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ANOJAN ESCAPES THE DEATH PENALTY. BUT HIS LEGAL ORDEAL IS NOT YET OVER.



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ANOJAN ESCAPES THE DEATH PENALTY. BUT HIS LEGAL ORDEAL IS NOT YET OVER.

Saudi Arabia's Supreme Court has quashed the judgment sentencing Sri Lankan national Anojan Sivarasa to death. Court documents examined by NewsLine confirm the reversal, but leave an important question unanswered: does the original sentence of five years' imprisonment and a fine of three million Saudi riyals now stand, or must the courts reconsider the case? The distinction is critical, and the answer may determine how soon Anojan can return home.

Saudi Arabia's Supreme Court has overturned the judgment imposing the death penalty on Sri Lankan national Anojan Sivarasa, bringing an extraordinary development in a case that has tested Sri Lanka's diplomatic capabilities, its commitment to protecting citizens overseas and the ability of its legal representatives to navigate an unfamiliar judicial system.

The decision, recorded as Supreme Court Decision No. 8927732 and dated 13 October 2026, quashes the judgment of the Seventh Criminal Circuit of the Court of Appeal in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. That appellate judgment had replaced an earlier five-year prison sentence and a substantial fine with the death penalty under Islamic Sharia law.

NewsLine has examined the 14-page English translation of the appellate court documentation, including the final notation recording the Supreme Court's intervention.

The document establishes that the death sentence has been quashed. It does not, however, reproduce the Supreme Court's reasoning or specify what further orders, if any, were made concerning the original conviction and punishment.

That is no small distinction.

Anojan, a young Sri Lankan migrant worker from the Eastern Province, was prosecuted following a Facebook comment considered offensive to the Prophet Muhammad.

The comment arose during an online altercation involving religious insults. According to the court record, Anojan admitted publishing the comment but maintained that it had been made in anger, without premeditation, and that he deleted it approximately ten minutes later.

He subsequently expressed remorse and apologized.

His defence argued that the incident was isolated, that there was no established history of similar conduct and that the punishment should reflect both the circumstances of the offence and his personal situation.

The original Criminal Court in Al-Ahsa convicted him under Sharia principles and Saudi Arabia's Anti-Cyber Crime Law. It imposed five years' imprisonment, a fine of three million Saudi riyals, confiscation of the digital device involved and closure of the relevant social media account.

The prosecution was dissatisfied with that outcome and appealed, seeking a more severe punishment. Anojan's lawyers also challenged the original sentence, arguing that the maximum penalties imposed were disproportionate.

The Court of Appeal subsequently overturned the original judgment and sentenced Anojan to death as a *hadd* punishment.

The distinction between *hadd*, a punishment associated with offences for which Islamic jurisprudence prescribes particular penalties, and *ta'zir*, a discretionary punishment determined by judicial authority, became central to the legal controversy.

The appellate judgment devoted considerable attention to classical Islamic jurisprudence and religious authorities concerning insults directed at the Prophet Muhammad. Its reasoning went substantially beyond the statutory penalties prescribed under the Anti-Cyber Crime Law.

The Supreme Court has now quashed that judgment. Whether its intervention specifically concerns the classification of the offence, the legal reasoning supporting the death penalty, procedural questions or some combination of these matters cannot be conclusively determined from the appellate document alone.

What can be said is that the judgment ordering Anojan's execution has been set aside.

The development follows sustained diplomatic and legal efforts by the Sri Lankan Government, including the involvement of President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath and Sri Lanka's diplomatic mission in Saudi Arabia.

A Sri Lankan legal delegation travelled to Saudi Arabia to work alongside Saudi counsel.

The delegation included President's Counsel Faiszer Musthapha and President's Counsel Upul Kumarapperuma, whose involvement brought additional senior legal expertise to a case where the consequences of failure could scarcely have been greater.

Both senior counsel travelled at their own expense, according to information previously provided to NewsLine.

Additional Solicitor General Azad Navavi and other legal professionals were also involved in the wider legal effort, while Sri Lanka's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Ameer Ajwad, and embassy officials pursued the diplomatic and consular aspects of the case.

The Government deserves recognition for maintaining its engagement and supporting a coordinated legal response. So do the lawyers and diplomats whose efforts contributed to bringing the matter before Saudi Arabia's highest court.

There is, however, an important distinction between acknowledging that contribution and declaring the entire case concluded.

The Supreme Court's intervention does not, on the documentation presently available, establish that Anojan has been acquitted.

Nor does it establish that the original five-year prison sentence and three-million-riyal fine have automatically been reinstated.

That question requires examination of the Supreme Court's actual decision and any directions accompanying it.

