

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

KAVANTISSA IS DEAD. SRI LANKA HAS AN ELEPHANT CONSERVATION PLAN. WHO IS ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE RESULTS?

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KAVANTISSA IS DEAD. SRI LANKA HAS AN ELEPHANT CONSERVATION PLAN. WHO IS ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE RESULTS?

By Prof. Ranjith Bandara, Emeritus Professor, University of Colombo

The death of one of Sri Lanka's best-known wild tuskers has exposed troubling questions about conservation policy, institutional responsibility and the unequal burden imposed on rural communities. With three investigations underway and the Government preparing another national action plan, the country must confront a fundamental question: why have years of scientific advice, public expenditure and political promises failed to prevent the continuing loss of human and elephant lives?

The death of Tusker Kavantissa on 16 October 2026 should provoke more than the familiar national expression of sadness that follows the loss of a celebrated wild elephant.

It should compel Sri Lanka to examine the effectiveness of a conservation system in which scientific knowledge, government authority, public expenditure and repeated policy announcements have not produced sufficient protection for either elephants or the people who live alongside them. The question is not simply whether Sri Lanka values its wildlife, but whether its institutions have translated that commitment into measurable results.

Kavantissa reportedly suffered a gunshot injury to his right front leg on 23 September and received veterinary treatment before his health deteriorated. The precise cause of death must be established through the proper investigative and veterinary processes rather than presumed in advance.

The Gallempuwa Magistrate's Court has ordered a post-mortem examination and a formal investigation, while two suspects have been arrested and remanded until 28 October. Their arrest represents an important development, but criminal responsibility must be established through evidence and due process.

The Government has now initiated three separate investigations, including an inquiry by the Criminal Investigation Department, an internal investigation involving external specialists and a six-member presidential expert committee.

The presidential committee has been directed to examine the circumstances surrounding Kavantissa's death, including possible shortcomings in veterinary treatment, and recommend improvements to wild elephant welfare and conservation.

At its first meeting on 21 October, the committee also considered establishing a rapid-response veterinary unit to provide timely treatment to injured elephants.

These initiatives deserve recognition, but their ultimate value will depend upon the independence of their findings, the transparency of their recommendations and the Government's willingness to implement them.

The distinction between investigation and accountability is important. The death of an elephant, however distressing, does not automatically establish negligence by wildlife authorities.

Equally, the absence of a confirmed finding of negligence cannot absolve the State of its wider responsibility to demonstrate that its conservation policies are effective. Public accountability requires evidence in both directions, together with an honest willingness to examine uncomfortable findings.

Sri Lanka's broader record offers ample reason for concern. Reported figures indicate that since 2019, an average of approximately 402 elephants and 138 people have died annually in connection with human-elephant conflict.

In 2023 alone, 488 elephant deaths were recorded. These are not merely statistics about wildlife. They represent the destruction of a national ecological resource alongside the deaths, injuries, lost livelihoods and persistent insecurity experienced by rural communities.

The scale of the problem also exposes the limitations of treating elephant conservation as an activity confined to national parks. Research and official assessments demonstrate that elephants occupy extensive areas outside protected reserves, sharing landscapes with settlements, farms, irrigation systems and infrastructure.

Conservation policy must therefore address the realities of coexistence rather than assume that elephants can simply be confined to designated forests while human development proceeds elsewhere.

Perhaps the most serious governance question concerns Sri Lanka's National Action Plan for the Mitigation of Human-Elephant Conflict, prepared in 2020. That plan recognised the importance of scientific management, community participation and protecting villages and cultivated land. It offered an alternative to approaches that depend excessively on reactive interventions, elephant relocation and administrative responses after conflict has already occurred.

Yet in June 2026, the Cabinet approved the preparation of a new National Action Plan for Human-Elephant Conflict Management, acknowledging that changing circumstances demanded a revised approach.

The Government reported that the conflict had spread across 19 districts and 134 Divisional Secretariat divisions, affecting a substantial proportion of the country. The decision to prepare another plan may be justified, but it raises an unavoidable question: what happened to the recommendations of the 2020 plan, and what evidence establishes that a replacement is preferable to implementing measures previously recommended?

Before another national strategy is adopted, the public deserves an account of the previous one. Which measures were implemented, which were abandoned, which encountered administrative resistance, and which produced demonstrable improvements?

How much public money was allocated, what outcomes were achieved, and which institutions were responsible for failures or delays? Without such an assessment, successive action plans risk becoming substitutes for action rather than instruments of effective governance.

