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NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz



"Questioning The Answers"

RIYADH'S AIRPORT REMAINS CLOSED AFTER DEADLY ATTACKS.

SRI LANKAN FLIGHTS TO DAMMAM SUSPENDED UNTIL 18 OCTOBER.



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RIYADH'S AIRPORT REMAINS CLOSED AFTER DEADLY ATTACKS. SRI LANKAN FLIGHTS TO DAMMAM SUSPENDED UNTIL 18 OCTOBER.

Saudi Arabia's aviation system is confronting one of its most serious security disruptions in years following deadly missile and drone attacks attributed to Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi movement. Riyadh's principal airport remains closed, international airlines have suspended services and SriLankan Airlines has announced the suspension of flights between Colombo and Dammam until 18 October. The immediate question for Colombo is how the escalating crisis affects Sri Lankan citizens living and working in the kingdom.

Saudi Arabia entered another day of serious security disruption on Monday as authorities extended the closure of King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh following a series of deadly missile and drone attacks. The strikes have caused substantial casualties, disrupted international aviation and exposed the vulnerability of civilian infrastructure in a country central to global energy markets.

Saturday's attack on Riyadh airport killed 13 people and injured more than 300, according to international reporting. A subsequent attack on Sunday reportedly killed another person and injured 11 others. The scale of the casualties and the repeated targeting of aviation infrastructure have raised concerns about the kingdom's ability to maintain normal civilian operations while confronting the Houthi threat.

The disruption has extended beyond Riyadh. Dammam, the principal city of Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, has also experienced attacks affecting aviation infrastructure. The province is particularly important because of its proximity to the kingdom's principal petroleum production and export facilities.

International airlines have suspended services, while aviation authorities and foreign governments have issued security advisories. The consequences extend well beyond passengers stranded at airports. Commercial operations, international conferences, investment activity and business travel are all being affected.

The crisis is especially significant for Sri Lanka because of its economic and human connections with Saudi Arabia.

On Monday, SriLankan Airlines announced that all flights between Colombo and Dammam would remain suspended until 18 October because of the prevailing security situation. The airline said services would resume when conditions were assessed as suitable for commercial operations.

The announcement provides a concrete indication that the consequences of the Saudi crisis are already affecting Sri Lankan transport connections.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement on 9 October condemning attacks on civilian airports in Saudi Arabia. The Sri Lankan Embassy in Riyadh also published an important announcement for Sri Lankan nationals in the kingdom on the same date.

The existence of that Embassy announcement is significant and should be distinguished from the absence of a newly verified statement on Monday. NEWSLINE has not independently established whether the mission has subsequently issued additional instructions or whether any Sri Lankan nationals have been injured in the attacks.

The Ministry and Embassy should clarify the position, including the arrangements available to Sri Lankan workers whose employment, accommodation or travel plans may be affected.

Particular attention should be given to workers in vulnerable employment arrangements, including domestic workers who may have limited access to independent transport or alternative accommodation.

There is also a wider economic dimension. Saudi Arabia is one of the world's most important petroleum producers, and threats to its infrastructure can influence energy markets even when production facilities remain operational.

For Sri Lanka, already burdened by the cost of imported fuel, any prolonged disruption affecting oil supplies, shipping or insurance would create additional pressure on an economy still recovering from its recent financial crisis. The immediate responsibility of the Saudi authorities is to protect civilian life and infrastructure.

The responsibility of Sri Lanka's Government is to ensure that its citizens are informed, supported and able to obtain assistance when necessary.

The Foreign Ministry's condemnation of attacks on civilian infrastructure is an appropriate diplomatic response. But diplomatic statements and consular protection serve different purposes, and both matter.

The kingdom's security crisis also presents a difficult strategic question for Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Military retaliation could carry the danger of wider escalation, while restraint may not prevent further attacks. Saudi Arabia's economic ambitions depend heavily upon international confidence in its stability.

That confidence is difficult to sustain when a major international airport is repeatedly attacked and commercial aircraft cannot operate normally.

For Sri Lanka, the priority must remain the safety of its citizens and the protection of essential transport and economic connections.

Be that as it may, the immediate measure of Colombo's response will be whether Sri Lankans in Saudi Arabia know whom to contact, where to seek assistance and what arrangements exist if the security situation deteriorates further.

MODI IN CHENNAI. RS. 13,000 CRORE IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND A FAMILIAR FACE AT THE AIRPORT.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Chennai on Sunday, 11 October, to inaugurate and launch development projects worth more than ₹13,000 crore. Among those photographed welcoming him at the airport was Malepati Chakravarthy, Vice President of the Bharatiya Janata Party in Tamil Nadu, who has known Modi personally for at least 16 years. The visit underlined the importance of infrastructure investment in one of India's most economically significant states and offered a reminder of the scale of development taking place immediately across the Palk Strait.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived in Chennai on Sunday for a programme involving the inauguration and commencement of infrastructure and development projects valued at more than ₹13,000 crore. The visit brought together central government investment, Tamil Nadu's regional political leadership and an ambitious programme intended to strengthen transportation, maritime infrastructure, education and industrial connectivity.

Modi was received at Chennai airport by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay and other political representatives, including senior members of the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Among those photographed greeting the Prime Minister was Malepati Chakravarthy, Vice President of the BJP in Tamil Nadu. Chakravarthy has personally known Modi for at least 16 years.

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

MODI IN CHENNAI...

Photographs obtained by NEWSLINE show Chakravarthy greeting the Prime Minister during the airport reception. The images provide a glimpse of the longstanding personal relationships that accompany the formal structures of political leadership.

The visit itself was substantially concerned with economic development.

Modi inaugurated the Poonamallee-Vadapalani section of Phase II of the Chennai Metro Rail Project, an investment valued at approximately ₹4,900 crore. The new section forms part of a wider effort to improve urban mobility in a metropolitan area that has experienced substantial economic and population growth.



The Prime Minister also participated in a Metro journey with the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, an occasion that carried significance beyond the opening of another railway connection.

India's federal political system frequently brings together governments controlled by different political parties. Infrastructure investment requires cooperation between national and state authorities, even when those authorities compete vigorously in elections.

The Chennai programme also included railway improvements valued at more than ₹750 crore, the redevelopment of railway stations and projects intended to strengthen road and maritime connectivity.

Port development formed an important part of the announcements.

Chennai and other ports in Tamil Nadu are central to India's manufacturing, logistics and international trading networks. Improvements in cargo-handling capacity, storage facilities and associated infrastructure are intended to support industrial expansion and more efficient movement of goods.

Modi also visited the Indian Institute of Technology Madras, where he inaugurated the Sudha Gopalakrishnan Brain Centre and highlighted research intended to advance scientific understanding of the human brain.

The programme included a project to develop detailed three-dimensional maps of more than 100 human brains at cellular resolution, covering different stages of human development.

The inclusion of advanced scientific research alongside transport and industrial infrastructure illustrates the breadth of India's development ambitions.

For Sri Lanka, developments in Tamil Nadu deserve particular attention.

The Indian state lies immediately across the Palk Strait and maintains longstanding historical, cultural, commercial and political relationships with Sri Lanka.

Tamil Nadu is also an important manufacturing centre, with substantial activity in automobiles, electronics, textiles, engineering and technology services.

Its infrastructure investments therefore have implications for regional trade, supply chains and economic competition.

