

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

IRANIAN. THE CREWS ARE HUMAN. WHAT DOES SRI LANKA DO NOW?

Iranian-registered vessels beyond Sri Lanka's waters may need food, water, medicine and fuel. Helping them sounds straightforward. US sanctions make it anything but. Maritime lawyer Nuwan Peiris says this is not a job for private actors. It requires the State, diplomacy and some very careful law.



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Sri Lanka has spent centuries looking out at the Indian Ocean. Occasionally the Indian Ocean looks back and presents us with a problem.

Reports that between 15 and 19 Iranian-registered vessels, primarily oil tankers, are lying in international waters beyond Sri Lanka's Exclusive Economic Zone present precisely such a problem. If their crews are genuinely running short of fresh water, medicine, food or other necessities, the humanitarian instinct is obvious.

Send them what they need. Unfortunately, international politics is rarely that simple.

Iran is subject to extensive unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States, including measures directed at its petroleum and shipping sectors. That means a Sri Lankan company or individual contemplating supplying an Iranian-linked vessel must consider something beyond the humanitarian merits of the transaction.

What happens to them afterwards?

Attorney-at-Law and maritime law specialist Nuwan Peiris, speaking to NEWSLINE, was distinctly uncomfortable with the idea of private Sri Lankan citizens or businesses simply loading supplies onto a vessel and heading out to help.

"I don't think the individual should venture out and give any humanitarian support the way I see it at this moment," Peiris said, warning that those involved could expose themselves to secondary sanctions.

That distinction matters.

There is a considerable difference between saying that distressed seafarers should receive humanitarian assistance and saying that any private person is legally and commercially safe to provide it.

A Sri Lankan businessman may regard a consignment of drinking water and medicine as an act of humanity. A sanctions authority examining the identity, ownership, cargo or commercial activity of the receiving vessel may have rather more questions.

That is why Peiris believes the matter should be handled at State level.

"Sri Lanka is a neutral state," he told NEWSLINE, arguing that humanitarian assistance to civilian merchant vessels need not, by itself, amount to taking sides in an international conflict.

But neutrality is not a magic word.

The identity of each vessel matters. Its ownership matters. Its cargo matters. Whether it has itself been specifically designated under sanctions matters. The nature of the assistance matters. Who supplies it, who pays for it and how any transaction is processed may matter as well.

Before Sri Lanka sends so much as a bottle of water, therefore, it should know exactly whom it is helping and under what legal framework.

That requires the Government, not an enthusiastic private flotilla.

Peiris believes Sri Lanka should consider an officially supervised humanitarian mechanism, with appropriate international visibility and monitoring. Regional states could be consulted, while international maritime institutions could provide another avenue through which the problem is addressed transparently.

There is considerable sense in that approach.

If this is genuinely a humanitarian emergency involving civilian seafarers, Sri Lanka should not have to choose casually between allowing human beings to suffer offshore and exposing its citizens or businesses unnecessarily to sanctions consequences.

Diplomacy exists precisely because some problems cannot safely be solved by simply doing what appears morally obvious.

Peiris suggested engagement with countries including India, Pakistan and the Maldives, together with international maritime institutions. He also emphasised quieter diplomacy behind the scenes.

"What you need is a big strategy and some sharpness," he said. "A multifaceted diplomatic strategy would certainly put even the Government of Sri Lanka on track."

That may be the most important point of all.

Sri Lanka does not need to make a geopolitical declaration simply because sailors may need drinking water. Nor should humanitarian assistance become an accidental mechanism for facilitating sanctioned commercial activity.

The two issues can and must be separated. First establish the facts.

How many vessels are actually there? Which vessels are they? Who owns and operates them? Are any individually sanctioned? What cargoes are aboard? What precisely do their crews require? Have formal distress or assistance requests been made? And through whom?

Then establish what humanitarian assistance can lawfully and safely be provided.

If necessary, Sri Lanka can communicate with the relevant governments and international institutions before acting. It can make clear that any assistance is humanitarian, transparent and confined to the welfare and safety of civilian crews.

That is considerably safer than leaving individual Sri Lankan companies to discover the boundaries of American sanctions policy after they have crossed them.

There is also a principle here worth defending.

Sanctions are directed at states, entities, commercial networks and individuals. Sailors aboard merchant vessels remain human beings. Their need for drinking water or urgent medicine does not disappear because of the flag flying above them or the government sitting thousands of kilometres away.

But compassion without legal preparation can create another problem rather than solve the first one.

Sri Lanka therefore needs neither bravado nor paralysis. It needs verification, law and diplomacy.

If there are seafarers sitting beyond our waters without adequate food, water or medicine, their circumstances deserve attention.

If sanctions make assistance complicated, then the Government must establish how assistance can be delivered without exposing Sri Lankan citizens and businesses unnecessarily.

That is what governments are for.

Be that as it may, the ships may be Iranian, the sanctions may be American and the waters may be international.

The people aboard them are still people. Sri Lanka's challenge is to remember that without forgetting the law.