Conservation responsibilities extend beyond the Department of Wildlife Conservation to agencies dealing with forestry, agriculture, land, irrigation, infrastructure and regional administration.

A programme requiring cooperation across those institutions cannot succeed unless responsibilities are clearly assigned and its progress independently assessed. Where conflicting decisions undermine conservation, the public must know which institutions exercised authority and what justification they offered.

This criticism should not be interpreted as a dismissal of the efforts of wildlife officers and veterinary professionals. Many operate in dangerous conditions, with inadequate resources and considerable personal commitment. Their work deserves recognition, particularly when responding to injured animals or protecting communities facing immediate threats. Nevertheless, individual dedication cannot compensate indefinitely for institutional arrangements that may lack effective coordination, adequate resources or clear accountability.

An equally neglected question concerns the economic distribution of conservation's costs and benefits. Sri Lanka's wild elephants contribute significantly to tourism, biodiversity, national identity and the country's international reputation. Yet many of the direct costs associated with their survival are borne by farming families who receive little of the economic value generated by wildlife tourism.

A conservation policy that distributes benefits nationally while concentrating losses among vulnerable rural communities contains an inherent inequity.

Research published in 2023 involving 300 farming households in southern Sri Lanka demonstrated this imbalance. None of the surveyed households reported deriving economic benefits from tourism, although 57 per cent had experienced elephant-related crop damage. The study also found that fear of elephants and anxiety about crop losses strongly influenced attitudes towards them.

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MAITHRIPALA SIRISENA SAYS...

These findings suggest that conservation cannot be secured through financial considerations alone, because personal safety, uncertainty and the psychological burden of living with danger are equally important.

Further research published in 2024, involving 439 affected farming households, examined the potential for tourism-based financial mechanisms to support compensation for losses arising from human-elephant conflict.

The findings provide a basis for examining whether those who benefit economically from wildlife conservation should contribute more directly to its costs. This is not merely a question of generosity towards rural communities, but one of economic fairness and the long-term sustainability of conservation itself.

The proposal deserves serious policy consideration, but its implementation would require financial discipline and transparent administration.

The Government should establish how much wildlife tourism revenue is collected, what existing commitments apply to those funds, what share might lawfully be redirected, and how compensation could be delivered without creating another inefficient bureaucracy.

A credible scheme would also require independent verification of losses, publicly available eligibility criteria and safeguards against political interference.

Compensation must, however, remain secondary to prevention. Families should not be expected to accept the loss of crops, property or personal security simply because payments may eventually follow. Effective conservation requires appropriately located and maintained protection systems, reliable warnings, sound land-use decisions and the meaningful involvement of communities that understand elephant movements and local conditions. Their knowledge should be incorporated into policy design and operational decisions, rather than sought merely to endorse programmes determined elsewhere.

Political leadership must also confront the consequences of development decisions affecting elephant habitats and movement corridors. Settlement expansion, infrastructure construction, agricultural projects and other land-use changes can intensify conflict when ecological consequences are inadequately considered.

These decisions often involve authorities outside the wildlife sector, yet their consequences are ultimately borne by wildlife officers, affected villagers and the elephants themselves. Accountability must therefore extend to the institutions responsible for land allocation and development approvals, not simply those called upon to manage the resulting emergencies.

The problem is not an absence of public announcements or an insufficient number of conservation initiatives. Electric fences, emergency operations and elephant relocations may have legitimate roles, but their success must be measured against outcomes rather than visibility.

How many human deaths have been prevented, how much crop damage has been reduced, which conflict areas have become safer, and what proportion of public expenditure has produced lasting benefits?

These are the measures by which conservation policy should be judged.

An independent assessment of the 2020 action plan, published before or alongside the proposed replacement, would provide a necessary starting point. It should identify implementation gaps, assess expenditures, examine inter-agency coordination and recommend measurable targets with clearly assigned responsibilities.

The revised national strategy should then be subject to periodic public reporting, allowing Parliament, affected communities and conservation specialists to evaluate progress against evidence rather than assurances.

Kavantissa's death also presents a specific test of institutional transparency. The findings of the court-directed investigation and the three inquiries should establish the circumstances of his injury, the treatment provided and the cause of death.

If shortcomings are identified, they should be addressed through appropriate corrective measures. If the evidence establishes that those responsible acted properly under difficult circumstances, that conclusion deserves equal recognition.

