

**NEWSLINE***Daily by Faraz***"Questioning
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Riyadh airport **under attack.** Sri Lankan lawyers remain focused on **mission to save a life.**

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RIYADH AIRPORT UNDER ATTACK. SRI LANKAN LAWYERS REMAIN FOCUSED ON MISSION TO SAVE A LIFE.

The missile attack reported on Riyadh's international airport has raised concerns about the safety of a Sri Lankan legal delegation currently in Saudi Arabia. But President's Counsel Faiszer Musthapha, speaking directly to NEWSLINE, has dismissed concerns about their immediate safety, insisting that their legal mission continues and that the security arrangements within the Kingdom remain reassuring

The reported attack on Riyadh's King Khalid International Airport has brought fresh uncertainty to international air travel in Saudi Arabia, raising questions about the circumstances of a four-member Sri Lankan legal delegation currently visiting the Kingdom in an effort to save a fellow citizen from execution.

The delegation includes President's Counsel Faiszer Musthapha and Upul Kumarapperuma, together with Additional Solicitor General Azard Navavi PC and Attorney-at-Law Hafeel Farisz. Their visit concerns the case of Sivarasa Anojan, a Sri Lankan national facing the death penalty in Saudi Arabia.

With reports of the airport coming under attack and flights being disrupted, questions naturally arose about whether the Sri Lankan lawyers might find themselves stranded in Riyadh.

However, speaking directly to NEWSLINE, Faiszer Musthapha PC made clear that the delegation's legal work was continuing and that there was no immediate cause for alarm.

Asked specifically about the attack on Riyadh Airport and whether the delegation had concerns about its safety, Musthapha expressed confidence in the security arrangements maintained by the Saudi authorities.

He said the security of the Kingdom, and of everyone within it, was being very well maintained. In his assessment, there was nothing to be concerned about.

Importantly, Musthapha also clarified that the delegation had never intended to return to Sri Lanka on either Saturday or Sunday. Their presence in Saudi Arabia was therefore not the consequence of cancelled flights or an inability to leave the country.

The lawyers remain in the Kingdom because their work is unfinished.

Musthapha described the legal undertaking as very much

a work in progress, emphasising that the purpose of the visit was to ensure that the fullest and most appropriate legal representations were made on behalf of the Sri Lankan national facing execution.

That distinction is important. While an attack on a major international airport understandably generates concern for foreign nationals in the affected country, it would be inaccurate to characterise the Sri Lankan delegation as stranded when its members had not planned to depart and remain engaged in their original assignment.

The legal mission itself carries considerable significance.

Sivarasa Anojan's case has attracted attention in Sri Lanka because of the severity of the punishment he faces and the efforts being undertaken to secure relief through the Saudi legal system.

The involvement of two senior President's Counsel, an Additional Solicitor General and another experienced attorney reflects the seriousness with which the matter is being pursued.

Their task is not simply to make a symbolic humanitarian appeal.

It is to work within the applicable legal framework, in consultation with Saudi legal representatives, to identify and pursue the strongest available grounds for challenging the sentence.

Musthapha's comments suggest that the delegation is determined not to allow the wider regional security situation to distract from that responsibility.

There is also an important distinction between diplomatic representations seeking clemency and legal submissions seeking relief through the courts. Both may be relevant, but each requires its own preparation, procedures and engagement with the appropriate authorities.

For the Sri Lankan lawyers, the immediate priority remains the preparation and presentation of the strongest possible legal case.

The reported airport attack may have disrupted international aviation, but it has not, according to Musthapha, interrupted the delegation's determination to complete its work.

Indeed, his comments indicate that the lawyers regard the time available in Saudi Arabia as an opportunity to pursue the legal avenues open to their client rather than an occasion to contemplate an early departure.

For Anojan and his family, the stakes could scarcely be higher. The outcome of the legal proceedings may determine whether a death sentence is carried out or whether the Saudi judicial system grants relief.

Be that as it may, Faiszer Musthapha and his colleagues did not travel to Saudi Arabia merely to make representations and return home.

They went to pursue every appropriate legal avenue to save a Sri Lankan life.

Despite the reported attack on Riyadh Airport, Musthapha's message to NEWSLINE is unequivocal: the legal work continues, the delegation is confident about its safety, and the mission remains unfinished.

ANOTHER 1,540 GRAMA NILADHARIS. WILL THE VILLAGES FINALLY GET THE SERVICE THEY DESERVE?

The Government has moved to strengthen Sri Lanka's grassroots administration by appointing 1,540 Grama Niladharis, with further recruitment planned next year. The appointments should help address longstanding vacancies, but the real test will be whether citizens experience faster, fairer and more accessible public services.

The Grama Niladhari is, for millions of Sri Lankans, the most immediate and recognisable representative of the State. Long before a citizen encounters a minister, a ministry secretary or a senior public official, it is often the Grama Niladhari who becomes the first point of contact with government administration.

Births, deaths, residency confirmations, welfare applications, disaster assistance and numerous other administrative requirements bring ordinary citizens into contact with these officers.

Their responsibilities are substantial, their geographical coverage can be demanding, and their effectiveness can determine whether a citizen receives a public service promptly or becomes trapped in a bureaucratic process.

The Government's decision to appoint 1,540 officers to Grade III of the Grama Niladhari Service is therefore welcome.