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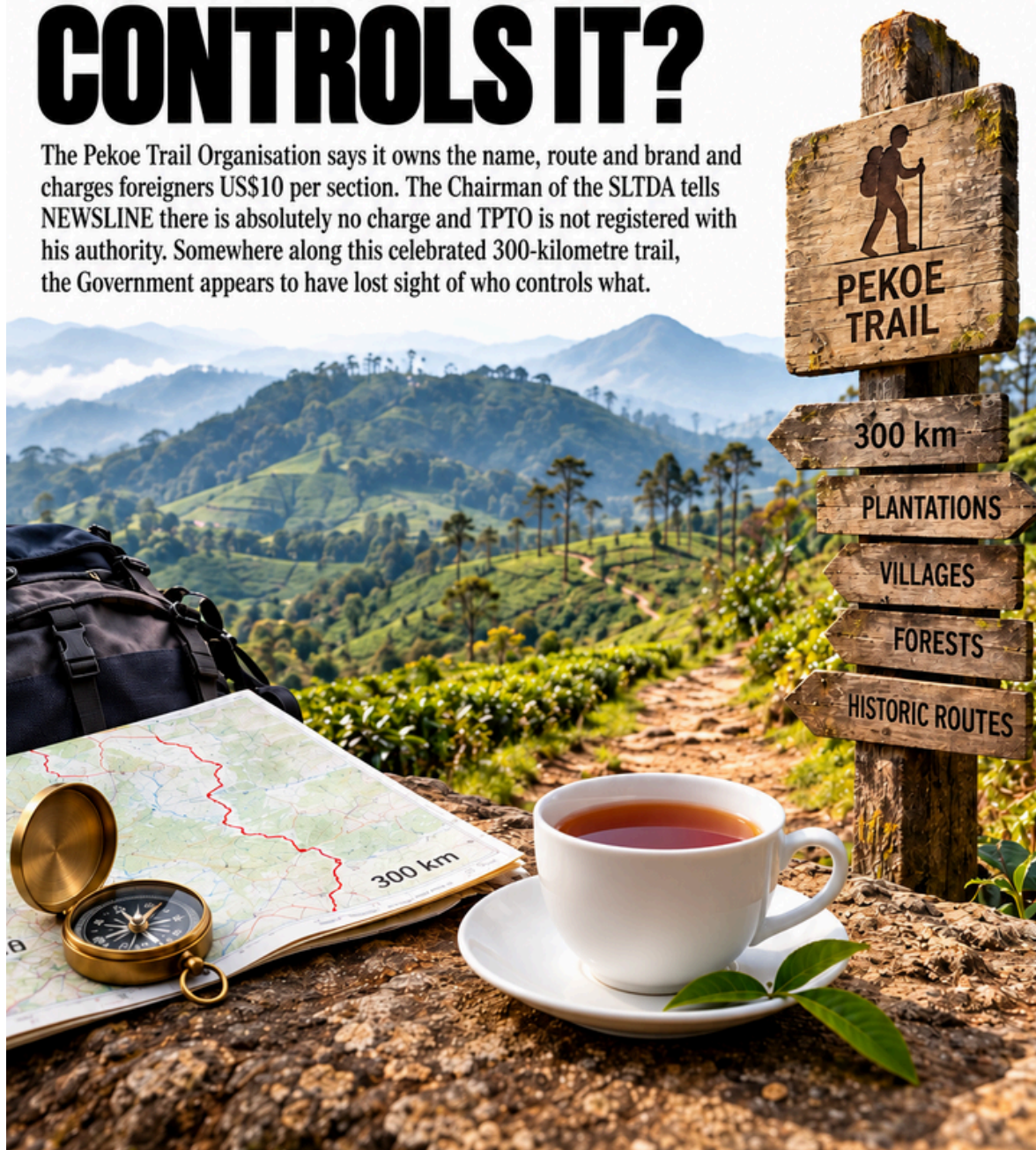
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THE PEKOE TRAIL IS A **NATIONAL TREASURE.** SO WHO ACTUALLY CONTROLS IT?

The Pekoe Trail Organisation says it owns the name, route and brand and charges foreigners US\$10 per section. The Chairman of the SLTDA tells NEWSLINE there is absolutely no charge and TPTO is not registered with his authority. Somewhere along this celebrated 300-kilometre trail, the Government appears to have lost sight of who controls what.





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Sri Lanka is presently pursuing alleged corruption and misuse of public assets with an enthusiasm rarely witnessed in recent years. Former presidents, political families, senior officials and others once considered almost untouchable have faced investigation, arrest or proceedings before the courts.

The message is unmistakable: public assets belong to the public and those entrusted with them must account for what they do.

Why, then, does government oversight appear so remarkably relaxed when it comes to the Pekoe Trail?

The approximately 300-kilometre trail through Sri Lanka's Central Highlands connects plantation roads, village paths, forest tracks, public roads and historic routes. International donor funding involving the European Union and USAID helped transform those existing pathways into an internationally marketed tourism product. The land beneath the trail belongs variously to the State, plantation companies and other landholders.

The Pekoe Trail Organisation, TPTO, meanwhile says it owns the name, route and brand. It operates through a company limited by guarantee and is chaired by businessman Malik J. Fernando, associated with Dilmah and Resplendent Ceylon. TPTO also makes another important admission: it does not own the land.

That distinction goes directly to the heart of the matter.

On September 14, it was publicly reported, following discussions with Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority Chairman Suranjith Wevita, that the SLTDA would take ownership of the Pekoe Trail during September. Under the proposed arrangement, the SLTDA and other State institutions were expected to hold the larger share of directorships alongside private-sector nominees.

September came and went. October is here. Malik Fernando remains identified as Chairman of the organisation managing the trail and there has been no publicly demonstrated completion of the transfer announced for September.

NEWSLINE telephoned Mr Wevita.

He was emphatic that the Pekoe Trail is a national asset and a national treasure. Indeed, he questioned why NEWSLINE was interested in a private company when, in his view, the essential point was that the Pekoe Trail belonged in the national realm. Any company could claim anything, he maintained, but this remained a national treasure.

That ought to be reassuring. Instead, it makes the question even more obvious.

If this is a national asset, what precisely does a private company own when it says it owns the name, route and brand? Who transferred those rights, under what agreement, and what exactly does the State own today?

When NEWSLINE pressed Mr Wevita about the transfer announced for September, he maintained that it would happen. There were, he said, several works in progress.