It is particularly important because the original judgment imposed penalties under Saudi Arabia's Anti-Cyber Crime Law, whereas the appellate judgment imposed the death penalty under Sharia jurisprudence.

The legal consequences of quashing the appellate judgment may therefore extend beyond simply removing the death sentence.

The case may require further judicial consideration, although the available document does not establish whether a retrial, reconsideration or other proceeding has been ordered.

For Anojan and his family, the immediate relief is considerable. A young man who faced execution is no longer subject to the appellate judgment ordering his death.

Yet the prospect of continued imprisonment and a fine equivalent to approximately US\$800,000 remains a serious concern until his legal position is clarified.

There is also a wider lesson in the handling of this case. Sri Lanka has previously experienced the anguish of watching a citizen face execution overseas.

The case of Rizana Nafeek, the young Sri Lankan domestic worker executed in Saudi Arabia in 2013, remains a painful chapter in the country's history of migrant-worker protection.

The two cases are legally different and should not be treated as interchangeable.

Nevertheless, they underline the importance of securing competent legal representation at the earliest possible stage, understanding the applicable legal system and ensuring that diplomatic intervention supports rather than substitutes for the judicial process.

In Anojan's case, the combination of Sri Lankan and Saudi legal expertise appears to have provided a more focused legal response.

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ANOJAN ESCAPES...

The involvement of senior counsel familiar with the demands of complex litigation, working with Saudi practitioners possessing direct knowledge of the Kingdom's laws and procedures, was particularly important.

The Supreme Court's decision should not be presented as a personal victory for any politician, lawyer or government official. It is, above all, a development of immense consequence for a Sri Lankan citizen and his family.

The Government has indicated that it will continue supporting Anojan as the remaining legal processes are concluded. That undertaking matters because the next stage may prove decisive in determining whether he remains in custody or can eventually return to Sri Lanka.

The immediate responsibility is to establish precisely what the Supreme Court has ordered, whether the original sentence remains legally operative and what avenues are available for securing Anojan's release.

There is also the question of the substantial fine. If any financial penalty survives the Supreme Court's intervention, its enforceability and the possibility of further legal relief will require careful examination.

For the moment, the central fact is both clear and significant. Saudi Arabia's highest court has intervened to quash a judgment that would have resulted in the execution of a Sri Lankan citizen.

It would be premature to describe this as a complete legal victory. It would be equally unreasonable to diminish the significance of what has been achieved.

Be that as it may, the measure of success will not ultimately be the number of officials claiming credit for the outcome. It will be whether Anojan Sivarasa can emerge from this ordeal alive, with his legal position resolved and the possibility of returning to his family.

The death sentence has been quashed. The work of securing his future must continue.

THE 'BORED' VS THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS?

NDB'S RS. 13.6 BILLION FRAUD. THE SHAREHOLDER LOST IN COURT, BUT ACCOUNTABILITY MAY HAVE GAINED GROUND.

The Commercial High Court has dismissed a minority shareholder's application arising from the massive fraud at National Development Bank. But the willingness of an individual investor to retain counsel and challenge the adequacy of corporate oversight sends a message to Sri Lanka's boardrooms. Shareholders, however modest their holdings, are beginning to ask difficult questions. And they are entitled to answers.

The dismissal of a shareholder's application by the Commercial High Court in the National Development Bank fraud matter deserves to be examined beyond the immediate outcome of the litigation.

The petitioner lost his application and was ordered to pay costs. The Court found that the legal requirements for allowing him to pursue proceedings independently of the bank's directors had not been satisfied. That is the judicial determination, and it must be respected.

But there is another aspect of this case that deserves attention. A minority shareholder, M. Thiagaraja, considered the circumstances surrounding one of Sri Lanka's largest reported internal banking frauds sufficiently serious to retain legal counsel and seek judicial intervention. He questioned whether those entrusted with safeguarding the institution had exercised adequate vigilance.

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That willingness to challenge corporate conduct is significant in a market where minority shareholders have often appeared content to leave governance to controlling interests, institutional investors and boards of directors.

The size of a shareholding does not determine the legitimacy of a shareholder's concerns. A person holding a relatively small investment has a financial interest in the company and a legitimate expectation that its affairs will be conducted responsibly. The law places conditions on the remedies available to shareholders, but it does not require them to abandon their interest in accountability merely because their holdings are modest.

The arguments advanced in the NDB proceedings concerned corporate governance, internal controls and the responsibilities of directors and auditors. These were substantial issues arising from a fraud whose financial impact, according to the final forensic findings, reached approximately Rs. 13.64 billion.

On October 9, Commercial High Court Judge Viraj Ranatunge dismissed the application, finding insufficient

grounds to permit the petitioner to proceed independently of the bank's directors.