Public Administration Minister Chandana Abeyratne has indicated that the recruitment follows the introduction of a new Service Minute and is intended to address longstanding vacancies and administrative difficulties.

The Minister has also disclosed that preliminary arrangements are being made to recruit more than 1,500 additional officers next year. According to the Government, some existing officers have been required to cover two administrative divisions because of staff shortages.

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ANOTHER 1,540 GRAMA ...

That is an unacceptable situation if the consequence is that citizens must wait unnecessarily for essential services. However, appointing additional personnel is only one part of the solution.

Sri Lanka's public administration has historically been characterised by an elaborate hierarchy of departments, offices, procedures and approvals.

The citizen frequently bears the burden of navigating that machinery, sometimes travelling considerable distances, producing documents already held by another government institution and returning repeatedly to complete relatively straightforward transactions.

A properly functioning public service should minimise these burdens rather than perpetuate them.

The Grama Niladhari Service offers an opportunity to demonstrate that public administration can be modernised without abandoning the personal accessibility that rural communities particularly require.

Digitised records, standardised procedures, transparent processing times and better coordination between government departments could substantially improve the service delivered.

But digitalisation must not become another obstacle. Elderly citizens, people with disabilities and those without access to smartphones or reliable internet connections must continue to receive assistance through accessible local offices.

There is also the question of accountability. How does the Government measure the performance of a Grama Niladhari division?

Is it through the number of certificates issued, the speed of processing applications, the accuracy of records or the satisfaction of the people served?

These are not unreasonable expectations. Citizens finance the public service through taxation, and they are entitled to expect professionalism, courtesy and efficiency in return.

The Government should publish the number of vacancies filled, the geographical distribution of the new appointments and the expected improvements in service delivery.

It should also explain whether additional recruitment will be accompanied by improved training, equipment and administrative oversight.

Public-sector employment must serve a public purpose. It cannot be regarded merely as a means of expanding the government payroll or fulfilling political commitments.

Be that as it may, the appointment of 1,540 Grama Niladharis represents an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between the State and its citizens.

Whether that opportunity is realised will not be determined by the number of appointment letters distributed, but by the quality of service delivered in the villages of Sri Lanka.

GOTABAYA GOES TO THE SUPREME COURT. SEVEN YEARS AFTER EASTER SUNDAY, THE QUESTIONS REMAIN.

Former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has reportedly appealed to the Supreme Court following the Court of Appeal's rejection of his attempt to prevent his arrest under the Prevention of Terrorism Act in connection with investigations into the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks. The legal proceedings raise fundamental questions about investigative powers, constitutional protections and the continuing search for accountability.

More than seven years have passed since the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks devastated Sri Lanka, killing hundreds of innocent people and leaving families confronting losses that no judicial process can ever fully repair.

The attacks also exposed profound failures within the country's national security establishment, particularly concerning the handling of intelligence, communication between agencies and the responsibilities of those entrusted with protecting the public.

Those failures have remained central to the continuing debate about accountability.

Former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has now reportedly filed an appeal before the Supreme Court challenging the dismissal of his earlier application to the Court of Appeal seeking protection against arrest under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

The Inspector General of Police, the Director of the Criminal Investigation Department and other respondents have reportedly been named in the proceedings.

The appeal must be understood within its proper legal context. An application seeking to prevent arrest does not establish innocence or guilt. Equally, the existence of an investigation does not establish criminal responsibility.

The Supreme Court will be required to consider the legal questions placed before it, including the extent of the powers available to investigators and the constitutional protections afforded to individuals who may face arrest.

Those protections apply to every citizen, including former presidents.

Indeed, the rule of law would be seriously weakened if constitutional rights were selectively applied according to a person's political history, public reputation or popularity.

But the rights of individuals facing investigation must be considered alongside the legitimate expectation of victims and their families that the State will pursue credible investigations without fear or favour.

The Easter Sunday attacks were not simply another criminal incident. They represented a catastrophic failure of public protection, followed by years of controversy, competing explanations and persistent demands for the full circumstances to be established.

The distinction between political responsibility, administrative negligence and criminal culpability is particularly important.

A public official may have failed in the performance of a duty without necessarily committing a criminal offence.

Conversely, holding high office cannot provide protection where evidence establishes conduct amounting to an offence under the law.



Investigators must therefore demonstrate precisely what conduct is alleged, what evidence supports the allegations and how that conduct satisfies the requirements of the applicable legislation.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act introduces an additional dimension.

Its extensive powers have long attracted criticism, and their use must be subjected to rigorous judicial scrutiny regardless of the identity of the person concerned.

Sri Lanka cannot credibly demand due process in some cases while disregarding it in others.

The families of those killed on Easter Sunday deserve more than periodic announcements, political accusations and lengthy legal proceedings.

They deserve a competent investigation, an honest accounting of institutional failures and, where the evidence justifies it, prosecutions capable of withstanding scrutiny in court.

The former President is entitled to pursue every lawful remedy available to him.

The investigative authorities are equally entitled to exercise powers conferred by law, subject to judicial supervision.

Be that as it may, seven years after Easter Sunday, the central obligation remains unchanged.

Sri Lanka must establish the truth through evidence, protect the rights of those under investigation and deliver justice that can withstand examination long after the political arguments have faded.