There may be a perfectly reasonable explanation for the delay. Intellectual property, corporate restructuring, plantation agreements and State participation cannot necessarily be reorganised overnight.

But surely the public can be told what is being transferred, from whom, to whom and when.

Then the trail became considerably more interesting.

TPTO advertises Trail Passes. Foreign visitors are charged US\$10 per section while Sri Lankan residents have been asked to pay Rs. 600. NEWSLINE therefore asked Mr Wevita whether we would have to pay Rs. 600 if we turned up tomorrow and walked a section of the Pekoe Trail.

His answer was unequivocal. There is absolutely no charge.

What happens, NEWSLINE asked, if somebody insists that we pay? Mr Wevita said the matter could be reported to the Police.

There is an obvious problem here. An organisation is advertising passes costing US\$10 and Rs. 600 while the Chairman of Sri Lanka's statutory tourism authority says there is absolutely no charge.

Both propositions cannot govern the same access in the same circumstances.

NEWSLINE resisted pointing out that somebody challenged for Rs. 600 somewhere deep in the Central Highlands might then have to embark upon an entirely different trail: finding the nearest police station.

There is, however, a considerably more serious question. Mr Wevita also told NEWSLINE that TPTO is not registered with the SLTDA.

Anyone familiar with Sri Lanka's tourism industry knows that registration and regulation are not optional concepts for businesses falling within prescribed tourism categories. Hotels, travel operators, guides and other tourism service providers operate within a regulatory framework.

So where does TPTO sit?

If an organisation markets an internationally recognised Sri Lankan tourism experience and charges a foreign visitor US\$10 per section to use it, does that constitute a tourism service requiring registration with the SLTDA? If it does not, what is the exemption or legal distinction?

Perhaps TPTO's status as a nonprofit destination management organisation places it outside the relevant category. Perhaps the US\$10 is legally a contribution rather than an admission fee. Perhaps it purchases services surrounding the walk rather than access to the trail itself.

There may be a perfectly satisfactory explanation. NEWSLINE would like to hear it.

Because if the Chairman of the SLTDA says there is absolutely no charge to walk the Pekoe Trail, there is a very simple follow-up question.

What exactly does the US\$10 buy?

Consider another national treasure. Sigiriya operates within a clearly identifiable State framework. Private companies can bring tourists there, sell packages, provide transport and offer authorised tourism services, but the distinction between the national asset and the businesses earning money around it is readily understood.

The Pekoe Trail is admittedly more complicated. It crosses different categories of land, including plantation property, and private landowners may legitimately impose access conditions on their property.

That makes transparency more important, not less.

If Rs. 600 buys permission to cross private property, say so. If US\$10 pays for maintenance, mapping, insurance, signage or another service, say so. If a section follows an unrestricted public road or State track which anybody may walk without payment, say that too.

A tourist should not have to determine the legal status of the ground beneath his shoes while standing on it.

There is another important dimension. International assistance helped create the tourism product now being marketed as the Pekoe Trail.

Money was spent identifying the route, mapping it, developing infrastructure, creating digital assets, promoting it and turning hundreds of kilometres of existing pathways into something capable of attracting international visitors.

What happened to those assets when the donor project ended?

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THE PEKOE TRAIL...

Who owns the intellectual property? Who owns the maps and digital infrastructure? Who receives the Trail Pass revenue? Who audits it? How much is spent maintaining the trail and how much reaches the communities through which it passes?

Most importantly, who ultimately answers to whom?

These are questions, not accusations. There is no evidence before NEWSLINE that Malik Fernando personally owns the physical Pekoe Trail or improperly acquired State property. His chairmanship of TPTO establishes nothing of the sort.

The issue is institutional and considerably simpler.

Who owns what? Who authorised it? Who regulates it? Who collects the money?

There is an uncomfortable irony in having to ask.

The State is presently demonstrating that it can investigate alleged misuse of public assets years after transactions occurred, involving some of the most powerful people in Sri Lanka. Investigators search for documents, prosecutors reconstruct decisions and courts are eventually asked to determine whether public resources were properly handled.

Why wait until then?

Good governance cannot simply mean investigating what happened to a national asset after something has gone wrong.

It must also mean establishing ownership, regulation, revenue flows and accountability while the asset is being created.

Prevention is considerably cheaper than prosecution.

The Government says the Pekoe Trail is moving into State ownership. The Chairman of the SLTDA says it is a national treasure. He tells NEWSLINE there is absolutely no charge to walk it and that TPTO is not registered with his authority.

TPTO meanwhile advertises paid Trail Passes and says it owns the Pekoe Trail's name, route and brand.

There appear to be several slips between several cups of tea and the lips or, in this particular case, before one's feet even begin moving along the Pekoe Trail.

Sri Lanka should be proud of what has been created across those 300 kilometres.

The Pekoe Trail has the potential to become one of the country's great tourism success stories and to take visitors, employment and money into communities far beyond the traditional tourism circuit.

That is precisely why the questions should be answered now.

Be that as it may, NEWSLINE will continue following this particular trail: the trail of how Sri Lanka protects its national assets, including the ones it has only just created.

SHIRANTHI TO BE TAKEN TO NATIONAL EYE HOSPITAL

Former First Lady Shiranthi Rajapaksa will not be moved to a private hospital for treatment but will instead be taken to the National Eye Hospital in Colombo on the morning of October 9, NEWSLINE understands.

Rajapaksa, who is presently in remand custody, requires continuing treatment for an eye condition and was seen leaving court with her eye heavily bandaged.

The Colombo Magistrate's Court had earlier directed prison authorities to facilitate treatment for the condition.

Her lawyers had told court that she was receiving treatment at a private hospital, and reports on October 8 indicated that arrangements were being made for her to be examined there.