The Court took account of the bank's response, including its complaint to the Criminal Investigation Department and the commissioning of a forensic audit.

Those actions were relevant to the legal question before the Court. They demonstrated that the institution had taken steps to address the matter following its discovery.

But there is an important distinction between responding to a fraud after its discovery and maintaining effective controls capable of preventing or detecting it in the first place.

The Court's decision on the shareholder's entitlement to proceed should not be confused with a comprehensive judicial determination that every aspect of the bank's previous governance, supervision and internal controls was satisfactory.

Indeed, the subsequent forensic findings make continued examination particularly important.

The final forensic review, conducted by Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu India LLP, identified a financial impact of approximately Rs. 13.6 billion and weaknesses across several areas of the bank's operations.

These included transaction processing, management of user credentials, access controls, transaction monitoring, reconciliation, internal audit and operational risk management.

These findings are not, by themselves, proof that individual directors, executives or auditors breached their legal duties. Such conclusions require examination of their respective responsibilities, the information available to them and the applicable standards of care.

Nevertheless, the weaknesses identified are substantial enough to justify continued scrutiny. There is also an important regulatory dimension.

The forensic audit was commissioned by NDB in consultation with the Central Bank, following recommendations from the regulator's Director of Bank Supervision. The Central Bank had also directed the bank to strengthen its internal controls and governance processes.

That regulatory involvement is important. But it raises a further question: how effectively did the existing supervisory arrangements operate during the period in which the fraudulent transactions were taking place?

The matter came under sharp scrutiny at Parliament's Committee on Public Finance, chaired by Dr. Harsha de Silva. Opposition MP Ravi Karunanayake was among those who questioned the effectiveness of the Central Bank's banking supervision function and its failure to identify the irregularities earlier.

The Central Bank Governor, Dr. Nandalal Weerasinghe, offered an explanation that also deserves consideration.

He described an organised concealment of fraudulent activity in which those responsible for answering questions about suspicious transactions were themselves allegedly involved in the wrongdoing.



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The Governor explained that banking supervision relies substantially on the assurances provided by bank management, boards and auditors, rather than independently examining every underlying transaction. That distinction is central to understanding the regulatory problem.

A supervisor cannot reasonably be expected to identify every dishonest transaction occurring within a licensed bank.

Equally, the effectiveness of a supervisory system must be assessed by examining whether it was sufficiently alert to warning signs, unusual balances, control deficiencies and inconsistencies in the information supplied by supervised institutions.

If a sophisticated fraud can defeat internal audit, external audit, management oversight, board supervision and regulatory scrutiny over an extended period, the appropriate response is not simply to identify the individuals who allegedly committed it. It is also to examine how the safeguards intended to protect the institution were circumvented.

This is not an argument for finding everyone guilty. It is an argument for establishing what happened, identifying any failures of responsibility and ensuring that the lessons are not confined to a confidential report.

The Committee on Public Finance has also highlighted the public interest involved. Significant NDB shareholdings are held by institutions representing public and State funds. Consequently, the financial and governance implications extend beyond the bank's immediate private shareholders.

It is equally important to recognise that the forensic review found no customer accounts had been affected by the fraud. The Central Bank has maintained that NDB continues to satisfy its regulatory capital and liquidity requirements.

Those assurances matter. Public confidence in a bank should not be undermined through speculation or unsupported allegations.

But confidence cannot depend upon reassurance alone. It must also rest upon credible governance, effective supervision and demonstrable corrective action.

The minority shareholder's unsuccessful application therefore deserves to be understood in its proper context. He did not obtain the Court's permission to pursue the proposed proceedings.

That outcome cannot be presented as a legal victory, nor can it be used to imply that the Court accepted his allegations.

What the proceedings do demonstrate is a willingness by an individual investor to use the legal mechanisms available to question corporate conduct. That is a development worth recognising, irrespective of whether this particular application satisfied the statutory requirements.

Sri Lanka's corporate governance culture would benefit from more shareholders examining annual reports,

questioning audit committees, attending general meetings and demanding clear explanations when serious financial irregularities emerge.

The right to ask questions does not guarantee the right to litigate on behalf of a company. Nor does an unsuccessful application establish that the questions themselves were unreasonable.

Be that as it may, there is a certain irony in a shareholder having to approach the courts to test the adequacy of corporate vigilance after Rs. 13.6 billion has already disappeared from the accounts.

The bank has taken steps since the fraud was discovered. The Central Bank has intervened. A forensic investigation has identified weaknesses. Parliament has examined the matter.

These are important developments, and the respective institutions should be assessed fairly on the actions they have taken.