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APEKSHA HOSPITAL PROMISES BETTER CANCER CARE. BUT HOW LONG MUST PATIENTS WAIT?

The Government has announced measures to improve cancer treatment at Maharagama's Apeksha Hospital, including attention to medicine shortages, medical equipment, staffing and radiotherapy facilities. The commitments are welcome, but they also raise an uncomfortable question: why must patients facing life-threatening illnesses continue to wait for improvements that should already have been delivered?

Cancer does not wait for a procurement committee, a construction timetable or the completion of an administrative process. For patients receiving treatment at Maharagama's Apeksha Hospital, the availability of medicines, functioning equipment and appropriately trained medical personnel can determine whether treatment proceeds as planned or is interrupted.

Deputy Health Minister Dr. Hansaka Wijemuni has announced that measures will be taken to strengthen treatment services at the hospital following a special management review involving senior health officials, medical specialists and hospital administrators.

The discussions covered a substantial range of concerns, including shortages of medicines, staffing requirements, medical equipment, expansion of treatment facilities and the need to improve coordination with the Medical Supplies Division.

The Government has also identified the need for a new master plan for the hospital, with assistance from the Central Engineering Consultancy Bureau, to ensure that available land is used effectively.

Plans involving new clinical buildings and a paediatric ward complex were also discussed.

Particular attention was given to radiotherapy services, including the completion of CT Simulator facilities and the construction of bunkers for new Linear Accelerator machines expected under an Asian Development Bank-supported project.

These are important developments. Modern radiotherapy requires sophisticated equipment, specialised staff, reliable maintenance and carefully coordinated treatment schedules.

But the announcement also raises questions about existing capacity.

How many radiotherapy machines are presently operational at Apeksha Hospital?

How many are unavailable because of breakdowns, maintenance or other technical difficulties? What is the average waiting period between a clinical decision to begin radiotherapy and the commencement of treatment? These figures should be publicly available.

A patient diagnosed with cancer should not be required to navigate an opaque administrative system to discover when essential treatment might begin.

There is also the continuing problem of medicine availability.

NEWSLINE has previously examined difficulties surrounding supplies of filgrastim, a medicine used to support patients whose white blood cell counts have been reduced, including as a consequence of chemotherapy.

The wider lesson from that controversy is that medicine procurement cannot be assessed solely by whether a consignment has arrived in Sri Lanka.

Apeksha Hospital promises better cancer care. But how long must patients wait?

The Government has announced measures to improve cancer treatment at Maharagama's Apeksha Hospital, including attention to medicine shortages, medical equipment, staffing and radiotherapy facilities. The commitments are welcome, but they also raise an uncomfortable question: why must patients facing life-threatening illnesses continue to wait for improvements that should already have been delivered?



A medicine must satisfy regulatory requirements, be released through the appropriate procedures, reach the hospital and ultimately become available to the patient for whom it was prescribed.

A failure at any stage can interrupt treatment.

The Deputy Minister's emphasis on strengthening coordination with the Medical Supplies Division is therefore particularly relevant. But coordination must produce measurable results, not simply additional meetings between officials.

Staffing presents another challenge.

The Government has acknowledged vacancies involving medical officers, nurses, radiologists, pharmacists and health assistants. These shortages cannot be addressed merely by constructing additional buildings or acquiring sophisticated equipment.

A linear accelerator without adequately trained personnel is not an effective treatment facility. Neither is a hospital pharmacy capable of serving patients when essential medicines are unavailable.

The Government should publish a comprehensive assessment of the hospital's existing treatment capacity, equipment availability, staffing requirements and waiting lists.

It should also establish realistic completion dates for the proposed improvements and report progress publicly.

Cancer treatment is not an ordinary public service in which administrative delays can always be corrected later. The consequences of interruptions may be serious, and patients should not have to depend on publicity or personal intervention to obtain treatment.

Sri Lanka has invested considerable resources in public healthcare, and Apeksha Hospital remains an essential institution for patients from across the country.

Its doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers deserve the equipment, medicines and support necessary to perform their duties effectively.

Be that as it may, the measure of the Government's commitment to cancer care will not be the number of development plans announced or meetings conducted.

It will be whether a patient arriving at Maharagama can receive the prescribed treatment, with the necessary medicines and equipment available, without an avoidable delay.

TWO INDUSTRIAL ZONES FOR THE NORTH. WILL THE FACTORIES FINALLY FOLLOW THE PROMISES?

The Board of Investment is advancing plans for two industrial zones at Paranthan and Kankesanthurai, with investor land reservations expected to begin at Paranthan by the end of November. The proposals could provide an important economic opportunity for Northern Sri Lanka, but the real test will be whether investment announcements translate into functioning factories, sustainable employment and prosperity for communities that have waited far too long.

Northern Sri Lanka has heard many promises about economic development.

Since the end of the civil war in 2009, successive governments have spoken of rebuilding infrastructure, attracting investment, creating employment and transforming the region into a productive contributor to the national economy.

Yet the distance between those ambitions and the economic realities experienced by many Northern families remains considerable.

The Board of Investment's plans to develop industrial zones at Paranthan and Kankesanthurai therefore deserve serious attention.

The initiative has the potential to create new opportunities for manufacturing, exports and

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TWO INDUSTRIAL ZONES ...

employment in a region whose economic prospects have too often been constrained by inadequate investment and limited industrial activity.