The presidential committee's consideration of a rapid-response veterinary unit is encouraging, but it also invites examination of existing emergency arrangements. What capacity currently exists to reach injured elephants, particularly in remote areas, and what equipment, personnel and specialist expertise are available?

If deficiencies are established, the Government should publish a practical programme for correcting them, including funding, responsibilities and implementation deadlines. Another committee report that identifies problems without producing measurable improvements would represent a further failure of public administration.

Sri Lanka cannot afford to make conservation a contest between the welfare of elephants and the rights of rural communities. Every person has a legitimate expectation of safety, while the survival of wild elephants forms part of the country's ecological responsibility to future generations. Protecting one at the expense of the other is neither equitable nor sustainable.

Effective policy must recognise that both depend upon sound governance, scientific evidence and a fair distribution of costs and benefits.

The Government now has an opportunity to demonstrate that its proposed new action plan will be more than another administrative exercise.

It can begin by accounting for what was achieved under the previous strategy, identifying the obstacles to implementation and publishing clear commitments against which future performance can be assessed.

That would be a more meaningful tribute to Kavantissa than another declaration of national sorrow.

Be that as it may, the real measure of Sri Lanka's commitment to conservation will not be the number of plans it produces, the committees it appoints, the promises it makes or the grief expressed when another elephant dies.

It will be whether fewer elephants are killed, fewer people lose their lives, farming families become safer and the institutions entrusted with protecting them can demonstrate that their decisions have delivered results. Kavantissa's death has once again brought the country's conservation failures into public view.

Whether it becomes a turning point or another forgotten tragedy will depend not on the conclusions of another report, but on what those entrusted with public authority actually do.

POLITICAL VICTIMS OR UNACCOUNTED MILLIONS? THE RAJAPAKSA PAPER TRAIL

A court rejects Gotabaya Rajapaksa's overseas travel application over a technical discrepancy. But beyond procedural arguments lies a larger question: how are Sri Lanka's former political elite financing their legal battles and lifestyles?

The Fort Magistrate's Court recently rejected former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's application to travel to Singapore for post-surgical medical care because of conflicting dates in the submitted documents. The rejection was procedural rather than a determination that he was legally ineligible to travel. Nevertheless, it raises questions about proportionality, judicial discretion and the treatment of politically exposed individuals.

Additional Solicitor General Dileepa Peiris informed the court that Rajapaksa had not been formally named as a suspect in the ongoing Easter Sunday attacks investigation. The prosecution acknowledged that permission to travel could be considered on humanitarian grounds through a properly presented application. If that is the position, should a clerical discrepancy delay access to medical treatment when the error could potentially be corrected?

Courts must apply the law consistently, regardless of political identity. Former presidents deserve neither preferential treatment nor additional punishment simply because they once occupied high office. Procedural correctness matters, but justice must also remain proportionate, particularly where medical considerations arise.

Be that as it may, portraying the Rajapaksas exclusively as victims of political persecution risks obscuring a considerably larger question: the origins, extent and transparency of their personal wealth.

The travel application comes amid continuing investigations and legal proceedings involving figures associated with the former administration.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa's former Private Secretary, Sugeeshwara Bandara, has faced allegations involving salary payments and misuse of state resources. Other members of the Rajapaksa family have also encountered financial investigations and judicial scrutiny, although allegations must never be confused with established guilt.

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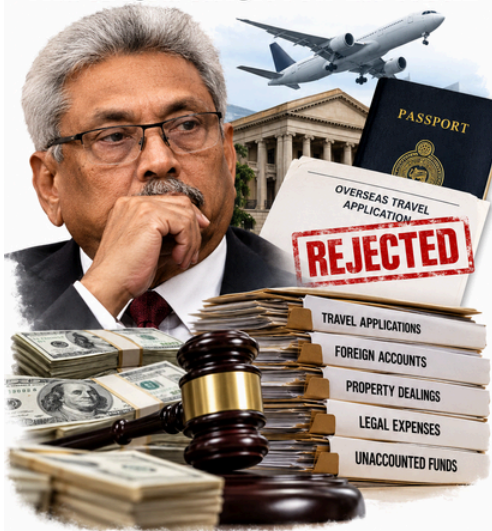


POLITICAL VICTIMS...

Sri Lanka's Supreme Court previously found senior political figures responsible for breaches of public trust associated with the economic crisis. That landmark determination established accountability at the highest political levels, but it did not resolve every question concerning the financial affairs of those involved.