The remaining task is to establish whether the corrective measures are sufficient, whether further regulatory or professional action is warranted and whether the weaknesses identified have implications for supervision elsewhere in the banking system.

The Commercial High Court has determined the application before it. It has not been asked to write the final chapter on banking governance in Sri Lanka.

For the country's directors, auditors, regulators and institutional investors, the message from this litigation should be clear. Shareholders are entitled to take an active interest in how their companies are managed, and even those with relatively small investments can demand explanations through the appropriate channels.

A shareholder may lose a case without losing the right to ask questions.

And a board may successfully resist litigation without being relieved of its continuing responsibility to account for the stewardship of the institution.

That is how corporate accountability ought to work. The parliamentary account confirms the forensic findings and the governance deficiencies.

The Central Bank's statement confirms its involvement in commissioning the forensic review, while reporting of the COPF proceedings records the exchanges involving Ravi Karunanayake, Harsha de Silva and the Governor

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NAJIB RAZAK LOSES HIS BID TO SUSPEND 15- YEAR SENTENCE. MALAYSIA'S COURTS ARE NOT FOR TURNING.

Malaysia's former Prime Minister Najib Razak suffered another judicial setback on Wednesday when the Kuala Lumpur High Court refused to suspend his 15-year prison sentence and RM11.38 billion fine arising from the 1MDB corruption scandal. The ruling leaves the former leader confronting a second substantial prison term even as legal arguments continue over the possibility of serving the remainder of his existing sentence under house arrest.

Malaysia's former Prime Minister Najib Razak has failed in his attempt to suspend a 15-year prison sentence and an accompanying fine of RM11.38 billion arising from his conviction in the 1Malaysia Development Berhad corruption scandal.

The Kuala Lumpur High Court rejected his application on Wednesday, October 14, finding that he had not established the special circumstances necessary to justify suspending the punishment pending appeal.

The ruling represents another significant setback for a former national leader whose political influence remains considerable despite his imprisonment. It also reinforces the distinction between the constitutional power of pardon and the authority of the courts to determine criminal liability.

Najib's lawyers had argued that his medical circumstances, the magnitude of the financial penalty and the legal issues arising from his conviction justified a stay of execution.

High Court Judge Noor Ruwena Md Nurdin was not persuaded that those considerations satisfied the applicable legal requirements.

The court took account of the seriousness of the offences and the wider public interest in the enforcement of criminal judgments. Najib's legal team has indicated that it intends to pursue further proceedings before the Court of Appeal.

The former Prime Minister has been imprisoned since August 2022 following his conviction in the separate SRC International corruption case.

That conviction originally carried a 12-year prison sentence, subsequently reduced to six years through a royal pardon granted in 2024.

The pardon also reduced the financial penalty imposed in that case, while separate proceedings concerning a purported royal direction have raised the possibility of Najib serving part of his remaining sentence under house arrest.



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Those developments have generated substantial political and constitutional controversy in Malaysia, particularly concerning the relationship between the monarchy, the executive and the judiciary.

The difficulty for Najib is that the SRC conviction is not the only criminal judgment confronting him. In December 2025, he was convicted of four counts of abuse of power and 21 counts of money laundering arising from the wider 1MDB scandal.

The effective prison sentence imposed was 15 years, with the terms ordered to run concurrently, and the financial penalty amounted to approximately RM11.38 billion. That sentence is expected to commence after the completion of his existing custodial term, making the consequences of Wednesday's ruling particularly significant.



The 1MDB scandal exposed an extraordinary series of financial transactions involving a Malaysian state investment fund established during Najib's administration.

Investigations conducted across several jurisdictions examined the movement of enormous sums through international financial institutions and the acquisition of luxury assets. Najib has maintained that he was misled by others and has consistently denied criminal wrongdoing. Nevertheless, his convictions remain subject to the legal consequences determined by the courts unless overturned through the appellate process.

The political implications are substantial because Najib's United Malays National Organisation remains an important component of Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's governing coalition. Anwar's administration has promoted institutional reform and the strengthening of public accountability.

yet it depends upon political arrangements involving individuals and parties with differing views about Najib's treatment.

That tension is not unique to Malaysia, where coalition politics frequently requires uncomfortable compromises. The more important question is whether those compromises are permitted to influence the administration of justice.

For Sri Lanka, the Malaysian experience provides a useful comparison at a time when former political leaders and their associates are increasingly facing investigations and criminal proceedings.

Political popularity cannot provide immunity from prosecution, but neither should public hostility towards a former leader justify denying the protections available to every accused person.

The right to appeal, the presumption of innocence where applicable and the requirement of fair judicial proceedings remain fundamental. Those principles do not become less important merely because the accused once exercised considerable political power.