According to the announced plans, the BOI expects to open land reservations for prospective investors at Paranthan towards the end of November. Infrastructure development is also envisaged for the proposed zones, with the intention of establishing facilities capable of accommodating industrial enterprises.

But reserving land is not the same as securing investment. Neither is establishing an industrial zone equivalent to creating an industrial economy.

The first question concerns investor commitments. How many companies have formally expressed interest in establishing operations at these locations? Have any entered into binding agreements? What sectors are being targeted, and what level of capital investment is anticipated?

These questions matter because Sri Lanka has accumulated considerable experience in announcing industrial projects that subsequently encounter delays involving land, infrastructure, financing and administrative approvals.

The Northern Province presents both opportunities and challenges. Its geographical position offers potential advantages for maritime trade, logistics and commercial links with southern India.

Its communities possess skills, entrepreneurial experience and a strong interest in employment opportunities that would allow younger generations to build their futures without leaving their home districts.

However, industrial development requires considerably more than available land.

Investors need reliable electricity, adequate water supplies, functioning transport connections, telecommunications infrastructure and predictable regulatory procedures. They also need confidence that approvals will be processed efficiently and that policy commitments will survive changes in political leadership.

The BOI should therefore explain the infrastructure requirements of both zones, the estimated development costs and the timetable for completing essential facilities.

The question of employment is equally important. Will the proposed industries create meaningful opportunities for local residents, or will skilled positions be filled predominantly by workers recruited from elsewhere?

There is nothing inherently objectionable about labour mobility within Sri Lanka. But a development programme intended to strengthen the Northern economy should include serious consideration of vocational training, local recruitment and opportunities for Northern entrepreneurs to participate in supply chains.

Environmental safeguards must also be addressed from the beginning. Industrial development cannot be pursued by transferring pollution, water shortages or other

environmental costs to communities that have already experienced considerable hardship.

The Government should publish a transparent development framework identifying prospective industries, investment targets, employment projections and infrastructure commitments.

Northern Sri Lanka does not require preferential treatment at the expense of other regions. It requires a fair opportunity to participate in national economic growth.

Be that as it may, the success of Paranthan and Kankesanthurai will not be measured by the number of hectares allocated or the ceremonies held to announce their development.

It will be measured by factories operating, workers receiving wages, businesses generating exports and Northern families experiencing an improvement in their economic circumstances.

RS. 96 BILLION FOR DIGITAL EDUCATION. WILL EVERY CHILD GET AN EQUAL CHANCE?

The Government has approved a series of education reforms, including a proposed five-year digital education programme estimated to cost Rs. 96 billion. The initiative could transform learning opportunities across Sri Lanka, but without adequate infrastructure, properly trained teachers and transparent procurement, it could also deepen the divide between children who already enjoy educational advantages and those who do not.

Sri Lanka has long regarded education as one of its greatest national achievements. Free education created opportunities for generations of children whose families might otherwise have been unable to afford schooling, helping establish a comparatively strong foundation of literacy and educational attainment.

But the existence of free education does not mean that every child receives an equal education.

The differences between well-resourced urban schools and those serving disadvantaged rural communities remain substantial.

Access to qualified teachers, science laboratories, libraries, modern technology and supplementary educational resources can vary dramatically depending on geography and family circumstances.

Against this background, the Government's proposed Rs. 96 billion digital education programme represents a significant commitment of public resources.

The initiative forms part of a broader package of education reforms that includes changes to curriculum development, student assessment and the administration of educational institutions.

Digital technology has the potential to improve access to

identify the institutions through which the payments passed and determine whether any other parties knowingly facilitated unlawful transactions.

A successful prosecution would address criminal responsibility. A successful investigation should also explain how the transactions became possible.

Sri Lanka needs both answers.

THE ROBE, THE PRISON AND THE CONSTITUTION. ARE SOME CITIZENS MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS?

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has initiated a review of prison regulations following objections to the removal of Buddhist robes from a convicted monk. Religious dignity deserves respect, but the proposed changes raise a fundamental constitutional question: can the State accommodate religious practice without creating unequal treatment under the law?

Sri Lanka is preparing to reconsider the rules governing the treatment and clothing of Buddhist monks serving prison sentences. More to the point it is not what they wear within the prison but rather when they are moved out of prison temporarily to attend court, health care and so on. The initiative follows controversy over the appearance of Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara in prison-issued clothing rather than his customary robes.

The President has announced that a committee comprising relevant government and legal authorities will examine the existing framework and recommend changes. The committee is expected to complete its work within two weeks.

The controversy has produced two competing arguments, both deserving serious consideration.

Senior Buddhist clergy maintain that the authority to determine whether a monk should cease wearing religious robes belongs to the recognised institutions of the Buddhist Sangha.

From that perspective, prison officials requiring a monk to wear ordinary prison clothing may be seen as intruding into an area of religious discipline and identity.

The opposing argument concerns equality before the law.

Article 12(1) of Sri Lanka's Constitution declares that all persons are equal before the law and entitled to its equal protection. Article 12(2) prohibits discrimination on specified grounds, including religion, while the Constitution also protects freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Those provisions must be considered together.



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THE ROBE, THE PRISON...

educational material, support teachers, expand learning opportunities and help students acquire skills increasingly required in modern employment.

But technology alone cannot correct structural inequalities.