Sri Lanka has repeatedly identified its geographical position as a potential advantage in attracting investment and developing logistics services.

That advantage must be considered against the continuing expansion of infrastructure and industrial capacity in neighbouring Indian states.

Proximity to a rapidly developing economy can create opportunities, but it does not automatically produce economic benefits.

Those benefits depend upon competitiveness, efficient administration, reliable infrastructure and the ability to establish productive commercial relationships.

The visit also illustrated the political importance of Tamil Nadu within India's federal system.

The BJP continues to maintain and develop its organisation in a state with a distinctive political history and strong regional parties. The presence of senior state party representatives at the airport reflected the political dimension of the Prime Minister's visit, alongside the official programme.

India continues to expand its infrastructure, industrial capacity and research institutions through programmes involving both national and state authorities.

Sri Lanka, meanwhile, faces the challenge of translating economic stabilisation into sustained investment and productive growth.

The comparison should not ignore the enormous differences in population, resources and economic scale between the two countries. Nevertheless, the importance of consistent infrastructure planning and effective implementation applies to both.

Be that as it may, while India continues to announce new railway lines, port facilities and scientific research centres, Sri Lanka would do well to ensure that its own development ambitions advance beyond announcements and ceremonial foundation stones.



EDITORIAL

CHAMARA SAMPATH ARRESTED AND REMANDED. RS. 8.1 MILLION IN ALLEGED BRIBES AND ANOTHER TEST FOR THE JUSTICE SYSTEM.

Badulla District Parliamentarian Chamara Sampath Dassanayake has been remanded until 23 October following his arrest by the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption. Investigators allege that money obtained from businesses involved in phosphate imports was channelled through the bank account of his secretary and subsequently used for political activities. The allegations are serious. Proving them is now the responsibility of the prosecution.

The arrest and remanding of Parliamentarian Chamara Sampath Dassanayake on Monday marks another significant development in Sri Lanka's expanding investigations into alleged corruption involving serving and former holders of public office.

Dassanayake was arrested after several hours of questioning by the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption and subsequently produced before the Colombo Chief Magistrate's Court, which ordered that he be remanded until 23 October.

According to investigators, the allegations concern the solicitation of Rs. 8.1 million from three companies engaged in phosphate imports.

The money was allegedly deposited into the bank account of Sumathipala Liyanarachchi, who served as Dassanayake's secretary. Investigators further allege that the funds were subsequently used for political activities and that the payments were obtained without following any lawful or approved procedure.

The allegations raise questions extending beyond the conduct of one politician. If businesses were asked to provide money in circumstances connected to official authority, the investigation must establish precisely what was requested, who made the request, whether any advantage was promised or provided and what happened to the money after it entered the account identified by investigators.

Dassanayake also faces separate allegations concerning the acceptance of Rs. 2.4 million from three businessmen involved in the gem trade. Proceedings relating to that matter are already before court.

The existence of multiple allegations does not establish guilt in any of them, and each must be considered according to its own evidence.

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

CHAMARA SAMPATH...

There is a broader institutional question here. Political financing in Sri Lanka has long occupied an uncomfortable space between legitimate contributions, personal relationships, commercial expectations and the exercise of official influence. Money can enter political activity through arrangements that are difficult to examine, particularly when transactions involve associates rather than the politicians themselves.

That is precisely why the financial trail matters. Investigators must establish not merely whether money changed hands, but whether the circumstances constituted an offence. Equally, the defence must have every opportunity to challenge the allegations and test the evidence.

The arrest comes amid heightened public attention to corruption investigations involving individuals associated with successive administrations.

The temptation to treat each arrest as evidence of a successful anti-corruption campaign is understandable, but misplaced. An arrest demonstrates that investigators have taken a particular legal step. It does not establish that a crime has been committed.

Sri Lanka's experience provides ample reason for caution. High-profile investigations have sometimes generated enormous publicity without producing corresponding convictions. Political opponents have celebrated arrests, only to discover later that the evidence presented in court was insufficient to sustain the accusations.

The Commission must therefore be judged by the quality of its investigations, the integrity of its procedures and the outcomes established through the judicial process.

Dassanayake is entitled to the presumption of innocence. The public is entitled to a thorough investigation. Neither entitlement should be sacrificed to political convenience.

Be that as it may, the true measure of Sri Lanka's anti-corruption effort will not be how many politicians enter remand prison, but how many allegations can be proved through evidence that withstands judicial scrutiny.

SHIRANTHI RAJAPAKSA MOVED TO NATIONAL HOSPITAL CARDIOLOGY UNIT. MEDICAL CARE IS A RIGHT, NOT A POLITICAL PRIVILEGE.

Former First Lady Shiranthi Rajapaksa has been admitted to the Cardiology Unit of the National Hospital of Sri Lanka while remaining in remand custody. Prison authorities say the admission followed medical recommendations. The development raises an important question about healthcare for prisoners, particularly whether the same clinical standards apply to those without political connections.

Former First Lady Shiranthi Rajapaksa was admitted to the Cardiology Unit of the National Hospital of Sri Lanka in Colombo on Monday, following a recommendation by doctors attached to the prison medical service.

The transfer represents another development in her period of remand custody, which began following her arrest by the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption on 7 October.

Prisons Spokesperson Senaka Pallethanne confirmed that the admission followed medical advice. Rajapaksa had previously been taken to the National Eye Hospital on 9 October for specialist treatment after being referred for an eye condition the preceding day.



The latest admission concerns cardiology, although the precise medical circumstances have not been publicly established. There is no legitimate basis for speculating about her diagnosis, and her status as a former First Lady does not extinguish her right to medical confidentiality.

The more important public question concerns the treatment available to people held in State custody.

Sri Lanka's prison authorities assume responsibility for the health and welfare of those they detain. That obligation applies to convicted prisoners and people awaiting trial. It applies to former political leaders and to ordinary citizens who may never have enjoyed the attention of a television camera.

A prisoner requiring specialist treatment must receive it according to medical necessity. The decision should rest with qualified doctors, not political authorities, prison administrators seeking favour or members of the public demanding that a prominent detainee experience discomfort.

The question is whether those standards operate consistently.

An ordinary woman held in remand who develops symptoms requiring cardiological investigation should have access to the same standard of clinical assessment and referral. The availability of specialist treatment must not depend upon a prisoner's surname, political history or social standing.

Rajapaksa's legal difficulties also continued on Monday when the Maligakanda Magistrate's Court rejected an anticipatory bail application relating to a separate investigation concerning the Siriliya Saviya account.

The application concerned allegations involving Rs. 10 million credited to the account by the National Savings Bank in 2010, reportedly following a request connected to the proposed acquisition of a CT scanner for the Lady Ridgeway Hospital for Children.

The court's decision turned on jurisdiction. State counsel submitted that the relevant facts had already been reported to the Fort Magistrate's Court and that the Maligakanda Magistrate's Court was not the appropriate forum for the application.

The rejection must therefore not be confused with a judicial determination of the underlying allegations.

The distinction is important. Criminal proceedings involve different legal questions at different stages, and the public should not be encouraged to interpret every adverse procedural decision as proof of wrongdoing.

Rajapaksa remains entitled to defend herself against the allegations. Her medical treatment must remain independent of those proceedings.

Sri Lanka has repeatedly declared its commitment to equality before the law. That principle is tested most meaningfully when the individual concerned is either unusually powerful or unusually powerless.