NEWSLINE now has confirmation that she will not be transferred to a private hospital. Instead, arrangements have been made for her to be taken under prison custody to the National Eye Hospital, Colombo, on the morning of October 9.

Rajapaksa was remanded until October 13 following her arrest by the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption in connection with an alleged Rs. 10 million transaction involving the Siriliya Saviya organisation. The allegations remain to be determined by court, and Rajapaksa denies wrongdoing.

The decision to use the National Eye Hospital means that her treatment will continue within the State health system while she remains a remand prisoner.

Be that as it may.

SHIRANTHI RAJAPAKSA TO BE TAKEN TO NATIONAL EYE HOSPITAL THIS MORNING



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XPRESS PEARL MATTER: AN UNUSUAL AND HIGHLY QUESTIONABLE ATTITUDE THE PRESIDENT IS NOT AN APPEAL COURT



The London P&I Club has every right to defend its interests and those of the parties it insures. It has every right to disagree with a judgment of Sri Lanka's Supreme Court and to pursue whatever remedies the law permits. **But asking the President of the Republic to “advocate” to the courts over the treatment of parties affected by that judgment crosses into constitutionally dangerous territory.**

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NEWSLINE has obtained a letter dated September 19, 2025, addressed to the President of Sri Lanka by James Bean, Chief Executive Officer of The London P&I Club, the protection and indemnity insurer connected to the X-Press Pearl.

The letter deserves very careful reading, not because writing to the President is itself improper, but because of what the President is being asked to do.

The Club tells the President that it is concerned that the vessel's agents and master could face detention under contempt proceedings and then makes this request:

“we would humbly ask that you seek to advocate that the courts make alternative arrangements”

Those words matter.

Sri Lanka is a constitutional democracy. The President heads the executive. He is not the head of the judiciary, he does not sit above the Supreme Court and he possesses no general constitutional authority to tell a court how it should deal with a party appearing before it.

Indeed, the constitutional architecture points firmly in the opposite direction.

Article 3 places sovereignty in the People. Article 4 then distributes the exercise of that sovereignty among the institutions of the State. Executive power is exercised by the President. Judicial power is exercised through the courts, tribunals and institutions established or recognised by the Constitution or law.

The separation is fundamental to Sri Lanka's constitutional structure.

There is an even more direct provision.

Article 111C provides that persons entrusted with judicial powers or functions shall exercise those functions without being subject to direction or other interference from anyone except where lawful supervision exists within the judicial structure. The constitutional purpose could hardly be clearer: judicial decision-making is to remain independent of outside influence.

That makes the request to the President extraordinary.

The London P&I Club actually acknowledges in its letter the President's “responsibility for ensuring the constitutional separation of powers” and, almost in the same breath, asks him to “advocate” that the courts adopt particular arrangements for the agents and master.

Those two propositions sit very uneasily together.

What precisely would presidential “advocacy” to a court mean?

Would the President write to the judiciary? Would an official from the Presidential Secretariat convey the Club's concerns? Would the executive publicly express a preference as to whether particular persons should be detained? Would someone communicate with a court concerning proceedings before it?

NEWSLINE is not suggesting that any of those things happened. We have no basis for saying that they did.

The point is that they should not happen.

The President's constitutional duty is not to secure a particular judicial outcome for a shipowner, insurer, agent, captain, environmental organisation, fisherman, government department or anyone else. His obligation is to respect the institutional independence that permits a court to reach its own decision according to law.

The Club makes a second request that raises a different but related issue. It asks the President to appoint a high-level representative to facilitate discussions between the Government, The London P&I Club, X-Press Feeders and others concerning how the situation might be resolved.

Dialogue with the executive is not inherently objectionable. Governments negotiate. Governments discuss settlements. State agencies communicate with litigants. The Attorney-General represents the State. There may be entirely legitimate space for discussions about matters falling within executive authority.

But there must be a bright line.

A government may discuss what the Government can lawfully do. It cannot negotiate away a judgment of the Supreme Court. Nor should an executive dialogue become an indirect mechanism for achieving what must properly be sought from a court through legal process.

The distinction is crucial because this is not simply an insurance dispute.

In its X-Press Pearl judgment, the Supreme Court ordered an initial US\$1 billion payment after considering the environmental damage and losses suffered by fishing communities and others. The Court held the relevant X-Press Pearl parties jointly and severally accountable under the Polluter Pays Principle.

The Club and the parties concerned are perfectly entitled to challenge conclusions available for challenge, seek clarification, make applications, advance arguments concerning proportionality, liberty and flight risk, and invoke every procedural protection available under Sri Lankan law.

That is what courts are for.

If detention is unnecessary or disproportionate,

make that argument before the court. If a travel restriction is sufficient, ask the court for one. If circumstances have changed, place the evidence before the judges. If there is a lawful route to vary an order, use it.

The answer cannot be to ask the President to advocate the preferred outcome.

There is another sentence in the letter worth examining. The Club asks the President to “reaffirm the commitment to a presumption of innocence and fair trials” for individuals facing legal jeopardy.

As a statement of principle, there can be little argument with it. Presumption of innocence and fair process are essential components of justice.

But those protections ultimately belong in the courtroom. They are secured by law and by independent judges, not by presidential intervention in individual cases.

This distinction protects everybody, including the London P&I Club.

Today an insurer may want a President to advocate restraint by a court. Tomorrow a government might want a President to advocate severity. Once executive intervention in individual judicial proceedings is accepted when the desired result appears reasonable, the constitutional barrier protecting the judiciary has already been weakened.

That is precisely why separation of powers matters most when the stakes are high.

NEWSLINE therefore makes no allegation that the London P&I Club has committed an offence by sending this letter. Nor do we question its right to represent its members vigorously. International insurers facing exposure of this magnitude would be expected to explore every lawful avenue available to them.

