precisely the sort of case in which that promise will be tested.

Shiranthi Rajapaksa is not an ordinary political name. She is the wife of a former President, mother of a sitting parliamentarian now himself in remand custody and a member of a family that dominated Sri Lankan politics for much of the past two decades.

That makes the investigation politically important.

It does not make the evidentiary standard any lower.

There is also a responsibility on investigators.

If an investigation has been continuing for a substantial period, the public is entitled eventually to know whether there is sufficient evidence to prosecute somebody or whether there is not.

Investigations cannot become permanent political clouds hanging over individuals without resolution.

Shiranthi Rajapaksa has returned. Her anticipatory bail application will be considered. The FCID wants her statement.

All of that is process. The important part comes afterwards. Does the investigation produce a case?

49 ALLEGATIONS AGAINST THE SPEAKER. THE NUMBERS WILL NOT ANSWER THEM.

The Opposition says it will submit a no-confidence motion against Speaker Jagath Wickramaratne on Friday containing 49 allegations. The Government has indicated that it is prepared to debate it. With the NPP commanding an overwhelming parliamentary majority, the arithmetic may appear straightforward. The allegations are not.

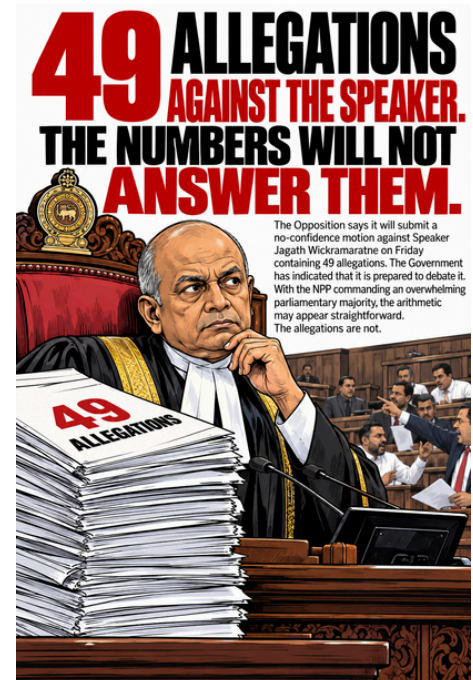
Sri Lanka's Opposition is preparing to place the conduct of Speaker Jagath Wickramaratne formally before Parliament.

The Samagi Jana Balawegaya says its no-confidence motion will be submitted on Friday, October 9, with Opposition MP Ajith P. Perera saying the document contains 49 allegations against the Speaker.

The Government has indicated that it is prepared to take up the motion for debate without unnecessary delay.

That is welcome.

But the debate will be useful only if Parliament does something more sophisticated than count votes.



The Government entered Parliament with 159 seats following an extraordinary electoral victory. Unless there has been a substantial political change within its own ranks, the Opposition faces an obvious numerical disadvantage in attempting to remove a Speaker elected by that majority.



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49 ALLEGATIONS...

That does not make the motion meaningless.
Nor does the existence of 49 allegations make any of them true.

The proper question is what the allegations actually are.

If they concern parliamentary procedure, decisions from the Chair, administration of Parliament, use of public resources or the Speaker's conduct, each should be capable of being stated clearly and answered clearly.

A list containing 49 accusations can sound devastating.

It can also obscure more than it reveals.

Some allegations may be substantial. Some may amount to disagreements over parliamentary procedure. Others may overlap or be variations of the same complaint.

NEWSLINE would therefore prefer Parliament to concentrate on the strongest allegations rather than the largest number.

There is already an additional dimension to the controversy. Separate allegations concerning the Speaker have previously reached the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption, including matters concerning official vehicles and allowances.

An investigation is not proof of wrongdoing, and those matters should not be conflated automatically with whatever appears in the no-confidence motion.

But they reinforce the need for answers.

The office of Speaker is different from an ordinary government position.

The Speaker is elected by Parliament, but once in the Chair is expected to protect the institution itself. Government MPs must be allowed to govern. Opposition MPs must be allowed to oppose. Parliamentary rules must apply regardless of who has 159 seats and who does not.

Confidence in that neutrality is therefore important. The Opposition also carries a responsibility.

A no-confidence motion should not become a device for converting every disagreement with a ruling from the Chair into an accusation of misconduct. If 49 allegations are being placed before Parliament, the Opposition should substantiate them.