For ordinary Sri Lankans, legal representation, medical treatment overseas and international travel can represent enormous financial burdens. Yet prominent former officeholders appear capable of maintaining expensive legal representation and international mobility.

EDITORIAL POLITICAL VICTIMS OR UNACCOUNTED MILLIONS? THE RAJAPAKSA PAPER TRAIL



Their ability to meet such expenses is not evidence of wrongdoing, but legitimate questions arise about declared income, accumulated assets and financial transparency.

Are these expenditures supported by legitimately acquired domestic wealth, inherited resources or overseas holdings?

Have relevant asset declarations been properly examined? Where credible grounds for investigation exist, have financial authorities followed the money rather than merely pursued politically attractive prosecutions?

An administration elected on promises of accountability cannot measure success through arrests, remand orders or procedural victories alone. Investigations must be lawful, evidence-based and equally applicable to political allies and opponents.

The Rajapaksas deserve due process. Sri Lanka's taxpayers deserve answers. Neither political victimhood nor public anger should determine the outcome.

The real test is whether investigators can establish where the money came from, whether it was lawfully acquired and whether every rupee can withstand scrutiny.

WHO PAYS FOR THE FLOUR HIKE? THE PRICE OF DAILY SURVIVAL IN SRI LANKA

A Rs. 13 increase in imported wheat flour has prompted a Rs. 5 rise in the price of parathas and egg roti. For millions already struggling with household expenses, another seemingly minor adjustment raises a larger question: who protects consumers when essential food prices keep climbing?

In economic reports, a Rs. 13 increase in the price of a kilogram of imported wheat flour might appear insignificant. When the All Ceylon Canteen and Restaurant Owners' Association subsequently announces a Rs. 5 increase for parathas and egg roti, effective from midnight, the adjustment may barely register in official policy discussions. Yet for ordinary Sri Lankans, these increases represent another erosion of already stretched household budgets.

There is no such thing as an insignificant increase in the cost of basic food for families living from one payday to the next. Daily-wage workers, students and low-income households cannot simply absorb repeated price adjustments without consequences. Every additional rupee spent on food reduces what remains available for transport, education, medicine and other essentials.

The immediate explanation for higher flour prices generally centres on international grain markets, shipping costs, exchange rates and import expenses. Sri Lanka's wheat flour market remains heavily dependent on a small number of major suppliers, raising legitimate questions about competition and pricing transparency. When suppliers adjust their prices, the consequences quickly reach bakeries, restaurants and roadside food outlets.

But should consumers simply accept every increase as an unavoidable consequence of international market conditions?

What mechanisms exist to independently verify the justification for price revisions, and how effectively are competition authorities monitoring the market? Equally importantly, when international prices decline, are reductions passed on to consumers with the same urgency?

Successive governments have demonstrated considerable enthusiasm for discussing economic recovery through inflation statistics, fiscal targets and international financial assessments. These indicators matter, but they provide an incomplete picture of household hardship.

A slowing inflation rate does not mean prices have returned to earlier levels, particularly after years of substantial increases.

The consequences extend beyond individual consumers. Small restaurants and tea shops face higher operating costs while attempting to retain customers whose purchasing power remains constrained.

Raising prices risks losing business, while absorbing additional costs threatens already narrow margins. Either way, the pressure ultimately falls on small enterprises and their customers.

Be that as it may, government intervention need not mean arbitrary price controls or commercially unsustainable subsidies.

It should mean transparent pricing, effective competition enforcement, scrutiny of import costs and policies that encourage alternative suppliers. Authorities must also establish whether existing consumer protection mechanisms are functioning as intended.

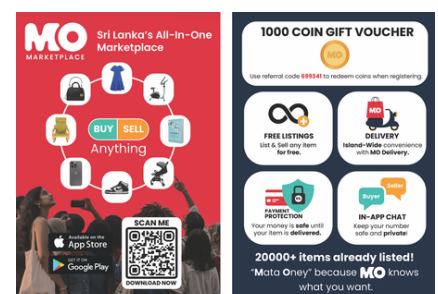
WHO PAYS FOR THE FLOUR HIKE? THE PRICE OF DAILY SURVIVAL IN SRI LANKA



Sri Lanka cannot claim meaningful economic recovery while substantial sections of its population struggle to afford everyday meals. Stability measured through financial indicators must eventually translate into improved purchasing power and greater household security.

A Rs. 5 increase may appear trivial to those determining economic policy. Multiply it across several purchases, several family members and an entire month, and its significance becomes considerably clearer.