But diplomatic access and constitutional authority are not the same thing.

The doors of the Presidential Secretariat may properly be open to international businesses wishing to discuss government policy.

The doors of Sri Lanka's courts are open to litigants seeking judicial relief.

The two doors must not become interchangeable.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake can listen. His Government can engage on matters lawfully within executive competence. Officials can meet representatives of the international maritime and insurance industries. The State can consider lawful proposals placed before it.

What the President cannot properly become is an intermediary between a litigant and the judges deciding that litigant's fate.

The Supreme Court is not a department of the Presidential Secretariat. And the President of Sri Lanka is not a court of appeal.

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XPRESS PEARL MATTER...

Be that as it may, NewsLine has these questions for the President and which we are writing to him directly. In essence the questions are as follows:

1. Has our President written (by way of disclosure) to the parliament and the judiciary about him being written to by London P and I club, where the President is party to the ongoing fundamental rights application on the issue of X-Press pearl?

2. Did the President meet UK Chancellor Reeves or did she contact the government on any of these matters? if so Why did the President not brief the parliament and the Supreme Court about it ? or if he did confirmation thereof.

3. Did the Cabinet headed by the President take any decisions through the cabinet regarding the X-Press Pearl after 30 April 2026? If so please table those decisions before Parliament.

THE WATER IS DISAPPEARING. WHO IS LISTENING TO THE FARMERS?

Sri Lanka's dry-zone farmers are confronting a worsening water crisis as reservoirs shrink, wells run dry and cultivation becomes increasingly uncertain.

The Mahaweli Authority is urging farmers to conserve water ahead of the Maha season. But conservation alone cannot protect a family whose livelihood depends on a harvest that may never materialise.

In Medirigiriya and other parts of Sri Lanka's dry zone, the economic crisis is not measured in percentages or discussed in conference rooms.

It is visible at the bottom of an empty well, across a field of failed crops and in the mounting debts of farmers who have already invested money they cannot afford to lose. For these families, the arrival or failure of the rains can determine whether the coming months bring an income or another season of borrowing.

Sri Lanka is experiencing serious water stress following inadequate rainfall, with some reservoirs reportedly holding only about one-third of their capacity. In affected communities, households have become dependent on water deliveries while farmers struggle to keep crops alive. Wildlife is also suffering, with diminishing water sources forcing authorities to intervene in some protected areas.

On October 8, the Mahaweli Authority urged farmers preparing for the Maha cultivation season to use rainwater wherever possible and conserve irrigation supplies.

Water releases under the 2026/27 Maha programme began on October 1 and are scheduled in stages until November 14, covering 55 Mahaweli schemes and approximately 227,283 hectares of agricultural land.

The advice is sensible, but it exposes the fundamental weakness of agricultural policy in a country where so much depends on increasingly unpredictable rainfall.

A farmer can reduce waste, change cultivation practices and follow official irrigation instructions, but he cannot manufacture rain. Nor can he suspend loan repayments simply because a reservoir has failed to replenish itself.

The Government has approved a fertiliser subsidy of Rs. 30,000 per hectare for the coming Maha season, subject to a maximum of two hectares per farmer.

The estimated national expenditure is Rs. 16 billion, a substantial commitment intended to reduce cultivation costs and support domestic agricultural production. Yet fertiliser assistance, however welcome, cannot compensate for the absence of sufficient water.

That raises a question which deserves an answer before farmers commit themselves to another season of expenditure.

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Are the authorities providing reliable, location-specific information about expected water availability, recommended cultivation areas and the risks associated with planting particular crops?

Farmers should not discover halfway through a season that the water they were encouraged to depend upon is no longer available.

The consequences of a failed harvest extend well beyond the individual cultivator.

Agricultural labourers lose employment, village traders lose customers and families already carrying debt are forced to borrow again. What begins as a shortage of rainfall can quickly become a prolonged financial crisis affecting entire rural communities.

Sri Lanka has experienced droughts before, and climate variability makes further periods of water stress inevitable.

Yet the national response remains heavily dependent on emergency measures, cultivation advice and the hope that the next monsoon will restore normal conditions.

There is insufficient public discussion about whether existing irrigation infrastructure, water storage arrangements and agricultural risk protection are adequate for the conditions farmers now face.

The immediate priority must be transparent water allocation, credible cultivation guidance and practical assistance for households facing crop losses.

Longer-term policy must address irrigation efficiency, storage, drought-resistant cultivation and insurance arrangements capable of protecting farmers against circumstances beyond their control.

There is also a question of fairness when water becomes scarce. Agriculture, domestic consumption, industry and environmental protection all make legitimate demands upon limited supplies.

Decisions about allocation must therefore be explained openly rather than left to administrative discretion, particularly when the consequences fall most heavily upon people with the least financial protection.

Sri Lanka frequently describes its farmers as the backbone of the national economy. That description carries an obligation which extends considerably beyond ceremonial speeches and seasonal subsidies.

If the country depends upon these families for food security, it must also accept responsibility for ensuring that agricultural risk does not repeatedly condemn them to debt and uncertainty.

The Government cannot guarantee rainfall, but it can guarantee honest information, transparent decisions and a credible framework for protecting rural livelihoods.

Those are reasonable expectations of a country that has made agricultural self-sufficiency a recurring national objective.

Be that as it may, the farmer standing beside an empty reservoir does not need another assurance that agriculture is important.

He needs to know whether there will be enough water to grow a crop, and what happens to his family if there is not.

350 COURTS ARE GETTING OFFICIAL EMAIL ACCOUNTS. WILL JUSTICE FINALLY MOVE FASTER?

The Cabinet has approved 1,050 official email accounts for 350 courts as part of Sri Lanka's e-Court programme. Voice-to-text technology and video conferencing are also planned. These are welcome developments, but the real measure of judicial modernisation will be whether ordinary citizens spend less time and money waiting for justice.