A former First Lady should neither receive preferential treatment nor be denied necessary medical attention to satisfy public anger. Both outcomes would undermine the principle that the law is supposed to protect.

Be that as it may, a country that wishes to demonstrate equality before the law should begin by ensuring that every prisoner who needs a cardiologist can see one, whether or not the prisoner's husband once occupied Temple Trees – or for that matter had even ever met a President in person.

MAHINDA KHANDAGAMA FURTHER REMANDED IN DRUG TRAFFICKING CASE. THE COURTS MUST FOLLOW THE EVIDENCE, NOT THE POLITICAL CONNECTIONS.

Mahinda Khandagama has been further remanded in connection with an investigation into alleged drug trafficking. The proceedings raise questions about the networks through which narcotics are financed, distributed and protected. The allegations must be established in court, but the public is entitled to know whether investigators are examining the entire operation rather than concentrating on individual suspects.

The further remanding of Mahinda Khandagama in connection with alleged drug trafficking brings renewed attention to the relationship between organised criminal activity, financial networks and individuals who have occupied positions of influence in Sri Lankan public life.

The court's decision to extend his remand represents a procedural development in an ongoing criminal

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"



MAHINDA KHANDAGAMA...

investigation. It is not a determination of guilt, and Khandagama remains entitled to the presumption of innocence.

That distinction is particularly important in cases involving narcotics, where the seriousness of the allegations can sometimes encourage the public to assume that an arrest or remand order establishes criminal responsibility.

Drug trafficking is not generally an activity that can be sustained without organisation. Significant operations require financing, procurement, transportation, storage, distribution and arrangements for handling the proceeds. Investigators therefore have a responsibility to examine the alleged operation in its entirety, where the evidence supports such an inquiry.

If the investigation establishes that Khandagama participated in a trafficking network, the next question must concern the identities and responsibilities of others involved.

If the evidence does not establish his involvement, the justice system must be equally prepared to recognise that outcome.

The objective cannot be to secure a politically attractive prosecution. It must be to establish the truth.

Sri Lanka has experienced repeated announcements concerning major drug seizures, arrests of suspected traffickers and investigations into organised criminal networks. Some have resulted in successful prosecutions, while others have raised questions about investigative methods, the handling of evidence and the capacity of law enforcement agencies to pursue those who finance criminal enterprises.

The financial dimension deserves particular attention. Narcotics trafficking generates proceeds that must eventually enter or interact with the legitimate economy. Property transactions, business investments, cash movements and financial intermediaries may all become relevant where investigators identify evidence of money laundering.

That does not mean that every person associated with an accused individual is implicated in criminal activity. Association is not proof, and investigators must distinguish between legitimate relationships and evidence of participation in an offence.

The same standard must apply when a suspect has political connections.

Public office should not provide protection from investigation, but political association should not become a substitute for evidence either. Both propositions are essential to a credible justice system.

The authorities should also explain, within the limits imposed by ongoing proceedings, whether the investigation concerns a particular consignment, an alleged distribution operation or a wider network.

Such information would help the public understand the nature of the case without prejudicing the accused.

Ultimately, the court must determine whether the prosecution can establish the alleged offences beyond reasonable doubt.

The public interest lies not in the spectacle of another remand order but in the prospect of a properly investigated case that identifies those responsible for criminal conduct.

Be that as it may, Sri Lanka will make little progress against organised drug trafficking if investigations stop with the people whose names are familiar while the financing and distribution networks remain beyond effective scrutiny.

SAUDI ARABIA UNDER ATTACK. MOHAMMED BIN SALMAN HAS FEW ATTRACTIVE OPTIONS. WILL HE RETALIATE, NEGOTIATE OR TRY TO DO BOTH?

Repeated missile and drone attacks attributed to Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi movement have presented Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman with a difficult strategic dilemma. Military retaliation could produce further escalation, while restraint may fail to deter additional attacks. For a kingdom investing heavily in economic transformation, the immediate security crisis threatens ambitions that extend far beyond the battlefield.

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman faces a difficult choice as the kingdom confronts continuing missile and drone attacks attributed to Yemen's Houthi movement. The attacks have disrupted civilian aviation, caused casualties and raised questions about the security of infrastructure essential to Saudi Arabia's economy.

The challenge is not simply military. It concerns the direction of the kingdom's economic and diplomatic strategy.

For several years, Mohammed bin Salman has sought to transform Saudi Arabia's international identity. Vision 2030 envisages a country less dependent upon petroleum revenues, more attractive to international investors and increasingly prominent in tourism, technology, entertainment and global commerce.

Those ambitions depend upon political stability and the confidence of foreign governments, businesses and travellers.

Repeated attacks on airports and other civilian infrastructure threaten that confidence.

A country can announce enormous investment projects, construct modern airports and promote itself as a global commercial destination. But international businesses must also be persuaded that their employees, investments and operations can function without unacceptable security risks.

The Houthis have demonstrated over several years that relatively inexpensive missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles can create disproportionate disruption when directed against economically important targets.

Saudi Arabia possesses substantial military resources and sophisticated air-defence capabilities. Nevertheless, defending a large country against repeated attacks involving different types of weapons presents considerable operational and financial challenges.

The Crown Prince must therefore consider whether a more forceful military response would improve Saudi security or deepen the conflict.

A campaign directed against Houthi military facilities could degrade some of the movement's capabilities. However, experience from the prolonged Yemen conflict demonstrates the difficulty of eliminating such threats through air power alone.

Military action also carries humanitarian consequences. Yemen has endured years of conflict, displacement, economic destruction and severe hardship. Renewed escalation could worsen conditions for civilians who have already suffered enormously.

The alternative is diplomacy.

Saudi Arabia has previously pursued negotiations intended to reduce hostilities with the Houthis and stabilise its southern border.

Renewed engagement could offer a route towards limiting attacks, although negotiations conducted while civilian infrastructure is being targeted would present obvious political difficulties.

Iran's relationship with the Houthis introduces another complication.

The movement has received support from Iran, but the precise degree of Iranian involvement in individual operations requires evidence. It would be inaccurate to assume that every Houthi decision is necessarily directed from Tehran.

Saudi Arabia must nevertheless consider the wider regional consequences of its response. A confrontation that expands beyond Yemen could threaten shipping, energy markets and diplomatic relationships throughout the Gulf.

The Eastern Province is particularly sensitive because of its concentration of petroleum infrastructure. Attacks affecting production, processing or export facilities could have consequences for global energy prices.

The kingdom's economic diversification programme remains substantially dependent upon revenues generated by its existing energy industry. A serious disruption to that industry would therefore threaten both current income and the financing of future development.

There is also a question concerning international partnerships.

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

SAUDI ARABIA UNDER ATTACK...

Saudi Arabia maintains important defence and security relationships with the United States and other countries. The effectiveness of those relationships will be judged partly by their ability to assist the kingdom in protecting civilian infrastructure and deterring further attacks.

Yet foreign military assistance cannot resolve every political problem underlying the conflict.

Mohammed bin Salman must balance domestic expectations of security, the risk of regional escalation and the economic costs of prolonged instability.



Retaliation may demonstrate resolve without guaranteeing deterrence. Negotiation may reduce immediate tensions without eliminating the underlying threat. Additional defensive measures may protect selected facilities while leaving other targets vulnerable.

A combination of these approaches may be necessary, but each requires difficult judgments about timing, credibility and acceptable risk.