The question is not simply why flour costs more. It is whether economic policy is delivering meaningful protection and relief to the people expected to pay for it.





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REFORMING THE SACRED PASTIME: CAN A NEW BILL FIX SRI LANKAN CRICKET?

Sports Minister Sunil Kumara Gamage insists the government will not allow Sri Lankan cricket to collapse. A proposed Sri Lanka Cricket Bill promises sweeping administrative reform, but can legislation restore the standards, accountability and international competitiveness that once made the country a cricketing powerhouse?

In Sri Lanka, cricket is more than a national sport.

It is a source of collective pride, national identity and occasional consolation when almost everything else appears to be going wrong. Yet when Sports Minister Sunil Kumara Gamage assured Parliament that the government would not allow cricket to collapse, his declaration sounded remarkably familiar to supporters who have heard similar promises from successive administrations.

Responding to Opposition MP Heshu Withanage, who questioned the national team's deteriorating performances, Gamage pointed to proposed legislation intended to restructure Sri Lanka Cricket's governance.

REFORMING THE SACRED PASTIME: CAN A NEW BILL FIX SRI LANKAN CRICKET?



He acknowledged that previous ministers attempting comparable reforms had encountered serious political consequences, including losing their portfolios. Nevertheless, he expressed confidence that parliamentary support would enable the current administration to deliver meaningful change.

Sri Lanka's cricketing achievements make its subsequent struggles particularly painful. The 1996 World Cup triumph transformed the country into an international

sporting force, followed by appearances in the 2007 and 2011 World Cup finals and victory in the 2014 T20 World Cup. Those achievements reflected exceptional talent, disciplined leadership and a competitive spirit that regularly overwhelmed considerably wealthier cricketing nations.

But the retirement of that generation exposed weaknesses extending beyond individual performances.

Administrative disputes, coaching instability, questionable selection decisions and political interference contributed to growing public frustration.

Sri Lanka Cricket's extensive voting structure has also attracted criticism for encouraging institutional alliances rather than prioritising player development and sporting excellence.

The International Cricket Council's suspension of Sri Lanka Cricket in November 2023 over government interference demonstrated how seriously governance failures could damage the country's international standing.

Although the suspension was subsequently lifted, the episode exposed the delicate relationship between legitimate state oversight and cricket's requirement for administrative independence.

The proposed legislation seeks to address governance, financial transparency and administrative accountability.

However, its effectiveness will depend on the precise powers granted to oversight bodies, the independence of appointments and safeguards against political interference. Replacing one entrenched administrative establishment with another politically convenient arrangement would achieve little.

Equally important is rebuilding domestic cricket. Sri Lanka requires stronger first-class competition, consistent coaching structures, transparent selection and credible pathways for talented young players outside established cricketing centres.

Administrative reform without investment in these foundations risks producing impressive legislation but disappointing scorecards.

Be that as it may, Parliament cannot legislate a winning cover drive, manufacture a reliable opening partnership or guarantee victory against Australia and India.

What it can establish is an environment where merit replaces patronage and professional management takes precedence over institutional politics.

The government must therefore demonstrate that its reforms serve cricket rather than political interests. Independent financial scrutiny, accountable leadership and meaningful representation for players and cricketing stakeholders should become essential components of any credible restructuring.

Minister Gamage's determination is welcome, but declarations alone will not restore Sri Lanka's international standing. The real measure of success will be whether the next generation inherits a system capable of developing champions rather than perpetuating administrative disputes.

Sri Lankan cricket does not need another political innings. It needs an administration that finally plays for the country.

POLITICAL COLOURS, ECONOMIC NUMBERS

When it comes to the economy, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake is apparently the very model of political non-partisanship. According to Opposition MP Dr Harsha de Silva, the President has appointed one of President Ranil Wickremesinghe's economic gurus as his very own economic guru. (Duminda Hulanguamuwa).

How wonderfully refreshing! The JVP can keep its revolutionary red, Ranil his familiar green, and the President can borrow the economic brains without troubling himself over their political origins. After all, inflation, interest rates and budget deficits have never shown much respect for party colours.

POLITICAL COLOURS, ECONOMIC NUMBERS



WHEN IT COMES TO THE ECONOMY, IT'S THE NUMBERS, NOT THE COLOURS!

One might even call it political maturity. Others may prefer to call it economic recycling. Be that as it may, when it comes to the economy, apparently it's the numbers, not the colours!

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