The distinction between clemency and judicial determination is equally important. A royal pardon may alter the consequences of a particular conviction, but it does not automatically extinguish liability arising from separate criminal proceedings.

Malaysia's courts must determine the issues before them according to law, irrespective of the political implications for the governing coalition.

Be that as it may, Najib's continuing influence has not persuaded the High Court to suspend his latest sentence, and his legal battle must now continue through the appellate process.

NAMAL RAJAPAKSA MONEY-LAUNDERING INVESTIGATION COMPLETED. WILL THE AIRBUS CASE FINALLY REACH TRIAL?

The Criminal Investigation Department has informed the Colombo Fort Magistrate's Court that investigations into alleged money laundering involving Parliamentarian Namal Rajapaksa and two other suspects have been completed. The case concerns financial transactions associated with SriLankan Airlines' controversial Airbus aircraft procurement, with investigators indicating that steps are being taken towards instituting proceedings before a higher court.

The Criminal Investigation Department informed the Colombo Fort Magistrate's Court on Wednesday that its investigation into alleged money laundering involving Parliamentarian Namal Rajapaksa and two other

suspects has been completed. The development marks an important procedural stage in proceedings concerning financial transactions associated with SriLankan Airlines' Airbus aircraft procurement arrangements. Investigators indicated that steps were being taken towards initiating proceedings before the appropriate higher court.

The announcement does not establish criminal liability, but it suggests that investigators believe the inquiry has reached the stage at which prosecutorial decisions can be considered.

The case was taken up before Fort Magistrate Pasan Amarasekera, with the CID providing an update on the status of its investigation. The court was also informed that Interpol Red Notices had been obtained in respect of two other suspects, identified as Priyanka Niyomali and Shamindra Rajapaksa.

Efforts to secure their attendance through international law enforcement channels are reportedly continuing. The matter is scheduled to be called again on November 18, when further procedural developments may become apparent.

Namal Rajapaksa, who has been granted bail in the money-laundering investigation, was produced before court by prison authorities because he remains in remand custody in connection with separate proceedings under the Bribery Act.

The distinction between the two matters is important because the allegations, legal provisions and procedural requirements are not necessarily identical.

Being remanded in one case does not establish guilt in another, and the completion of an investigation does not automatically result in an indictment. Prosecutors must still determine whether the available evidence is sufficient to support formal charges.

The Airbus procurement controversy has attracted attention for several years because of the enormous financial commitments associated with acquiring aircraft for the national carrier.

SriLankan Airlines has struggled with substantial financial obligations, operational difficulties and repeated attempts by successive governments to develop a sustainable commercial strategy.

Decisions involving aircraft procurement can create liabilities extending over many years, sometimes long after the officials responsible have left office. Where allegations of improper financial transactions arise, the public has a legitimate interest in establishing whether the arrangements were commercially justified and whether anyone unlawfully benefited.

There is, however, an important distinction between a poor commercial decision and a criminal offence. An airline may enter an expensive or commercially unsuccessful arrangement without the individuals involved necessarily committing a crime.

Conversely, the complexity of international aviation transactions cannot provide automatic protection against scrutiny where evidence suggests that improper payments may have been made. Investigators and prosecutors must establish the relevant facts through financial records,



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witness testimony and other admissible evidence rather than relying upon public suspicion.

The present Government came to office promising that politically influential individuals would no longer be protected from investigation or prosecution. That undertaking must be measured against the quality of investigations and the ability of the justice system to determine cases fairly and efficiently.

Arrests, remand orders and announcements concerning investigations may generate considerable publicity, but they are not substitutes for convictions secured through lawful proceedings. Equally, acquittals reached after proper judicial examination must be respected, however unpopular they may prove politically.

Sri Lanka has experienced too many cases in which investigations continued for years without producing a definitive judicial outcome. Such delays undermine public confidence while also imposing substantial burdens upon individuals who remain under suspicion without having their allegations determined.

The completion of the CID investigation is therefore a development worth recording, but the more important test lies ahead. The prosecution must now determine whether the evidence supports charges capable of being sustained before a court.

For taxpayers, the matter extends beyond the political identity of those under investigation. Sri Lankan Airlines has repeatedly imposed financial burdens upon the State, and the public is entitled to understand whether the decisions contributing to those burdens were made lawfully and in the country's interests.

If criminal wrongdoing occurred, those responsible should face the consequences established by law. If the evidence does not support prosecution, the authorities should say so rather than allowing suspicion to become a permanent substitute for justice.

BASIL RAJAPAKSA FACES INTERNATIONAL ARREST EFFORT. BUT AN INTERPOL NOTICE IS NOT A CONVICTION.