A computer or digital learning platform is of limited value in a school without dependable electricity, adequate internet connectivity or teachers trained to incorporate technology into classroom instruction.

The first responsibility of the Government must therefore be to establish the actual requirements of the school system.

How many schools currently possess adequate digital infrastructure?

How many classrooms have reliable connectivity? What proportion of teachers has received appropriate training? How many students lack access to suitable devices outside school hours?

Without reliable answers, the risk is that a substantial programme will be designed around assumptions rather than demonstrated needs.

The proposed expenditure also demands close scrutiny.

Rs. 96 billion is a considerable sum for a country still confronting serious fiscal constraints and competing demands involving healthcare, transport, agriculture and social protection.

The public is entitled to know how the money will be allocated.

How much will be spent on hardware, software, connectivity, teacher training, maintenance and technical support? Will equipment be purchased through competitive procurement? Who will own the educational platforms and the data they generate?

The experience of other countries demonstrates that digital education programmes can become expensive exercises in purchasing equipment that subsequently remains underutilised, becomes obsolete or cannot be maintained.

Sri Lanka must avoid repeating those mistakes.

Teacher training is particularly important. Effective education depends on the ability of teachers to explain, guide, challenge and encourage students. Digital technology should strengthen those relationships rather than reduce education to the passive consumption of electronic content.

There are also legitimate concerns about children's privacy, cybersecurity and excessive screen exposure. Any national digital education programme must include safeguards appropriate to the age and circumstances of the students concerned.

Equity must remain central to the initiative.

A child attending a remote rural school should not receive an inferior version of digital education simply

because the school lacks infrastructure or the family cannot afford additional devices and connectivity.

The Government should publish a detailed implementation plan, including annual expenditure, school-level priorities, procurement arrangements and measurable educational outcomes.

Independent evaluation should be built into the programme from the beginning, rather than introduced only after substantial public funds have been committed.

Be that as it may, Sri Lanka's ambition to modernise education is welcome. But the true achievement will not be the amount spent on technology or the number of devices distributed.

It will be whether a child in an underprivileged village receives educational opportunities comparable to those available to a child attending one of the country's best-equipped schools.

ELEPHANTS ARE DYING ON RAILWAY TRACKS. WHY DID IT TAKE THE COURTS TO DEMAND ACTION?

The Court of Appeal has reportedly directed the relevant State authorities to take measures to prevent wild elephants from being killed in collisions with trains. The intervention highlights a longstanding failure to reconcile railway operations with wildlife protection, raising questions about the effectiveness of preventive measures and the responsibilities of institutions entrusted with protecting one of Sri Lanka's most important natural assets.

The death of a wild elephant on a railway track is not simply an unfortunate collision between an animal and a train.

It represents a failure of prevention in circumstances where the risks are frequently known, the locations of recurring incidents can be identified and practical measures may be available to reduce the danger.

Sri Lanka's elephants are an irreplaceable part of the country's natural heritage. Their survival depends on access to habitats, feeding grounds and traditional movement corridors that increasingly intersect with roads, railways, settlements and agricultural land.

The expansion of human activity has made those encounters more frequent and, in many cases, more dangerous.

Railway collisions present a particularly serious problem because of the size and speed of trains and the limited opportunity available to drivers to avoid animals appearing on the tracks.

The consequences can be devastating for elephants. They can also endanger railway employees and passengers,

damage rolling stock and disrupt essential transport services.

The reported intervention of the Court of Appeal should therefore be regarded as an important development in the continuing effort to reduce preventable wildlife deaths.

But it also raises an uncomfortable question.

Why should judicial intervention be necessary before the relevant authorities implement effective measures against a danger that has been recognised for years?

Elephants are dying on railway tracks. Why did it take the courts to demand action?

The Court of Appeal has reportedly directed the relevant State authorities to take measures to prevent wild elephants from being killed in collisions with trains.



Sri Lanka possesses institutions responsible for wildlife conservation, railway operations, environmental management and public infrastructure. Each has a role in addressing the problem, yet the persistence of fatal collisions suggests that existing arrangements have not produced sufficiently effective results.

The first requirement is reliable information.

Authorities should identify the railway sections where elephant collisions occur most frequently, the times at which incidents are concentrated and the environmental conditions that contribute to the danger.

This information should guide practical interventions rather than allowing preventive measures to be introduced without adequate assessment.

Speed restrictions on high-risk railway sections may be necessary, particularly during periods when elephants are known to cross the tracks.

Early-warning systems, improved visibility, communication between wildlife officers and railway control centres, and technology capable of detecting animals approaching railway lines should also be considered.



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ELEPHANTS ARE DYING ...

However, no single measure is likely to eliminate the danger.

Elephants move according to environmental conditions, food availability and established behavioural patterns. Their movements cannot always be predicted with precision, and measures that appear effective in one location may be unsuitable elsewhere.

This makes cooperation between the Department of Wildlife Conservation and Sri Lanka Railways essential.

The agencies should establish clearly defined responsibilities, shared monitoring arrangements and procedures for responding rapidly when elephants are detected near railway lines.

There must also be accountability for implementation. It is not enough to announce that measures will be introduced.

The Government should publish the locations selected for intervention, the funding allocated, the completion timetable and the methods by which effectiveness will be assessed.

The financial implications deserve consideration, but so does the cost of continued inaction.