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350 COURTS ARE GETTING...

Sri Lanka is preparing to introduce official electronic communication facilities across 350 courts, with the Cabinet approving 1,050 email accounts under the Government's e-Court programme.

The initiative forms part of a broader effort to modernise judicial administration through electronic case management, voice-to-text technology and video conferencing. It is a necessary development, although the fact that such basic facilities are still being introduced in 2026 illustrates how much remains to be done.

The programme, originally approved in December 2025, envisages digital systems for Magistrate's Courts, District Courts and High Courts. Official email facilities are expected to improve communication between judicial institutions, while voice-to-text technology is intended to address shortages of court stenographers.

Video conferencing should also make certain proceedings possible without requiring every participant to be physically present.

These improvements deserve support, but technology is not an achievement merely because it has been installed. Its value must be judged by the administrative problems it resolves and the measurable benefits delivered to the people who depend upon the justice system.

Sri Lanka's courts operate under considerable pressure, with delays affecting criminal proceedings, civil disputes and the enforcement of legal rights.

Every postponement has consequences beyond the courtroom, particularly for litigants who must repeatedly travel, pay legal expenses and rearrange their working lives. For somebody with limited financial resources, the cost of pursuing justice can become an additional form of punishment.

Consider a family involved in a land dispute, an employee seeking unpaid entitlements or a person awaiting the conclusion of criminal proceedings.

The legal issues may differ, but all share a dependence upon institutions capable of handling documents, communicating decisions and conducting proceedings without avoidable delay.

An inefficient administrative system imposes costs upon people regardless of the eventual merits of their cases.

Electronic communication can reduce some of those costs. Documents can move between institutions more quickly, notices can be issued without unnecessary physical handling and case information can become easier to retrieve. But none of those improvements is guaranteed simply because a courthouse receives an official email address.

The Government should therefore explain how the new facilities will change the actual experience of litigants and lawyers.

Will electronic filing become available across the country, will hearing information be accessible without repeated visits and will court records be managed through reliable systems? More importantly, will the authorities measure the time saved and publish the results?

There is also a serious question concerning the accessibility of digital justice. Large law firms and established commercial litigants may possess the resources necessary to adapt quickly to electronic procedures, but many ordinary citizens do not.

A modernised judicial system must remain accessible to people without sophisticated equipment, reliable internet connections or the means to pay for additional professional assistance.

Technology should reduce inequality rather than introduce another barrier between citizens and their legal rights. That requires clear procedures, appropriate assistance and public access arrangements, particularly outside Colombo and the larger urban centres.

It also requires adequate training for court employees who will be expected to operate the new systems.

Security and reliability are equally important. Judicial records contain sensitive personal and commercial information, while electronic filing and communication must preserve the authenticity of documents and provide dependable evidence of when material was submitted or received.

A system that accelerates communication but compromises confidentiality or record integrity would represent a poor exchange.

The introduction of voice-to-text technology offers particular promise because accurate court records are essential to the administration of justice.

Nevertheless, automated transcription requires careful verification, especially where testimony involves multiple languages, unfamiliar terminology or statements whose precise wording may become legally significant. Technology can assist the judicial process, but responsibility for the accuracy of the official record must remain clearly established.

The same principle applies to video conferencing. Remote participation may reduce travel expenses, improve scheduling and make certain proceedings more efficient, but it must be implemented without compromising the rights of accused persons, witnesses or other participants. Convenience cannot become a substitute for procedural fairness.

Sri Lanka has announced numerous public-sector digitalisation initiatives over the years, often accompanied by considerable enthusiasm at the point of introduction. The more difficult task has been demonstrating sustained improvements after the ceremonies conclude.

The e-Court programme should be different, with published performance indicators showing whether administrative delays, unnecessary appearances and document-processing times are actually declining.

The public is entitled to expect that judicial modernisation will improve the delivery of justice rather than merely change the equipment used to administer it.

A court that communicates electronically but continues to impose avoidable delays has modernised its correspondence without adequately modernising its service.

Be that as it may, 1,050 email accounts may represent a useful beginning.

The achievement worth celebrating will be the day an ordinary Sri Lankan can obtain a fair decision without sacrificing years of life and a substantial part of the family income merely to reach it.

RS. 16 BILLION FOR FERTILISER. ARE WE HELPING FARMERS OR KEEPING THEM DEPENDENT?

The Government has approved Rs. 16 billion for fertiliser assistance during the 2026/27 Maha season, providing Rs. 30,000 per hectare up to a maximum of two hectares per farmer. The support will reduce cultivation costs, but it does not answer the larger question of whether Sri Lanka's agricultural economy allows farmers to earn a sustainable living.

Sri Lanka has once again committed substantial public funds to supporting agricultural production, with the Cabinet approving an estimated Rs. 16 billion for fertiliser subsidies during the forthcoming Maha season.

Eligible farmers cultivating paddy and other approved field crops in paddy lands will receive Rs. 30,000 per hectare, subject to a maximum of two hectares. The decision recognises the importance of protecting domestic food production while reducing the immediate financial burden on cultivators.

There is little difficulty understanding why such assistance is necessary.

Agricultural input costs remain significant, cultivation involves considerable uncertainty and many farming households operate with limited financial reserves. A subsidy can make the difference between proceeding with cultivation and abandoning a season because the initial expenditure is unaffordable.

But the announcement also exposes a weakness in Sri Lanka's agricultural debate. Governments routinely explain how much money is being allocated to farmers, while providing considerably less information about whether the economic structure within which those farmers operate is sustainable.