The Colombo Fort Magistrate's Court has directed investigators to pursue an Interpol Red Notice against former Minister Basil Rajapaksa in connection with allegations that public funds belonging to the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau were improperly used for political purposes. The proceedings concern approximately Rs. 7.8 million allegedly spent on T-shirts associated with the 2014 Uva Provincial Council election campaign, raising renewed questions about the use of State resources for party political activities.

The Colombo Fort Magistrate's Court has directed investigators to take steps towards obtaining an Interpol Red Notice against former Minister Basil Rajapaksa in connection with allegations involving the misuse of public funds belonging to the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau.

The proceedings concern approximately Rs. 7.8 million allegedly spent on the purchase of T-shirts associated with political activities during the 2014 Uva Provincial Council election campaign.

The court has also directed that the necessary arrest warrants be prepared in Sinhala and English to facilitate further action. Rajapaksa, a former Minister of Economic Development and a prominent figure in the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna, is reported to be residing overseas.

The authorities are seeking international assistance to secure his attendance before the Sri Lankan courts, but the practical consequences of an Interpol Red Notice require careful explanation. Such a notice is not an international arrest warrant and does not automatically authorise police officers in another country to detain a person.

It is a request circulated through international police cooperation channels asking member countries to locate and provisionally arrest an individual pending extradition or other lawful proceedings. Whether a foreign jurisdiction acts upon that request depends upon its domestic laws, applicable treaties and the circumstances of the case.

The pursuit of an Interpol notice does not establish criminal guilt, and Rajapaksa remains entitled to the presumption of innocence and the full protections available under the law.

The allegations must be established through admissible evidence before a competent court, and the prosecution must satisfy the legal requirements applicable to the offences alleged. These distinctions are particularly important where proceedings involve politically influential individuals and attract substantial public attention. Public interest in accountability must not be confused with a presumption that every allegation made against a former political leader is necessarily true.

Nevertheless, the underlying allegations raise a question that has troubled Sri Lanka for decades: where does the State end and the political party begin? Public institutions are established to perform functions authorised by law, and their budgets are allocated for specific purposes.

The Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau exists to promote tourism and advance the country's interests as a destination, not to finance political campaigns. If public money was diverted from its authorised purposes, the matter would concern more than the amount allegedly involved.

Successive administrations have faced allegations concerning the use of public vehicles, government employees, official premises and State expenditure for political activities.

The problem has never been confined to one political party or one administration, although those exercising power have often found it convenient to remember the misconduct of their predecessors more clearly than their own.

The distinction between government resources and party resources is fundamental to democratic accountability. Taxpayers are not required to subsidise election campaigns merely because a political organisation happens to control the machinery of government.

The present administration has promised to dismantle the culture of political privilege and misuse of public resources.

That commitment must be demonstrated through consistent enforcement of the law, including where allegations concern individuals associated with the Government or its political allies. Investigations must proceed without political interference, while accused persons must receive the protections necessary for a fair trial. A system that applies different standards according to political affiliation would merely reproduce the failures it claims to have corrected.

The passage of time also deserves attention because the allegations concern events dating back more than a decade. Delayed investigations can create difficulties in obtaining evidence, locating witnesses and ensuring that proceedings remain fair to all parties.

They also weaken public confidence in the ability of the State to respond promptly when allegations of wrongdoing arise. The pursuit of international assistance may be necessary, but it cannot conceal the broader question of why proceedings concerning alleged misuse of public funds have taken so long to reach this stage.

The public interest requires that the allegations be determined through lawful proceedings rather than becoming another prolonged political spectacle.

If sufficient evidence exists, the prosecution should proceed and allow the courts to determine the matter. If the evidence is inadequate, that conclusion must also be accepted. Accountability is not measured by the number of arrest warrants issued, but by whether the justice system can establish the truth and apply the law without fear or favour.

SRI LANKAN AIRLINES SUSPENDS RIYADH AND DAMMAM FLIGHTS. WHO LOOKS AFTER THE PASSENGERS LEFT BEHIND?

Sri Lankan Airlines has temporarily suspended flights from Riyadh and Dammam to Colombo until October 18, creating uncertainty for passengers travelling between Saudi Arabia and Sri Lanka. The disruption is particularly significant for migrant workers whose employment obligations, family commitments and limited financial resources may make unexpected travel changes considerably more difficult to manage.



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SRI LANKAN AIRLINES...

SriLankan Airlines has announced the temporary suspension of its flights from Riyadh and Dammam to Colombo until October 18, citing prevailing conditions affecting commercial aviation operations. The national carrier has emphasised that the safety and security of passengers and crew remain its highest priority, an obligation that must take precedence over commercial considerations.