Railway collisions can result in damage to locomotives and infrastructure, operational delays and significant expenditure. Preventive investment may therefore protect both wildlife and public resources.

The broader issue concerns Sri Lanka's approach to development and conservation.

Economic infrastructure is necessary, and railway services remain important to communities and businesses. But development cannot be regarded as successful if preventable environmental destruction is accepted as an unavoidable consequence.

Sri Lanka has long promoted its wildlife, particularly its elephants, as part of the country's identity and tourism appeal. Protecting those animals must involve more than expressions of regret after another fatal collision.

Be that as it may, the Court of Appeal's reported intervention should mark the beginning of measurable action rather than another round of administrative assurances.

The question is not whether Sri Lanka values its elephants. It is whether the institutions responsible for their protection are prepared to take the practical steps necessary to keep them alive.

MALAYSIA'S ANTI-CORRUPTION WATCHDOG INVESTIGATES ONE OF ITS OWN. WHO WATCHES THE WATCHDOG?

Malaysia's Anti-Corruption Commission has reportedly established a special team to re-examine allegations involving RM350,000 and one of its senior officers. The allegations concern an incident dating back to 2017 and were previously investigated without wrongdoing being established. The decision to revisit the matter raises an important question for Malaysia, Sri Lanka and every country that claims to be serious about fighting corruption: who ensures accountability when allegations concern the investigators themselves?

An anti-corruption agency occupies an unusually powerful position within the machinery of government. It investigates allegations against politicians, public servants, businesspeople and other individuals suspected of abusing positions of trust. Its authority depends not simply on the powers granted by legislation, but on the confidence of the public that those powers will be exercised independently and without favour.

Malaysia's Anti-Corruption Commission, widely known as the MACC, now finds itself confronting precisely that test.

Reports emerging on Sunday indicate that the Commission has established a special team to re-examine allegations involving RM350,000 and a senior officer.

The matter reportedly relates to an incident in November 2017 and was investigated in 2018, when the authorities concluded that no wrongdoing had been established.

The allegations have resurfaced following renewed public attention and calls for scrutiny from Malaysian Corruption Watch.

The MACC has indicated that the renewed examination is intended to protect institutional integrity and maintain public confidence.

That decision deserves careful consideration, but it must not be interpreted as evidence that the allegations are true.

The officer concerned remains entitled to the presumption of innocence, and the outcome of the earlier investigation cannot simply be disregarded because questions have subsequently been raised.

Nevertheless, the decision to reopen scrutiny presents an important institutional challenge.

When allegations concern an ordinary public official, the anti-corruption commission may be expected to investigate. But when allegations concern one of the commission's own senior officers, the question of independence becomes considerably more complicated.

Can an institution credibly investigate itself? What safeguards prevent personal relationships, professional loyalties or institutional reputational concerns from influencing the outcome? Who determines whether an internal investigation has been sufficiently rigorous? These are not questions unique to Malaysia.

Sri Lanka's Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption operates within a legal and political environment in which public confidence is equally important.

The country's recent emphasis on accountability has placed considerable expectations on investigative institutions. Citizens have been encouraged to believe that the era of impunity is ending and that those entrusted with public power will be held answerable for misconduct.



But the credibility of that undertaking depends on the standards applied to the investigators themselves.

An anti-corruption institution cannot demand transparency from others while treating its own internal processes as matters beyond legitimate scrutiny.

This does not mean that every allegation against an investigator should result in suspension, public condemnation or disciplinary punishment. Such an approach would expose investigative officers to malicious complaints and could undermine their independence.

The proper response is a credible process that protects both the public interest and the rights of the individual concerned.

Where allegations involve senior officials, consideration should be given to independent oversight, external investigators or other arrangements capable of avoiding actual or perceived conflicts of interest.

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The procedures adopted should be transparent enough to demonstrate that the allegations have been examined fairly, while protecting confidential evidence and the integrity of any continuing investigation.

There is also a broader question concerning institutional culture.

Anti-corruption agencies frequently operate under intense political pressure. Their investigations may involve influential individuals, substantial financial transactions and allegations capable of damaging reputations long before a court determines whether an offence has been committed.

For that reason, investigative integrity must be maintained at every stage, from the receipt of a complaint to the collection of evidence and the decision whether to pursue prosecution.

Malaysia's renewed examination of the RM350,000 allegations provides an opportunity to demonstrate how such principles operate in practice.

If the allegations are unsupported, a credible investigation should establish that conclusion and explain it appropriately.

If evidence of wrongdoing emerges, the authorities must act according to law, regardless of the officer's position. Sri Lanka would do well to follow the outcome.

The question is not whether Malaysia's anti-corruption commission is more or less effective than its Sri Lankan counterpart. Such a conclusion would require a much broader assessment of their respective powers, safeguards and performance.

The more useful question is whether both countries possess sufficiently independent mechanisms to investigate allegations against those entrusted with investigating everyone else.

Be that as it may, the authority of an anti-corruption institution rests on a simple proposition: the standards it applies to the public must also apply within its own walls.

When the investigators themselves become the subject of allegations, institutional credibility depends on the fairness, independence and transparency of the investigation that follows.

MALAYSIA OPENS THE DOOR TO MYANMAR'S MILITARY LEADERSHIP. PRINCIPLE OR PRAGMATISM?