For Sri Lanka, the consequences are not remote.

The kingdom is an important destination for Sri Lankan workers, while regional instability can affect aviation, petroleum prices, shipping costs and the broader economic environment.

Colombo has an interest in Saudi Arabia's security, the protection of civilian life and the avoidance of a wider regional conflict.

The immediate responsibility for the attacks rests with those who plan and carry them out.

The longer-term challenge is to establish arrangements capable of preventing further violence.

Mohammed bin Salman has considerable authority and resources at his disposal. What remains uncertain is whether those resources can deliver a durable political and security settlement.

Be that as it may, Saudi Arabia's economic transformation will ultimately depend not only upon how much the kingdom can build, but upon how effectively it can protect what has already been built.

RELIGION, JUSTICE AND THE CONSTITUTION

GNANASARA, THE ROBE AND THE LAW. DOES A CRIMINAL CONVICTION WARRANT DISROBING A BUDDHIST MONK?

The controversy surrounding Galagodaaththe Gnanasara raises a question that extends far beyond one individual. When a Buddhist monk is convicted of a criminal offence, who determines whether he remains entitled to the robe? The answer lies partly in the Vinaya, partly in the authority of the Buddhist monastic institutions and partly in the distinction between religious discipline and the secular law of the State.

The debate surrounding Galagodaaththe Gnanasara has brought into focus an issue that Sri Lanka has repeatedly confronted without satisfactorily resolving. What happens when a Buddhist monk is convicted of a criminal offence, and does the conviction itself justify removing his monastic robes?

The answer is more complicated than either those demanding special treatment for monks or those insisting upon identical prison clothing may acknowledge.

Buddhist monastic life is governed by the Vinaya, a detailed body of disciplinary rules regulating the conduct of ordained monks. The criminal law, meanwhile, governs the conduct of citizens regardless of their religious identity. These two systems may address the same conduct, but they do not necessarily attach the same consequences to it.

Under the Theravada Vinaya, four particularly serious offences, known as the *pārājika*, entail defeat in the monastic life.

They concern sexual intercourse, theft meeting the relevant disciplinary conditions, intentionally killing a human being and knowingly making false claims to extraordinary spiritual attainments.

A monk who commits a *pārājika* offence loses his standing as a bhikkhu under the Vinaya. The consequence follows from the offence itself, although establishing whether the relevant conduct occurred may require examination by competent monastic authorities.

This is an important distinction. Not every criminal conviction constitutes a *pārājika* offence, and not every breach of the Vinaya constitutes a criminal offence under Sri Lankan law.

The Vinaya also recognises other categories of misconduct, including serious disciplinary offences requiring confession, prescribed procedures or temporary exclusion from normal communal activities.

These should not be confused with permanent loss of monastic standing.

Consequently, the proposition that a monk must automatically be disrobed whenever convicted of a criminal offence is not supported by the basic structure of Theravada monastic discipline.

But that does not settle the wider question of accountability.

The Maha Sangha has an important responsibility to maintain the integrity of the monastic order. If serious allegations arise concerning the conduct of an ordained monk, the relevant monastic authorities must be willing to examine those allegations according to established disciplinary principles.

That responsibility cannot depend upon the popularity, political associations or public prominence of the individual concerned.

The same principle applies to the State.

A monk accused of a criminal offence is entitled to the protections afforded by the Constitution and the criminal justice system.

He is also subject to the law. Religious status cannot provide immunity from investigation, prosecution or punishment.

The distinction between imprisonment and disrobing is therefore fundamental.

The State may lawfully imprison a monk following conviction and sentence. Whether prison authorities may require particular clothing is a separate question involving prison regulations, constitutional rights and the accommodation of religious practice.

Removing a monk's robe while he is in custody does not, by itself, determine whether he remains a monk under the Vinaya. Equally, allowing him to retain religious clothing does not diminish the validity of a criminal conviction.

The difficulty arises when these distinct questions become entangled in political argument.

Sri Lanka's Constitution gives Buddhism the foremost place while also protecting fundamental rights, including freedom of religion and equality before the law. Those provisions must be interpreted together rather than selectively invoked according to the identity of the prisoner.

Religious accommodation is not necessarily unlawful discrimination.

The State may recognise genuine religious requirements where doing so is consistent with prison security, discipline and the rights of others.

However, any accommodation must be based upon coherent principles rather than political pressure.

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

GNANASARA, THE ROBE ...

If Buddhist monks are permitted to retain religious clothing, the State must also consider how comparable religious requirements affecting clergy and adherents of other faiths are accommodated.

The deeper issue concerns the credibility of religious authority.

The Maha Sangha cannot reasonably expect the State to recognise the special significance of monastic robes while avoiding difficult questions about the conduct expected of those who wear them.

Nor should politicians assume that a discussion about prison clothing gives them authority to determine questions of Buddhist ordination.

The courts determine criminal responsibility. The relevant monastic authorities determine disciplinary standing under the Vinaya. The State must administer imprisonment according to law.

Each institution has its responsibilities, and none benefits when those responsibilities are confused.

Be that as it may, the robe deserves respect because of what it represents. Whether the conduct of an individual monk honours that representation is a different question, and one that the Maha Sangha must be prepared to confront.

THE PRISONS ORDINANCE OF 1877. DID THE BRITISH IMPRISON BUDDHIST MONKS IN JAFFNA, AND WHY ARE WE STILL DEBATING COLONIAL RULES?

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake is reported to have referred to the colonial origins of Sri Lanka's prison regulations during discussions with senior Buddhist clergy. A related historical claim concerns the imprisonment of Buddhist monks in Jaffna under British rule.

The history deserves examination, but it does not remove the responsibility of successive independent governments to ensure that prison regulations comply with contemporary constitutional principles.

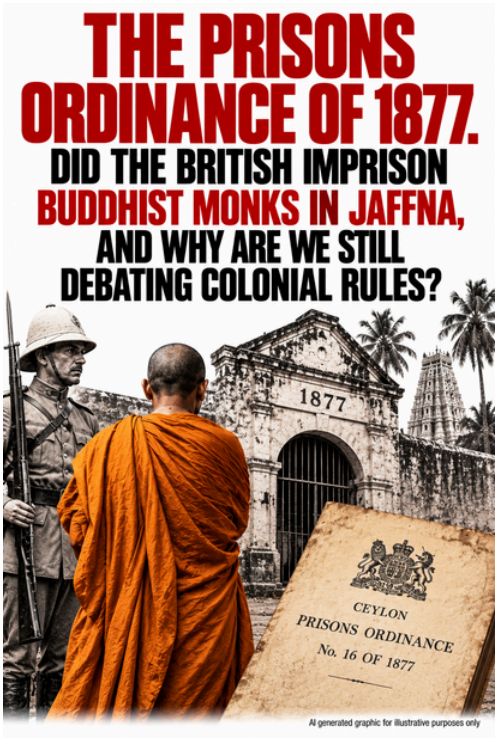
Sri Lanka's debate over the treatment of Buddhist monks in prison has acquired an unusual historical dimension, with attention turning to the Prisons Ordinance of 1877 and the practices of the British colonial administration.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake is reported to have discussed the colonial origins of prison regulations when he met senior Buddhist clergy following objections to the removal of monastic robes from a convicted monk.

A further claim concerns Buddhist monks allegedly imprisoned by the British in Jaffna and the treatment they received while in custody.