The Government carries an equal responsibility. Its majority can defeat a motion. It cannot, by itself, answer an allegation.

That is why the coming debate may matter even if everybody believes they already know what the division bell will produce.

Parliament should examine the allegations, the Speaker should have the opportunity to answer them and the public should be able to judge the substance of both.

Be that as it may, 159 votes can settle the motion. They cannot settle the facts.

PORT CITY: WHEN DOES THE CITY ACTUALLY ARRIVE?

Colombo Port City was never supposed to be simply 269 hectares of very expensive reclaimed land beside the Indian Ocean. It was sold as something transformational: a new commercial district, an international services hub and a magnet for billions of dollars of investment that would change Colombo's economic geography.

Years later, the question is becoming increasingly difficult to avoid. When does the city actually arrive?

There has been progress. Businesses have been approved, legislation amended, investors courted and projects announced. The Government said in July that Port City had attracted US\$2.19 billion in investments, with 176 investments recorded and US\$336.67 million described as finalised. New developments have been announced and three major projects have received strategic-investment status.

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Those are not insignificant numbers.

But announcements are not buildings. Registrations are not operating businesses. Approved investments are not necessarily money already invested. Projected jobs are not people receiving salaries.

Port City itself says more than 150 companies are registered within the Special Economic Zone, associated with approximately 10,000 direct job opportunities.

That sounds impressive, but it also makes transparency more important. How many of those companies are actually operating today?

How many people are physically employed there?

How much foreign exchange came into Sri Lanka from those businesses during the last twelve months? How much tax revenue was generated?

These are not hostile questions. They are the questions that should accompany a project of this scale.

Port City is estimated ultimately to require around US\$15 billion in development.

Its master developer says approximately US\$1.4 billion has already gone into reclamation and enabling infrastructure.

The country therefore has an enormous economic interest in making the next stage work.

That requires more than announcing another authorised business, another investment roadshow or another regulatory approval.

Sri Lanka needs cranes, foundations, offices, residents, companies, employees, transactions, exports of services and foreign exchange.

The Government has improved the regulatory framework and shortened approval processes. Port City says authorised-person registration can be completed within seven days and approved work visas within five business days. Good.

But facilitating thousands of potential employees, issuing authorisations or creating thousands of projected employment opportunities does not mean everything has been taken on board.

The ultimate measurement is considerably simpler.

What has actually been built? Who has actually arrived? What are they actually doing?

And how much money is actually coming into Sri Lanka?

Be that as it may, Colombo Port City has had enough time to tell us what it intends to become.

It is time we were shown what it has become.

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LORD JEFFREY ARCHER: HE NEVER DID ANYTHING BY HALVES

He wrote his way out of bankruptcy. He couldn't write his way out of prison. Jeffrey Archer was a politician, millionaire, bankrupt, peer, prisoner and one of the most successful storytellers of his generation. He died aged 86, leaving behind a life so improbable that, had Archer himself submitted it as a manuscript, an editor might have told him to make it more believable.

There was something irresistible about Jeffrey Archer. You did not necessarily have to admire everything he did, approve of the choices he made or even particularly like his politics, but it was exceedingly difficult to find him boring. Perhaps that was because Archer lived as though every chapter required another plot twist.

He became an MP at 29, lost his fortune, resigned from Parliament, wrote himself back into wealth, returned to politics, entered the House of Lords, came within sight of becoming Mayor of London, was convicted of perjury, went to prison and then wrote about that too. Most people would have regarded one of those lives as quite enough.

Born in London in 1940 and raised in Somerset, Archer entered Parliament as Conservative MP for Louth in 1969 and appeared to have the political world ahead of him.

A disastrous investment in the Canadian company Aquablast subsequently left him facing enormous debts, and he resigned from Parliament in 1974 before turning seriously to writing because, among other things, he needed the money.

Not a Penny More, Not a Penny Less appeared in 1976 and *Kane and Abel* followed in 1979. Archer ceased being merely a former politician who had written a novel and became an international bestselling author who had, quite literally, written his way out of bankruptcy.

Over the decades that followed, his books sold in their hundreds of millions.

A Matter of Honour, *First Among Equals*, *As the Crow Flies*, *The Fourth Estate*, the Clifton Chronicles and his short stories found readers across the world, while literary critics who were not always enthusiastic about his prose were confronted by millions of readers who plainly were.