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has signalled a willingness to assist Myanmar's return to fuller engagement with ASEAN, while maintaining that dialogue does not necessarily amount to recognition of the country's military-backed administration.

The initiative raises difficult questions about regional diplomacy, democratic legitimacy and the responsibilities of neighbouring countries towards millions of people affected by Myanmar's prolonged political crisis.

Myanmar's political crisis has presented the Association of Southeast Asian Nations with one of the most difficult challenges in its history.

The military's seizure of power in February 2021 disrupted the country's democratic transition, triggered widespread opposition and contributed to an increasingly destructive conflict involving the armed forces, resistance organisations and ethnic armed groups.

The humanitarian consequences have been severe. Large numbers of civilians have been displaced, economic activity has suffered and communities across the country have experienced insecurity and hardship.



ASEAN has struggled to develop an effective collective response.

Its traditional emphasis on consensus, non-interference and diplomatic engagement has encountered the reality of a crisis in which political divisions and armed conflict have made meaningful progress exceptionally difficult.

Malaysia has frequently been among the more outspoken ASEAN members concerning the situation in Myanmar.

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's recent comments suggesting a willingness to facilitate Myanmar's reintegration into regional engagement therefore deserve attention.

The Malaysian position appears to distinguish between maintaining diplomatic contact with Myanmar's military leadership and formally recognising the legitimacy of the administration established following the coup.

That distinction is important, but it is not without complications.

Diplomatic engagement can provide opportunities to discuss humanitarian access, political dialogue, refugee protection and measures intended to reduce violence.

Refusing all contact may satisfy a political principle without necessarily improving conditions for civilians living under the consequences of conflict.

Conversely, engagement that produces no meaningful change risks being interpreted as acceptance of the existing political order.

ASEAN must therefore determine what it expects to achieve through renewed dialogue.

The organisation adopted a Five-Point Consensus in 2021, calling for an immediate cessation of violence, constructive dialogue among the parties concerned, mediation by a special envoy, humanitarian assistance and access for the envoy to meet relevant stakeholders.

Implementation has remained deeply problematic.

Any new diplomatic initiative should therefore be assessed against those commitments rather than presented simply as evidence of improved relations. Malaysia also faces domestic and regional pressures arising from the presence of Myanmar nationals seeking refuge or employment.

Questions concerning the repatriation of migrants and refugees require particular care.

Returning individuals to a country experiencing armed conflict and political instability may expose them to serious risks, depending on their personal circumstances and the conditions in the areas to which they would be returned.

International humanitarian principles and applicable legal obligations must therefore inform decisions concerning repatriation.

The wider ASEAN community has an interest in preventing Myanmar's instability from producing further regional consequences.

Cross-border crime, irregular migration, trafficking, disrupted trade and humanitarian emergencies do not remain confined within national boundaries.

Sri Lanka, although not an ASEAN member, has legitimate reasons to follow these developments.

The stability of Southeast Asia influences regional trade, maritime commerce and the wider political environment of the Indian Ocean.

There is also a broader diplomatic lesson.

Countries frequently confront situations in which maintaining principled positions and pursuing practical engagement appear to pull in different directions.

The challenge is to ensure that engagement serves identifiable objectives rather than becoming an end in itself.

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NEWSLINE

Daily by Faraz



**“Questioning
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MALAYSIA OPENS THE DOOR...

Malaysia should therefore clarify what conditions it believes would justify Myanmar's fuller participation in ASEAN processes and what measurable progress it expects from renewed contact.

Humanitarian access, protection of civilians and credible political dialogue would provide more meaningful indicators than the frequency of meetings between senior officials.

Be that as it may, Malaysia's willingness to engage with Myanmar's military leadership may reflect an attempt to break a prolonged diplomatic deadlock. But the success of that approach will not be determined by whether Myanmar's rulers return to regional conference tables.

It will depend on whether the people of Myanmar experience greater security, humanitarian protection and a credible prospect of political stability.

EDITORIAL

THE LAW IS NOT A SPECTACLE. JUSTICE IS NOT A PUBLIC EXECUTION.

Sri Lanka is witnessing an extraordinary period in which individuals once regarded as politically untouchable are being investigated, arrested and brought before the courts. For a country that has endured decades of allegations of impunity, this is a significant development. But accountability must never become a substitute for justice, and the presumption of innocence must not become another casualty of political change.

There is something profoundly encouraging about a country beginning to question the conduct of those who once exercised enormous political and institutional power. Sri Lanka has spent far too many years confronting allegations of corruption, abuse of authority, financial misconduct and failures of public responsibility without consistently delivering the accountability its citizens deserve.

The election of President Anura Kumara Disanayake and the subsequent parliamentary mandate secured by the National People's Power reflected, among other things, a public demand for a different approach to governance. The expectation was not simply that different politicians would occupy the seats of power, but that the institutions of the Republic would begin functioning according to principles of transparency, fairness and equality before the law. That expectation remains entirely legitimate.

But the manner in which accountability is pursued matters just as much as the determination to pursue it.

Recent months have seen former presidents, a former First Lady, senior police officers, political figures and other influential individuals become subjects of investigations and judicial proceedings. Their appearances before courts, encounters with investigators and periods in custody have attracted considerable public attention.

For some, these developments represent long-awaited evidence that political influence no longer guarantees protection from the law. For others, they raise concerns about the possibility of selective investigations and the political consequences of highly publicised arrests.