The historical proposition requires careful examination. The fact that a prison law originated during British rule does not establish that every regulation currently applied under it was introduced in 1877. Nor does it establish the circumstances in which particular monks may have been imprisoned.

The Prisons Ordinance, No. 16 of 1877, formed part of the legal framework established by the colonial administration for managing prisons and prisoners. Its provisions have been amended over time, while detailed administrative requirements have also been addressed through subordinate regulations.



The distinction between the principal Ordinance and regulations made under it is important. A provision concerning prisoners' clothing may derive from a later regulation rather than the original colonial enactment.

If the Government intends to justify changes by reference to the historical treatment of Buddhist monks, it should identify the relevant legal provisions and documentary evidence.

The alleged Jaffna precedent deserves particular scrutiny.

Which monks were imprisoned? When were they arrested? What offences were alleged? Were they convicted by a court? What prison regulations were applied, and is there documentary evidence concerning the removal of their robes?

These are not trivial questions. Historical claims acquire considerable political force when repeated in discussions involving religion and national identity. That makes accuracy especially important.

British colonial rule undoubtedly involved the exercise of authority over religious institutions and communities.

But a general understanding of colonial power cannot substitute for evidence concerning a particular imprisonment.

The more immediate issue is whether present prison regulations are compatible with Sri Lanka's Constitution.

The Constitution recognises equality before the law, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the special position accorded to Buddhism. The State must reconcile those provisions when determining how religious practice may be accommodated in prisons.

The question is not whether Buddhist monks deserve dignity. Every person deprived of liberty deserves dignity.

The question is whether prison regulations can recognise genuine religious requirements without creating arbitrary distinctions between prisoners.

That examination should extend beyond Buddhist monks.

Sri Lanka is a country of several religious traditions. If the Government reviews prison rules concerning religious clothing, the exercise should consider the requirements of other faiths and the practical needs of prison administration.

Security, identification, hygiene and discipline are legitimate considerations.

They should be examined transparently rather than invoked as convenient explanations for decisions already taken.

There is also a broader question concerning the continued operation of colonial legislation.

Sri Lanka obtained independence in 1948 and became a republic in 1972. Since then, successive governments have possessed the legislative authority to review and amend inherited laws.

If a colonial provision is inconsistent with contemporary constitutional values, the responsibility for correcting it rests with the institutions of the independent State.

The British administration may have enacted the original law. It has not been responsible for administering Sri Lanka's prisons for nearly eight decades.

That distinction is worth remembering whenever colonial history is offered as an explanation for present administrative arrangements.

The Government's proposed review provides an opportunity to examine prison regulations comprehensively. Such a review should consider religious accommodation, healthcare, overcrowding, rehabilitation, disciplinary procedures and the treatment of remand prisoners.

It should also establish clear standards capable of being applied consistently, irrespective of a prisoner's social standing or political connections.

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

THE PRISONS ORDINANCE...

The public deserves a system governed by law rather than improvised responses to controversy.

Be that as it may, blaming the British for a law enacted in 1877 may explain where it originated. It does not explain why independent Sri Lanka has taken so long to decide whether it should remain unchanged.

ECONOMICS, INDIA AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR ECONOMICS GOES TO TWO AMERICANS WHO EXPLAIN HOW ECONOMIES CAN BE STABILISED. SRI LANKA SHOULD PAY ATTENTION.

American economists Robert E. Hall and Michael Woodford have been awarded the 2026 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences for work that transformed the understanding of economic stabilisation. Their research explains why governments and central banks must understand how ordinary people and businesses respond to economic uncertainty. For Sri Lanka, where macroeconomic recovery has yet to deliver adequate relief to millions of households, the lessons could hardly be more relevant.

The 2026 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences has been awarded to two American economists whose work has fundamentally influenced how governments and central banks respond to economic instability. Robert E. Hall of Stanford University and Michael Woodford of Columbia University were announced as this year's laureates on Monday, 12 October, for their contributions to the microeconomic foundations of macroeconomic stabilisation.

The prize, awarded by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, recognises decades of research explaining how the decisions of individual households and businesses influence the performance of entire economies. The two economists will share 12 million Swedish kronor.

Their central contribution is both sophisticated and remarkably straightforward. An economy cannot be properly understood simply by examining government expenditure, interest rates, inflation statistics and national output. Policymakers must also understand how people respond to those conditions and, importantly, what they expect to happen next.

A family anticipating higher prices may change its spending habits. A business expecting interest rates to remain elevated may postpone investment.

A household worried about unemployment may increase precautionary savings, provided it has sufficient income to save anything at all.

Millions of such decisions collectively determine how an economy performs.

Hall, now 83, helped develop the understanding of consumption, employment and economic fluctuations, while Woodford, 70, made important contributions to modern monetary policy, particularly the role of expectations and communication by central banks.

Woodford's work helped establish the importance of forward guidance, through which central banks communicate their expectations about future monetary policy. Such communication can influence economic behaviour even before interest rates change.

The research became especially important during the global financial crisis, when conventional interest-rate reductions were no longer sufficient to stimulate economic activity.

For Sri Lanka, the significance of this year's award extends beyond academic recognition.

The country has endured an extraordinary economic collapse followed by painful adjustments intended to restore financial stability. Inflation, taxation, interest rates, debt restructuring and restrictions on public expenditure have become familiar subjects of national discussion.

The Government and economic authorities can point to improvements in several macroeconomic indicators. Growth has returned, foreign exchange reserves have strengthened and the immediate conditions associated with the 2022 crisis have eased.

Yet the lived experience of many households remains considerably less encouraging.

A family struggling to purchase food, pay electricity bills or meet school expenses does not necessarily experience economic recovery in the same way that a central banker observes improving statistics.

This is not an argument against stabilisation. Without financial stability, sustained economic development becomes exceptionally difficult. It is an argument for recognising that stabilisation is a necessary condition for recovery, not the entirety of recovery itself.

The work of Hall and Woodford demonstrates why expectations matter. If households believe that their financial circumstances will remain precarious, their economic behaviour will reflect that uncertainty even when official indicators improve.

Businesses operate under similar constraints. Investors require confidence not only in current economic conditions but also in the predictability of future policy.

Sri Lanka has frequently suffered from abrupt changes in taxation, import restrictions, exchange-rate policy and other economic decisions.

Such changes make long-term planning difficult and can undermine the confidence necessary for productive investment.

The Nobel laureates' research provides a useful framework for understanding why policy credibility matters.

But there is another important consideration. Not every household possesses the financial flexibility assumed in simplified economic models. Families living from one pay packet to the next may have little capacity to alter savings or investment decisions because there is simply no surplus income available.

Economic policy must therefore account for differences in income, vulnerability and access to financial resources.

For Sri Lanka, the challenge is to combine macroeconomic stability with improvements in employment, productivity, household purchasing power and access to essential services.

The Nobel Prize does not offer a ready-made solution to Sri Lanka's economic difficulties. It does, however, reinforce the importance of understanding the relationship between policy decisions and human behaviour.

The country has become accustomed to hearing that the economy is improving. The next task is to ensure that ordinary people have sufficient reason to believe it.

Be that as it may, two American economists have received one of the world's highest academic honours for explaining how economies can be stabilised. Sri Lanka's policymakers must now confront the rather less glamorous question of how stability can be translated into a better life for the people who have paid so dearly to achieve it.