Archer understood something very simple about popular fiction. The reader had to want to know what happened next, and he knew how to end a chapter at precisely the point at which putting the book down became irritating.

Politics meanwhile kept calling him back. Margaret Thatcher appointed him deputy chairman of the Conservative Party in 1985 and in 1992 he became Baron Archer of Weston-super-Mare, a peerage he retained for the rest of his life.

Then came the extraordinary second collapse. Archer had successfully sued the *Daily Star* for libel in 1987 over allegations concerning a prostitute and received

substantial damages, but years later evidence emerged that the case had been supported by false testimony and a fabricated alibi.

In 2001 he was convicted of perjury and perverting the course of justice and sentenced to four years in prison. The Conservative Party expelled him, but he was not stripped of his peerage, meaning the millionaire novelist, former MP and Baron Archer of Weston-super-Mare was now also prisoner FF8282.

Even prison became material. Archer watched the people around him, recorded the routines, absurdities, cruelties and friendships of prison life and eventually produced three volumes of prison diaries from an experience that would have caused many public figures simply to disappear.

One story from *Purgatory*, the second volume, perhaps captures Archer better than almost anything else. At HMP Wayland he befriended a Colombian prisoner named Sergio who had contacts back home, and through those contacts Archer set about obtaining an emerald for his wife Mary.



The transaction was wonderfully improbable.

One of Britain's wealthiest and best-known novelists was sitting in prison attempting to buy his wife a Colombian emerald through a fellow inmate whose brother could source the stone in Colombia.

The emerald was reportedly obtained for around £10,000, substantially less than Archer believed an equivalent stone would have cost through a London jeweller, and he even explored whether the same Colombian connection could obtain a painting by Fernando Botero.

The painting never materialised, but the emerald story reveals something beyond Archer's seemingly inexhaustible appetite for a deal.

He was in prison, his political ambitions had collapsed and his reputation had suffered an extraordinary blow, yet he was still thinking about what he could give Mary for Christmas.

Dame Mary Archer had been beside him since their marriage in 1966. An accomplished scientist and academic in her own right, she remained through extraordinary wealth, political ambition, financial catastrophe, public humiliation, trial and imprisonment, and together they had two sons, William and James.

There is something rather human about the prisoner trying to find an emerald for the woman who had stayed through all of it.

It would be easy to write Archer's obituary entirely around his scandals, and a man who successfully sued a newspaper before subsequently being imprisoned for lying during that case cannot reasonably expect the episode to become a footnote, but neither should it swallow everything else.

Archer possessed an extraordinary capacity to recover. Bankruptcy did not finish him, political resignation did not finish him, public scandal did not finish him and prison did not finish him; sometimes the instrument of recovery was money, sometimes charm and sometimes sheer audacity, but most consistently it was writing.

Even into his eighties the books continued.

The Clifton Chronicles gave way to the William Warwick novels and Archer remained fascinated by characters, plots and the mechanics of storytelling long after he had anything left to prove commercially.

There were always at least two Jeffrey Archers. One was ferociously ambitious, occasionally reckless and capable of decisions that inflicted astonishing damage upon himself, while the other could sit before a blank page and make millions of strangers care about people who did not exist.

Perhaps the two were inseparable. He understood ambition because he possessed enormous quantities of it, reversals because his life was full of them and people prepared to risk everything because he had repeatedly done precisely that, sometimes successfully and sometimes disastrously.

There will be arguments about Jeffrey Archer's legacy and there should be.

He was far too complicated a man to reduce conveniently to either hero or villain, and his failures were too serious to erase simply because his books sold spectacularly well.

Eventually, however, the politicians with whom he shared platforms will become names in old newspapers, the scandals will become archive material and the criminal case will belong to legal history.

Somewhere, somebody who knows almost nothing about Jeffrey Archer will pick up *Kane and Abel*, read a chapter and then, because Archer knew exactly how to make them do it, read another.

Be that as it may, Jeffrey Archer spent much of his extraordinary life trying to control what happened next.

In the end, the one place he could always do so was on the page, and for a storyteller that may be the more enduring obituary.

Thank you Lord Archer for the books. Thank you for the fantastic specimen of a Life. Well and truly lived.

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