Neither public satisfaction nor political suspicion should determine the outcome of a criminal investigation.

The law must. An arrest is not a conviction. Remand is not a sentence. An allegation is not evidence of guilt, and the decision to initiate proceedings does not establish that an offence has been committed. These distinctions are not technicalities invented to protect powerful individuals. They are fundamental safeguards intended to protect every citizen from the arbitrary exercise of State power.

A person accused of stealing a modest sum is entitled to the same presumption of innocence as a former president accused of misconduct involving millions.

A politically unpopular defendant possesses the same constitutional protections as a citizen whose innocence commands widespread public sympathy. The principle is uncomplicated, even if its application is frequently uncomfortable. Sri Lanka cannot claim to have established equality before the law while allowing the rights of an accused person to depend on public approval. This is particularly important in a country where criminal investigations have historically been vulnerable to political influence, institutional weakness and selective enforcement.

The danger is not confined to the possibility that innocent people may be prosecuted. It also includes the risk that poorly prepared investigations, premature publicity and procedural failures will undermine otherwise legitimate cases.

When investigators make allegations that cannot subsequently be established through admissible evidence, the resulting acquittals can damage public confidence and provide opportunities for those accused to portray the entire accountability process as politically motivated.

The State must therefore approach investigations with professional discipline rather than public enthusiasm. Evidence must be collected lawfully, witnesses must be protected, financial records must be examined competently and prosecutors must be satisfied that the available material supports the charges brought before a court.

The purpose of criminal justice is not to produce headlines. It is to establish responsibility according to law. There is also a distinction between the legitimate reporting of judicial proceedings and the public humiliation of those accused.

The media has an important responsibility to scrutinise the conduct of powerful individuals, expose wrongdoing and inform citizens about matters of public interest.

But that responsibility does not confer the right to present allegations as established facts or treat an accused person's appearance in custody as proof of criminal responsibility. The spectacle of arrest can be politically satisfying. It can also be dangerously misleading. A person may be arrested and subsequently released without charge. Another may be remanded while investigations continue and eventually acquitted.

A third may be convicted after a lengthy trial and sentenced according to law.

These outcomes are fundamentally different, and responsible public discussion must recognise those differences. The presumption of innocence is not suspended when a defendant becomes unpopular.

Nor should the principle of equal treatment be abandoned when questions arise concerning religious identity, social standing or previous political office.

Recent controversy surrounding the treatment of convicted religious figures has demonstrated how quickly the debate can move from constitutional equality to demands for special accommodation. Religious dignity deserves respect, but the State must distinguish between reasonable accommodation and preferential treatment that cannot be justified under the law.

The same principle applies to the wealthy, the politically connected and those who once exercised authority over the institutions now investigating them.

No individual should receive preferential treatment because of former office, family connections or public influence. Equally, no individual should be subjected to harsher treatment merely because of political history or public hostility.

Justice must be indifferent to status. That is a demanding standard, particularly for a society emerging from years of frustration with political privilege.

There is an understandable desire to see those suspected of abusing public power held accountable. Citizens who have endured economic hardship, declining public services and repeated allegations of corruption are entitled to expect meaningful action.

But public anger, however justified, cannot replace the discipline of the law.

Indeed, the strongest demonstration of institutional reform would be a justice system capable of investigating the most powerful individuals while protecting their constitutional rights with exactly the same determination extended to every other citizen.

Such a system would be neither weak nor indulgent. It would be credible.

The Government also has a responsibility to ensure that accountability extends beyond the prosecution of individuals associated with previous administrations.

A genuine commitment to clean government requires effective scrutiny of current officeholders, public procurement, appointments, State enterprises and the expenditure of public funds. The standards applied to yesterday's rulers must apply with equal force to those governing today.

Otherwise, accountability risks becoming a political cycle in which each incoming administration investigates its predecessors while expecting its own conduct to escape equivalent examination.

Sri Lanka has experienced enough of that pattern. The country needs institutions capable of operating independently of political transitions, supported by competent investigators, properly resourced prosecutors and courts able to determine cases without interference or intimidation.

It also needs a public willing to accept judicial outcomes even when those outcomes do not satisfy political expectations.

An acquittal is not automatically evidence of corruption. A conviction is not automatically evidence of political persecution. Both must be assessed according to the evidence, procedures and legal reasoning involved.

The judiciary must be permitted to perform its constitutional responsibilities without being required to satisfy the demands of politicians, commentators or public opinion.

This does not place judicial decisions beyond criticism. Courts, like every public institution, are properly subject to informed scrutiny. But criticism must be distinguished from attempts to intimidate judges or prejudge proceedings.

The ultimate objective should be a Republic in which no citizen fears arbitrary prosecution and no public official assumes immunity from lawful investigation.

That would represent genuine change.

Be that as it may, Sri Lanka will not establish justice by turning the humiliation of yesterday's powerful into today's political entertainment.

The handcuffs are not the revolution, the prison cell is not proof of guilt, and public applause is not a judicial verdict. A government committed to ending impunity must be equally committed to preventing injustice.

Otherwise, the faces may change, the slogans may change and the occupants of political office may change, but the abuse of power will remain. The true measure of this Republic will not be how many prominent people it arrests, but whether it can finally deliver justice without fear, favour or exception.

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