MALAYSIA, CORRUPTION AND THE RULE OF LAW

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 a senior officer of the agency. The allegations date back to 2017 and were previously investigated without wrongdoing being established. The decision to revisit the matter raises a question relevant to Malaysia, Sri Lanka and every country that claims to take corruption seriously: can an institution credibly investigate allegations against its own senior officials?

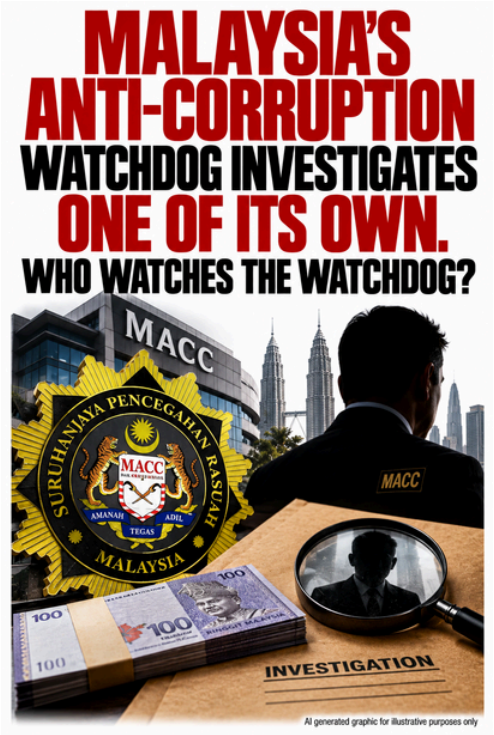
Malaysia's principal anti-corruption agency is confronting an uncomfortable question concerning its own accountability following reports that allegations involving a senior officer and RM350,000 are being

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MALAYSIA'S ANTI-CORRUPTION...

re-examined by a specially constituted investigative team. The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, widely known as the MACC, is responsible for investigating corruption involving public officials, politicians, commercial enterprises and others suspected of abusing positions of trust. Its effectiveness depends heavily upon public confidence in the independence and integrity of its investigations.

That confidence becomes particularly important when allegations concern individuals within the commission itself.



The matter reportedly dates back to 2017 and involves allegations that were previously examined without wrongdoing being established. The decision to revisit the case does not mean that the earlier investigation was necessarily defective, nor does it establish that the officer concerned committed an offence.

It does, however, create a legitimate expectation that the authorities will explain why the matter requires renewed examination.

Was new evidence obtained? Were concerns raised about the original investigative process? Has an independent review identified deficiencies requiring further inquiry?

These questions are important because an investigation reopened without a clearly explained basis can generate suspicion without necessarily improving accountability.

The MACC's decision to establish a special team may demonstrate a willingness to subject its own officers to scrutiny. That is an important institutional principle.

But the composition, authority and independence of the team will determine whether the process commands public confidence.

An agency investigating allegations against one of its own senior officials faces an obvious institutional difficulty. Investigators may have professional relationships with the individual concerned. Senior administrators may have participated in earlier decisions. Internal hierarchies can complicate the willingness of officers to challenge colleagues or superiors.

None of these considerations automatically invalidates an internal investigation. They do, however, explain why independent supervision and transparent procedures are particularly important.

The public is entitled to know who appointed the investigators, to whom they report and whether their conclusions will be subject to review outside the commission.

There is also a distinction between institutional accountability and the rights of the individual concerned.

A public officer does not lose the presumption of innocence merely because an allegation attracts publicity. The officer must have a fair opportunity to respond, and any adverse finding must be supported by evidence.

Malaysia's broader anti-corruption efforts have frequently attracted international attention, particularly through investigations involving former political leaders and major financial scandals.

The country's experience demonstrates both the importance of strong investigative institutions and the difficulties that arise when allegations concern politically influential individuals.

Sri Lanka faces comparable challenges.

The Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption has become increasingly prominent as investigations involving former ministers, public officials and other individuals proceed through the legal system.

Its credibility depends not only upon its willingness to investigate politically powerful people but also upon the standards it applies to its own officers and procedures.

The same principle extends to police investigators, prosecutors, prison officials and other institutions responsible for administering justice.

An anti-corruption agency cannot reasonably demand accountability from the rest of society while treating its internal affairs as matters beyond public examination.

Equally, allegations against investigators must not be used as convenient instruments to undermine legitimate investigations or discredit officers without evidence.

The challenge is to establish procedures that protect both institutional independence and individual fairness.

Malaysia's decision to revisit the RM350,000 allegations therefore presents an opportunity to demonstrate how an investigative agency should respond when its own conduct comes under scrutiny.

The outcome will matter, but so will the process through which that outcome is reached.

Be that as it may, an anti-corruption commission should be able to investigate a minister, a businessman or one of its own senior officers with equal independence.

Anything less risks creating an institution that demands transparency from everyone except itself.

NAJIB RAZAK HAS THE KING'S CONDITIONAL PARDON. BUT HE REMAINS IN PRISON, AND ANOTHER 15-YEAR SENTENCE AWAITS.

Malaysia's former Prime Minister Najib Razak remains at the centre of an extraordinary legal and constitutional controversy. A conditional royal pardon has opened the possibility of serving the remainder of his SRC International sentence under house arrest, but a substantial financial condition remains unresolved. Meanwhile, a separate conviction arising from the 1MDB scandal carries a further 15-year prison sentence. The courts, the monarchy and the criminal justice system must now confront the consequences of decisions operating on different legal tracks.

Former Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak remains in prison despite a conditional royal pardon permitting him to serve the remainder of his sentence in the SRC International case under house arrest, subject to the fulfilment of specified conditions.

The decision, announced on 18 September 2026, has generated considerable debate about the constitutional powers of Malaysia's monarchy, the administration of criminal sentences and the treatment of politically prominent prisoners.

Najib's position is complicated by the existence of two separate criminal cases.

The first concerns SRC International, a former subsidiary of the state investment fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad, commonly known as 1MDB.

Najib was convicted of offences including abuse of power, criminal breach of trust and money laundering involving RM42 million belonging to SRC International.

He originally received a 12-year prison sentence and a substantial fine. In February 2024, Malaysia's Pardons Board reduced his prison sentence to six years and lowered the fine.

The subsequent conditional pardon created the possibility of Najib completing the remaining portion of that sentence under house arrest until 23 August 2028.

However, the arrangement was subject to payment of a RM50 million fine.

Najib's lawyers subsequently indicated that he did not possess sufficient funds to satisfy the financial condition.

NEWSLINE
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"Questioning The Answers"

NAJIB RAZAK...

The Attorney-General also confirmed that payment had not been made at the time of the relevant announcement. As of Monday, 12 October,
NEWSLINE has not independently established that the payment has subsequently been completed or that Najib has been transferred from Kajang Prison.

The distinction matters because the existence of a conditional pardon does not necessarily mean that every condition required for its implementation has been fulfilled.

There is also the separate 1MDB conviction.

In December 2025, Najib was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment following convictions involving abuse of power and money laundering connected to the wider 1MDB financial scandal.

That sentence was ordered to commence after completion of the SRC International sentence.

Najib has challenged the conviction, and the Kuala Lumpur High Court is scheduled to hear an application for a stay of execution on Wednesday, 14 October.

The proceedings are separate from the conditional royal pardon affecting the SRC sentence.

This distinction is central to understanding the legal position.

A royal pardon or commutation concerning one criminal sentence does not automatically extinguish a conviction or sentence imposed in another case.