The decision affects two important routes connecting Saudi Arabia with Sri Lanka, where a substantial number of Sri Lankan nationals live and work. While operational disruptions may sometimes be unavoidable, the consequences for affected passengers require careful attention.

For travellers whose journeys are associated with overseas employment, unexpected flight cancellations can create difficulties extending far beyond inconvenience.

Migrant workers may have arranged leave for specific periods, obtained permission from employers or made commitments to return to work by particular dates. Families in Sri Lanka may also have organised important events, medical appointments or other arrangements around their expected arrival. A cancelled flight can disrupt all of these plans while imposing additional financial burdens upon people who may have limited resources available to meet unexpected expenses.

The immediate responsibility of the airline is to provide accurate and timely information concerning the flights affected and the arrangements available to passengers. Those arrangements should include clear explanations of rebooking options, refunds and any assistance available under the applicable conditions of carriage and passenger-protection requirements.

Passengers should not be required to navigate conflicting information from booking agents, airline offices and online announcements. Effective communication is particularly important where travellers may have limited access to reliable information or may be unfamiliar with the procedures for obtaining assistance.

SriLankan Airlines operates under a national identity and provides an important connection between the country and its overseas workforce.

Remittances from Sri Lankans employed abroad remain a significant source of foreign exchange and household income, supporting families and contributing to the wider economy. The workers generating those remittances deserve practical assistance when transport disruptions affect their ability to travel. Their circumstances should not be treated as incidental to the airline's operational decisions.

The Government also has responsibilities through its diplomatic missions and the agencies concerned with overseas employment.

Where large numbers of Sri Lankan nationals may be affected by disruptions, accurate information and appropriate coordination can help prevent unnecessary hardship. Diplomatic missions should be prepared to assist vulnerable passengers who encounter serious difficulties, particularly where employment arrangements or personal circumstances create urgent needs.

Such assistance need not involve assuming responsibility for every commercial dispute, but it should ensure that citizens are not left without access to reliable guidance.

The wider issue concerns the resilience of Sri Lanka's international transport connections in a region where geopolitical developments and operational uncertainties can affect aviation services. An island economy dependent upon tourism, overseas employment and international trade cannot eliminate every risk associated with international travel.

It can, however, develop effective procedures for responding when disruptions occur. Those procedures require coordination between airlines, airport authorities, diplomatic missions and the agencies responsible for protecting the interests of overseas workers.

The immediate priority must remain the safety of passengers and crew, and no airline should be expected to operate services where conditions make doing so unsafe. Nevertheless, safety considerations do not remove the obligation to communicate clearly or to provide assistance in accordance with applicable rules and contractual commitments. The distinction is important because passengers have paid for a service and are entitled to know what happens when that service cannot be provided as scheduled.

For SriLankan Airlines, already confronting substantial commercial and financial challenges, the treatment of affected passengers is an important measure of its commitment to public service.

An airline's reputation is shaped not only by its performance when flights operate normally, but also by the way it responds when circumstances go wrong. Passengers may understand that cancellations are sometimes unavoidable, particularly where safety is concerned.

They are considerably less likely to accept unnecessary confusion, inadequate information or unreasonable delays in resolving their difficulties. SriLankan Airlines should therefore ensure that affected passengers receive clear instructions and timely assistance while the suspension remains in effect.

THE PEOPLE DID NOT VOTE FOR MORE ARREST WARRANTS. THEY VOTED FOR JUSTICE.

Sri Lanka has no shortage of investigations, arrests, court appearances and allegations of corruption. What remains in desperately short supply is the public confidence that wrongdoing will be investigated competently, prosecuted fairly and determined within a reasonable time. The Government promised accountability, but the country must now distinguish between the machinery of justice being set in motion and justice actually being delivered.

Sri Lanka's political landscape has become crowded with investigations, arrest warrants, remand orders and court proceedings involving individuals who once occupied

positions of considerable authority. Former ministers, parliamentarians and senior public officials are increasingly required to answer questions concerning the use of public money, the exercise of official powers and decisions taken while they held office.

For a country that has spent decades watching allegations of corruption disappear into administrative obscurity, these developments represent an opportunity to strengthen accountability. But an opportunity is not an achievement, and the distinction matters enormously to the people who voted for change.

The present Government came to office with an overwhelming parliamentary majority and a powerful mandate to confront corruption, political privilege and the misuse of public resources.

That mandate was not simply an invitation to investigate the previous administration or to demonstrate that powerful individuals could be arrested.

It was a demand for a fundamentally different relationship between the State and its citizens, one in which public authority would be exercised lawfully and public money would be treated as belonging to the people.