The amount distributed becomes the headline, although the farmer's actual income should be the central concern.

The question is straightforward.

What does it cost to produce a kilogram of paddy in Sri Lanka, and how much profit does the farmer retain after paying for seed, fertiliser, machinery, labour, irrigation, transport and financing?

There is no single answer applicable to every cultivator.



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RS. 16 BILLION FOR FERTILISER...

Production costs vary according to land conditions, yields, access to irrigation, mechanisation and the extent to which family labour can substitute for paid workers. Yet these differences are frequently obscured when agricultural policy is presented through uniform subsidy rates and national production targets.

A farmer may receive fertiliser assistance and still suffer a financial loss if rainfall is inadequate, yields decline or the selling price fails to cover total expenditure.

The subsidy reduces one component of production costs without eliminating the commercial risks associated with cultivation. Those risks become particularly serious when farmers borrow money before planting and must repay it regardless of the eventual harvest.

The distinction between the price of paddy and the retail price of rice is another area requiring greater transparency.

Processing, storage, transport, finance and distribution all involve legitimate expenditure, but the public rarely receives a sufficiently clear explanation of how the final consumer price is divided across the supply chain. Farmers complain about inadequate returns while consumers complain about expensive rice, leaving both groups dissatisfied with an arrangement whose underlying economics remain poorly understood.

Sri Lanka has repeatedly experienced disputes involving paddy purchasing prices, milling capacity, stock availability and rice imports.

These controversies are often reduced to political arguments about whether the Government has intervened sufficiently or whether private market participants are exercising excessive influence. The more useful question concerns whether competition, information and market infrastructure are adequate to protect both producers and consumers.

Farmers require access to credible production-cost information and reliable market signals before committing themselves to a cultivation season.

Consumers require confidence that retail prices reflect genuine costs rather than avoidable inefficiencies or distortions.

The Government, meanwhile, needs dependable information about national stocks, expected harvests and consumption requirements if it is to make sensible decisions about procurement and imports.

The subsidy programme should also be assessed against the Government's broader agricultural objectives.

If public expenditure is intended to improve food security, the authorities should be able to demonstrate how that expenditure affects cultivation, productivity, farmer income and domestic supply.

Simply announcing that Rs. 16 billion has been allocated does not establish whether the money is producing the best possible result.

There is a further complication this season. Water shortages and uncertain rainfall are affecting agricultural

communities, raising questions about the relationship between fertiliser assistance and actual cultivation prospects. Where irrigation supplies are inadequate, farmers may be unable to realise the intended benefit of subsidised inputs.

Agricultural policy must therefore be coordinated across fertiliser distribution, irrigation management, crop planning, research and financial protection. Supporting one input while leaving other essential conditions uncertain risks producing disappointing results despite considerable public expenditure.



None of this means fertiliser subsidies should be abolished. Agricultural support is a legitimate policy instrument, and many countries recognise the public interest in maintaining domestic food production.

But assistance should strengthen the productive capacity and financial resilience of farmers rather than become a permanent substitute for improvements in the agricultural economy.

There is a difference between helping a farmer become more prosperous and helping him remain sufficiently solvent to begin another season of uncertainty. Sri Lanka should be aiming for the former, even while acknowledging that immediate assistance remains necessary for many households.

The Government deserves recognition for allocating resources to cultivation, but public expenditure must be judged by outcomes rather than announcements.

Farmers should be earning sustainable returns, consumers should have access to reasonably priced food and the country should be improving its ability to withstand disruptions to agricultural production.

Be that as it may, a nation cannot claim to have solved the problems of its farmers merely because it helps pay for their fertiliser.

The real achievement will come when growing the country's staple food provides a dependable livelihood rather than another season of financial anxiety.

THE HORROR OF HUMAN BADNESS. THE GREATNESS OF HUMANITY. WHICH ONE DEFINES US?

Sri Lanka has become accustomed to the spectacle of wrongdoing, from corruption and cruelty to political arrogance and the abuse of power. Yet behind the scandals and the suffering is another country, sustained by ordinary people whose decency rarely attracts attention. The question is whether our institutions recognise that humanity or merely depend upon it to compensate for their failures.

There is something profoundly disturbing about the ease with which human beings become accustomed to the suffering of others. A murder becomes a headline, corruption becomes a political argument and the humiliation of somebody once powerful becomes a form of public entertainment.

The spectacle commands attention, while the quieter consequences of wrongdoing are often forgotten long before the damage has been repaired.

Sri Lanka has witnessed enough human cruelty to understand its destructive power. Decades of conflict, political violence, terrorism, communal suspicion and economic upheaval have left consequences that cannot be measured solely through official statistics.

Behind every national tragedy are individual lives interrupted, families damaged and opportunities permanently lost.

Yet this same country has also demonstrated an extraordinary capacity for compassion.

During disasters, ordinary people have opened their homes to strangers, shared food they could scarcely afford and assisted families with whom they had no personal connection. Their generosity has frequently emerged without instruction, publicity or any expectation of reward.

That contrast deserves considerably more attention than it receives.

We have become adept at documenting the horror of human badness while treating the greatness of humanity as something almost too ordinary to deserve examination. The wrongdoing of a few can dominate national conversation, while the decency of millions is accepted as an unremarkable feature of everyday life.

Consider the circumstances of an elderly patient travelling to a government hospital for treatment. There may be a son or daughter who has taken leave from work, borrowed money for transport and spent



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hours waiting without knowing whether the prescribed medicine will be available. The public system may record a consultation, but it rarely records the sacrifices that made the consultation possible.

Consider the parent who goes without adequate food so that a child can eat, or the teacher who quietly helps a pupil whose family cannot afford the basic requirements of schooling. These are not abstract illustrations of kindness.