Malaysia's constitutional arrangements provide for the exercise of royal clemency through established procedures.

Those powers are significant, but their exercise must be understood within the legal framework governing the particular offence and sentence.

The present controversy therefore raises questions about the interaction between executive clemency, judicial authority and the practical administration of imprisonment.

There is also a broader question concerning equality before the law.

Malaysia's former prime minister is entitled to seek every remedy available under the Constitution and the criminal justice system. His previous office does not remove those rights.

Equally, the public is entitled to expect that the conditions attached to a pardon will be applied according to law rather than adjusted through informal political arrangements.

The issue of house arrest has attracted particular attention because it changes the circumstances under which a convicted individual serves a sentence.

Home detention may constitute a legitimate component of a criminal justice system when authorised by law and administered according to transparent criteria.

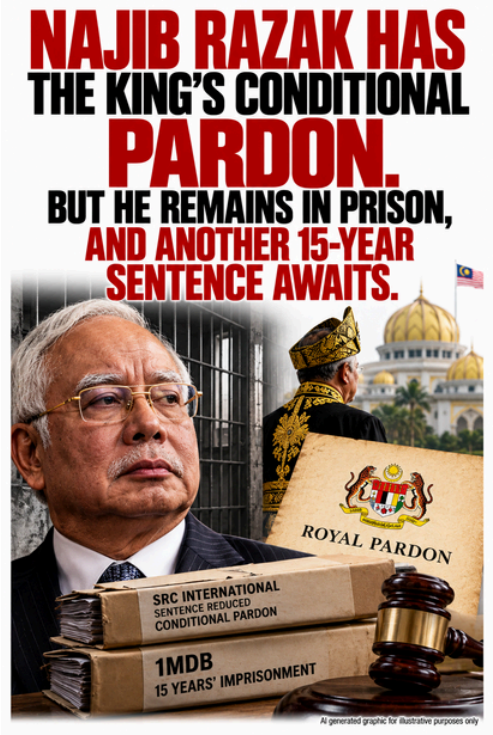
But such arrangements inevitably raise questions when they concern a former head of government convicted of serious financial offences.

Would an ordinary prisoner in comparable circumstances have access to the same legal remedies? Are the relevant procedures sufficiently transparent? Can the public understand the conditions governing the decision?

These are legitimate questions about the administration of justice, not arguments against the constitutional authority of the monarchy.

The financial dimension adds another complication.

A pardon conditioned upon payment of a substantial fine creates a practical distinction between the legal possibility of release and the ability to satisfy the conditions imposed.



If the required payment is not made, the legal consequences must be determined according to the terms of the pardon and the applicable law.

Meanwhile, the separate 1MDB proceedings continue.

The scandal attracted international attention because of allegations concerning the diversion of enormous sums from a state investment fund, complex financial transactions and the use of international banking systems.

Its consequences extended beyond Malaysia, generating investigations and proceedings in several jurisdictions.

For Malaysians, the case has become an important test of whether the criminal justice system can deal consistently with individuals who once exercised extraordinary political authority.

Najib remains entitled to pursue his appeal and any other remedies available under law.

The prosecution and the courts must discharge their responsibilities independently, while the monarchy's constitutional role must be respected.

The challenge is to ensure that these different institutions operate according to clearly understood legal principles.

Malaysia's experience offers lessons for other countries, including Sri Lanka, where questions about the treatment of former political leaders have become increasingly prominent.

The existence of legal remedies for powerful individuals is not itself evidence of privilege. The relevant question is whether those remedies are available and administered according to consistent standards.

The next significant development is expected on 14 October, when the court considers Najib's application concerning the separate 1MDB sentence.

Be that as it may, Najib Razak has discovered that receiving a conditional royal pardon and satisfying the conditions necessary to benefit from it are two different matters. A further 15-year sentence makes the distinction considerably more consequential.

OPINION

SRI LANKA IS ARMING THE STATE AGAINST CORRUPTION. WHO WILL RESTRAIN THE WATCHDOG?

Sri Lanka has spent years demanding tougher action against bribery, illicit wealth and political impunity. But as parliament expands the machinery of anti-corruption enforcement, a harder democratic question is emerging: can the state acquire greater powers over liberty, wealth and private information without weakening the safeguards that make those powers legitimate?

By Kithmi Gunaratne

Sri Lanka has no shortage of reasons to demand a harder fight against corruption. Allegations of patronage, opaque procurement, unexplained wealth and political interference have followed successive governments, while the collapse of 2022 deepened public anger over how the state had been governed.

The International Monetary Fund's governance diagnostic identified corruption vulnerabilities across procurement, tax administration, state-owned enterprises and high-level decision-making, while Transparency International currently gives Sri Lanka a score of 35 out of 100 on its Corruption Perceptions Index, placing it 107th among 182 countries.

Against that background, stronger anti-corruption institutions are not merely desirable;

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"Questioning The Answers"

Sri Lanka is arming...

they are necessary. But the difficulty begins when stronger enforcement is treated as though it automatically produces stronger democracy.

An anti-corruption system derives legitimacy not only from how many people it investigates or prosecutes, but from whether those powers are exercised consistently, transparently and within the same constitutional limits that govern every other arm of the state.

That tension now sits at the centre of Sri Lanka's Anti-Corruption (Amendment) Bill, introduced to revise the Anti-Corruption Act No 9 of 2023. The government says the amendments are intended to address practical problems involving investigations, prosecutions, asset declarations and the administration of the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption, or CIABOC. Those objectives are understandable. The more difficult question is how far the state should be allowed to go in the name of fighting corruption.

When tougher law becomes weaker democracy

Fifteen petitions challenged provisions of the amendment bill, including applications by Transparency International Sri Lanka, the Media Law Forum and former minister GL Peiris.

On 22 September, the Speaker informed parliament of the Supreme Court's determination. Several clauses were found to require special parliamentary majorities, while clause 17, in its existing form, was held to require both a special majority and approval at a referendum.

The importance of that ruling lies less in the technicalities than in the principle behind it. Sri Lanka is being forced to confront a democratic paradox: the more powerful an anti-corruption institution becomes, the more important the restraints on that institution become as well.

A body capable of investigating hidden wealth, examining personal finances and pursuing politically influential suspects needs significant authority, but the same powers that make enforcement effective can become dangerous when they are insufficiently supervised.

In countries where corruption has become synonymous with impunity, procedural safeguards can easily appear to be obstacles.

A suspect released on bail can look like proof of elite privilege; restrictions on investigators can appear weak; privacy protections can look like concealment. Yet those safeguards exist precisely because state power is most dangerous when public anger makes exceptional treatment seem justified.

The strength of anti-corruption law should therefore not be measured only by how severely it can act against suspects. It should also be measured by how effectively it prevents enforcement itself from becoming arbitrary.