The Government must therefore be judged not by the volume of allegations directed against its political opponents, but by the quality, consistency and fairness of the institutions responsible for examining them.

The distinction between investigation and conviction is essential to any functioning democracy. An arrest warrant does not establish guilt, a remand order is not a sentence and the completion of a police investigation does not mean that a criminal offence has been proved.

Those protections are not privileges reserved for political leaders, nor are they inconveniences that can be discarded when the accused happens to be unpopular. They are safeguards intended to protect every citizen from the arbitrary exercise of State power, including those who have never held political office and possess neither wealth nor influential friends.

Yet the opposite danger is equally serious. Investigations cannot be permitted to continue indefinitely while the individuals concerned remain under suspicion and the public remains without answers. Proceedings concerning events that occurred more than a decade ago inevitably raise questions about the efficiency of investigative institutions and the willingness of successive administrations to confront politically sensitive allegations.

Delays can weaken evidence, complicate prosecutions and undermine confidence in the eventual outcome.

A justice system that moves only when the political climate changes is not demonstrating independence, however impressive its announcements may sound.

The proceedings involving former Health Minister Keheliya Rambukwella and other former senior health-sector officials illustrate another dimension of accountability.

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THE PEOPLE DID NOT...

Where courts impose financial obligations upon public officials, the enforceability of those orders becomes as important as the judgments themselves.

A court cannot restore confidence in public administration merely by declaring that particular conduct was unlawful if the remedies it orders are subsequently ignored.

Equally, allegations of non-compliance must be examined fairly, with the respondents receiving the full protections available under the law.

The consequences of weak accountability are particularly severe in essential public services. When money allocated to healthcare is mismanaged, the result may be a shortage of medicines or equipment rather than merely an unfavourable entry in a government account.

When public resources intended for agriculture, education or transport are improperly diverted, the costs are ultimately borne by people who have little influence over the decisions being made. Corruption is not simply a contest between politicians and investigators.

It is a transfer of public opportunity away from citizens who are entitled to expect that the State will act in their interests.

The Government must also recognise that the credibility of its anti-corruption programme depends upon the standards applied to its own members and supporters.

It is relatively easy to demand accountability from political opponents, particularly when public opinion is already hostile towards them.

The more difficult test arises when allegations concern individuals who are politically useful, personally familiar or associated with the governing movement.

An administration that promises equality before the law cannot maintain one standard for its opponents and another for its friends without undermining the very principle upon which it sought office.

There is a temptation in politics to confuse public anger with evidence and political popularity with legal authority. Both temptations are dangerous because they invite the Government to treat criminal justice as an extension of electoral competition.

Investigators must be free to follow evidence wherever it leads, prosecutors must be able to make decisions without political interference and judges must determine cases without regard to the popularity of the parties appearing before them. The public should expect no less, even when the outcome of a particular case is disappointing or politically inconvenient.

Sri Lanka's experience also demonstrates why accountability cannot depend exclusively upon criminal prosecutions.

Public institutions require transparent procurement systems, effective internal controls, independent auditing and meaningful parliamentary oversight capable of identifying problems before they become national scandals.

Waiting until enormous sums have been lost and then announcing an investigation is a remarkably expensive method of public administration. Prevention may attract fewer headlines than an arrest, but it offers considerably greater protection to taxpayers.

Nearly two years into the present administration, the Government has had sufficient time to understand that the public expects more than a succession of dramatic developments in the courts.

Citizens want to know whether investigations are progressing competently, whether prosecutions are being prepared properly and whether the institutions responsible for enforcing the law are themselves accountable. They also want to see public services improve, because the purpose of confronting corruption is not simply to punish wrongdoing after it occurs. It is to ensure that public resources are available for the purposes for which they were collected.

Be that as it may, the Government should resist the temptation to treat every arrest as a political victory and every accusation as proof that its promises are being fulfilled. The public did not elect a new administration merely to watch a different group of politicians describe the alleged misconduct of their predecessors.

It elected a Government that promised to establish a system in which misconduct would be less likely to occur, more likely to be detected and capable of being dealt with fairly and efficiently. That is a considerably more demanding undertaking than producing another arrest warrant.

The country has already endured the financial and social consequences of weak institutions, political interference and the misuse of public authority. Its people have paid through higher taxes, diminished public services, reduced economic opportunity and a prolonged loss of confidence in those entrusted with governing them.

They are entitled to expect that the sacrifices imposed upon them will produce lasting institutional improvements rather than another cycle of political accusations. The measure of this Government will not be how many former ministers appear before magistrates, but whether ordinary citizens can finally trust that the law applies equally to everyone.

The people voted for justice, not a permanent investigation.

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