They represent the daily decisions through which ordinary people preserve dignity in circumstances that might otherwise destroy it.

The greatness of humanity is not necessarily found in extraordinary achievements. It is frequently demonstrated by people fulfilling responsibilities when doing so requires personal sacrifice. Their conduct sustains families, communities and institutions in ways that no government budget adequately recognises.

There is, however, a danger in celebrating such resilience without examining why it is so frequently necessary. Sri Lankans are repeatedly praised for helping one another during hardship, but public admiration must not become an excuse for institutional neglect.

A society should not depend upon charity to provide essential medicine, protect vulnerable children or ensure that elderly citizens can live with dignity.

Compassion is a human virtue, while the provision of basic public services is a responsibility of government. The two should reinforce each other rather than become substitutes. When families must repeatedly rely upon private generosity to meet essential needs, the generosity deserves admiration but the circumstances requiring it demand investigation.

This distinction is particularly important at a time when Sri Lanka is placing considerable emphasis upon accountability for alleged corruption and abuse of public authority.

Investigations and prosecutions are essential where evidence justifies them, and no political party or individual should be protected from the ordinary operation of the law. But the purpose of accountability cannot be reduced to the spectacle of powerful people being arrested or brought before the courts.

Justice must ultimately serve the people whose rights, resources and opportunities have been damaged. Recovering misused public money matters because those resources could have supported hospitals, schools, transport, housing and other essential services. Punishing wrongdoing matters because unchecked abuse weakens the institutions upon which ordinary citizens depend.

The same standard should apply to every administration, regardless of political allegiance. A Government cannot claim moral superiority merely because it condemns the misconduct of its predecessors, while an Opposition cannot demonstrate public responsibility simply by cataloguing the failures of those presently in office.

Both must explain how their policies will improve the lives of people who possess neither wealth nor influence.

There is also a responsibility for journalism. The media must investigate wrongdoing, challenge official explanations and expose abuses of power without fear or favour.

But it must also recognise that the lives of ordinary citizens are not secondary to the political disputes which so frequently dominate public attention.

A pensioner unable to afford prescribed medicine deserves scrutiny of the policies that produced that predicament. A farmer facing financial ruin because of failed irrigation deserves an explanation from the authorities responsible for water management.

A child whose education is interrupted by poverty deserves more than an occasional expression of public sympathy.

These are matters of governance, not merely human-interest stories. They reveal whether institutions are performing the functions for which they exist and whether public expenditure is improving the circumstances of those most dependent upon it.

A country's moral condition cannot be assessed solely by the number of people prosecuted for wrongdoing.

Nor should national greatness be confused with the accumulation of wealth, the construction of impressive buildings or the international recognition of political leaders.

Economic development is necessary, and prosperity can provide the resources required for better public services. But prosperity loses much of its meaning when the benefits remain inaccessible to those who need them most.

The real measure of a civilised society is found in how it treats people when they are vulnerable. The sick, the elderly, the poor, children and those living with disabilities should not have to depend upon personal influence to obtain services that ought to be available as a matter of right.

Their dignity should not be determined by the size of their bank accounts or the importance of the people they know.

Humanity is also demonstrated through the everyday exercise of public authority.

A police officer who treats a suspect lawfully, a public servant who assists an applicant without demanding a favour and a hospital employee who recognises the distress of a frightened patient are performing duties that carry moral significance.

Their conduct determines whether ordinary people experience the State as an institution of service or an instrument of intimidation.

These expectations are neither extravagant nor sentimental.

They concern the basic standards by which people should be able to live together and the obligations that public institutions owe the communities they serve.

A society that tolerates cruelty, dishonesty and indifference cannot compensate for those failures through economic statistics or political declarations.

There is something particularly revealing about the way we respond to wrongdoing by prominent individuals.

Public anger may be justified, especially where allegations concern the misuse of resources or the abuse of authority. But anger becomes productive only when it strengthens the rule of law and improves the institutions intended to prevent further harm.

Humiliation is not reform, and the public disgrace of an accused person is not a substitute for a fair judicial determination. Equally, an acquittal or conviction does not by itself resolve the institutional weaknesses that allowed legitimate concerns to arise. A country genuinely committed to accountability must be interested in preventing injustice as well as punishing proven misconduct.

The greatness of humanity offers a different measure of national progress. It is visible when people act with restraint despite possessing power, when they fulfil obligations without expecting personal advantage and when they recognise the suffering of others without first asking whether those people belong to the correct community or political camp.

Sri Lanka possesses an abundance of such people, although their contribution is rarely celebrated with the enthusiasm reserved for political victories or commercial success. They continue working, caring, teaching, treating patients, cultivating land and supporting families through circumstances that would test the endurance of anybody. Their achievements are often modest in appearance but profound in consequence.

The country owes them more than praise for their resilience. It owes them institutions that function, laws applied fairly, public services delivered competently and an economy in which honest work provides a reasonable prospect of security. These are the practical foundations upon which human dignity depends.

There will always be wrongdoing, and journalism must never retreat from exposing it.

But a national conversation dominated entirely by scandal risks forgetting the people for whose benefit public accountability is supposed to exist. The objective should not merely be to identify those responsible for making Sri Lanka worse, but to create conditions in which more Sri Lankans can make it better.

The horror of human badness reminds us of what people are capable of destroying. The greatness of humanity demonstrates what they are capable of preserving, even when circumstances offer little encouragement. Both realities exist within the same country, and neither should be ignored.

Be that as it may, history may remember the names of those who inflicted suffering, but Sri Lanka's future will depend upon the countless people who refused to add to it. The greatest tribute we can pay them is not another speech about national resilience, but a country in which their decency is respected, their sacrifices are not taken for granted and their humanity is matched by the institutions established to serve them.