Bail cannot become punishment before conviction

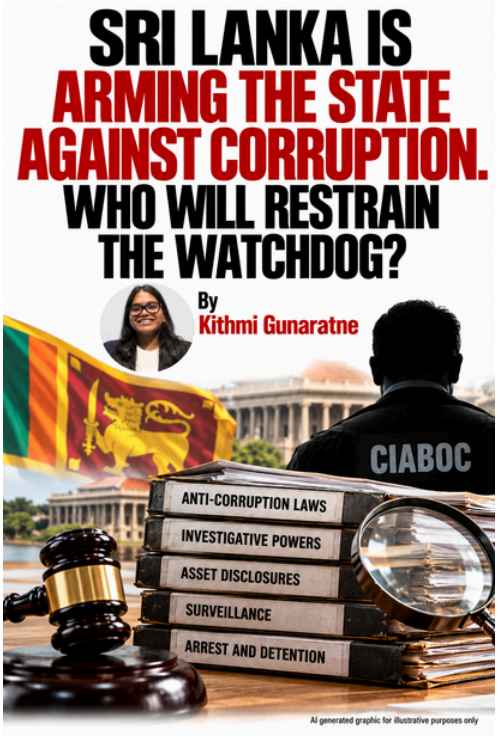
One of the clearest areas of conflict concerns pretrial detention. Critics of the amendments argued that parts of the bill risked narrowing judicial discretion and making remand more routine in corruption cases.

The political appeal of such measures is obvious in a country where the public has repeatedly watched powerful suspects emerge from courtrooms on bail and concluded that privilege remains stronger than justice.

But frustration cannot erase the distinction between accusation and conviction. Bail does not mean that an accused person has been cleared, just as remand should not function as punishment before guilt has been established.

Courts retain discretion because detention is supposed to depend on identifiable risks, such as flight, interference with witnesses or obstruction of justice, rather than on the political popularity of keeping a suspect behind bars.

This matters especially in corruption cases because they are often inseparable from politics. Governments change, alliances shift and prosecutorial priorities change with them.



A detention rule that appears acceptable when used against an unpopular former minister may look considerably more troubling when applied by another administration against critics, rivals or inconvenient officials.

Good legislation must therefore be judged not simply by whether present office-holders intend to misuse it, but by whether its protections would remain adequate in the hands of governments yet to come.

A serious anti-corruption regime needs powerful investigators and independent judges at the same time. Judicial discretion does not weaken enforcement; it gives enforcement legitimacy by ensuring that coercive powers remain reviewable.

Transparency cannot become selective visibility

The second major dispute concerns asset declarations. Sri Lanka's 2023 law significantly expanded the declaration regime, requiring a wide range of office-holders to disclose assets, liabilities, income and interests. CIABOC now administers the system and makes redacted declarations available to the public, reflecting the principle that corruption often reveals itself not through an obvious bribe but through wealth that cannot be reconciled with legitimate income.

Asset declarations therefore serve a purpose far beyond bureaucratic compliance. They allow investigators, journalists and citizens to compare an official's public income with property, financial interests and changes in wealth over time.

But transparency becomes meaningless if disclosure is so heavily restricted that outsiders can no longer identify conflicts of interest or unexplained enrichment.

Transparency International Sri Lanka objected to changes affecting the scope of declarations, including provisions involving people who share a household with an office-holder.

Its concern is straightforward: if the law examines only assets directly held in an official's own name, sophisticated corruption can be concealed through relatives, associates or intermediaries.

There are legitimate reasons to protect private information. Current law already requires sensitive details such as bank account numbers, identification numbers and full residential addresses to be withheld from publicly accessible declarations.

The issue is therefore not transparency versus privacy. It is whether redaction protects genuine privacy or removes information the public needs in order to hold officials accountable.

That distinction matters because public access is itself part of enforcement. Journalists can compare declarations across years, civil society groups can examine links between office-holders and private interests, and citizens can identify property or business relationships that deserve scrutiny.

A declaration system that technically publishes information while making meaningful examination impossible would amount to visibility without accountability.

A watchdog cannot operate in darkness

This is the deeper weakness in many anti-corruption systems: they focus almost entirely on the people being investigated and too little on the institutions doing the investigating. CIABOC needs operational independence, but it also needs institutional transparency.

Investigative powers should be clearly defined, prosecutorial decisions should be insulated from political pressure, redaction rules should follow objective standards and detention powers should remain subject to judicial review.

That is not bureaucratic caution. It is how legitimacy is built.

The IMF's governance diagnostic repeatedly identified opacity and discretionary authority as enabling conditions for corruption in Sri Lanka.

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It would therefore be a profound irony if an anti-corruption system designed to combat discretionary power were itself structured around vague or weakly reviewed discretion.

Sri Lanka does not merely need institutions capable of punishing corruption. It needs institutions designed so that corruption is harder to hide, harder to protect and harder to weaponise politically.

That requires open procurement, usable asset declarations, independent courts, accessible public information and prosecutors capable of pursuing complex financial cases. It also requires accepting that anti-corruption agencies themselves should be exposed to scrutiny.

A credible watchdog cannot demand transparency from everyone else while operating behind a veil of its own. The authority to examine private wealth, compel evidence or initiate criminal proceedings is too significant to depend entirely on institutional goodwill.

The more power an agency possesses, the clearer its own standards of accountability must become.

Sri Lanka has seen what unchecked powers become

Sri Lanka has particular historical reasons to understand this danger. Its recent history is full of laws and institutions created in response to genuine crises that later became controversial because extraordinary powers survived long after the conditions that produced them had changed.

Emergency regulations and counter-terrorism measures were repeatedly defended on the basis of necessity, demonstrating how easily temporary powers can become embedded in ordinary government.

Anti-corruption enforcement is not counter-terrorism, and the comparison should not be overstated.

The constitutional lesson, however, remains relevant: good intentions do not permanently guarantee good use. Institutions naturally prefer authority; investigators prefer broader access to evidence, prosecutors prefer fewer procedural barriers and administrators prefer greater discretion.

The role of democratic law is not to make their work impossible, but to define where useful power ends and unreviewable power begins.

That boundary becomes especially important when anti-corruption acquires enormous political popularity. The more widely supported an anti-corruption campaign becomes, the easier it is to portray procedural objections as attempts to protect corrupt officials.

Yet that is precisely when scrutiny matters most, because rule-of-law protections are designed to ensure that accountability does not become selective, arbitrary or politically convenient.

The real test is equal enforcement

Ultimately, the credibility of Sri Lanka's anti-corruption project will not be determined by how sweeping its legislation appears on paper.

It will depend on whether institutions can investigate politically connected individuals without fear, prosecute strong cases without favour, respect the rights of the accused and expose public officials to meaningful scrutiny regardless of which party holds power.

That requires more than dramatic arrests, raids or declarations that nobody is above the law.

It requires investigators with operational independence, prosecutors capable of handling complex financial cases, courts free to exercise discretion, journalists with access to usable information, whistleblowers who can speak safely and procurement systems that make public spending visible before scandals erupt.

It also requires consistency. A system that pursues opponents aggressively while hesitating around allies would simply reproduce the political inequality that anti-corruption reform is supposed to dismantle.

The most convincing proof of independence will not be how fiercely the state moves against people who have already lost power, but whether the same standards apply when allegations concern those close to power now.

Sri Lanka is right to build stronger institutions against corruption.

But those institutions only become credible when they remain constrained by the same rule of law they are supposed to defend.

A democracy does not prove its commitment to accountability by giving watchdogs unlimited authority; it proves it by creating watchdogs powerful enough to pursue the powerful while remaining answerable to courts, transparent procedures and clearly defined law themselves.

For years Sri Lanka has asked who will hold corrupt officials to account.

As the state acquires greater authority to investigate wealth,

restrict liberty and collect personal information, it must now ask the question that will determine whether anti-corruption reform strengthens democracy or merely enlarges the state: **who watches the watchdog?**

