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The Answers"



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SRI LANKA DOES THE IMPOSSIBLE.

HARRY BROOK MAKES HISTORY, BUT ENGLAND STILL LOSES.

	ENGLAND 429/4 (50 OVERS)
	SRI LANKA 431/8 (49.5 OVERS)

England captain Harry Brook smashed the fastest double century in one-day international cricket history, scoring 202 from 116 deliveries, including ten sixes. England amassed 429 for four, a total that would ordinarily guarantee victory. But Sri Lanka had other ideas, producing an astonishing run chase to win by two wickets with just one delivery remaining.

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There are cricket matches that are remembered for an individual performance, others for a remarkable team effort, and occasionally one that manages to deliver both. Thursday's encounter between Sri Lanka and England in Rawalpindi belonged to that rare category.

Harry Brook produced an innings of extraordinary power and precision, rewriting the record books with the fastest double century in men's one-day international cricket. Yet when the final ball was struck and the celebrations began, it was Sri Lanka that had achieved something even more remarkable.

England's 429 for four appeared an almost insurmountable target. Brook reached his double century in just 114 deliveries before eventually departing for 202 from 116 balls, having struck 21 fours and ten sixes. His performance was supported by Joe Root's 69, Tom Banton's 50 and Will Jacks' unbeaten 66. England had not merely posted a competitive total.

They had delivered the kind of batting performance that generally leaves the opposition playing for respectability rather than victory.

Sri Lanka's reply began disastrously. At 24 for two, the prospect of chasing another 406 runs appeared remote, even allowing for the increasingly extravagant possibilities of modern limited-overs cricket. England had the runs, the momentum and every reason to believe the contest was effectively settled. What followed was an extraordinary demonstration of attacking cricket, calculated risk and an unwillingness to accept defeat.

Avishka Fernando began the recovery with an accomplished 97 from 83 deliveries, striking eleven boundaries and two sixes. Pavan Rathnayake then produced the innings around which Sri Lanka's response was constructed, scoring a magnificent 130 from 106 balls. His contribution combined sustained aggression with the discipline necessary to prevent the required scoring rate from becoming unmanageable.

The decisive acceleration came from Dasun Shanaka. Returning to one-day international cricket after more than two years, he struck 97 from just 50 deliveries, including eight sixes.

His innings transformed a formidable challenge into a genuine possibility. England's bowlers, who had begun with the comfort of an enormous total, suddenly found themselves defending boundaries rather than dictating terms.

But there was still work to be done. Janith Liyanage delivered the finishing performance, remaining unbeaten on 61 from just 27 balls. With Sri Lanka needing seven runs from the final over, the contest remained balanced between an extraordinary victory and an agonising failure. Two wickets fell in successive deliveries, leaving Sri Lanka eight down and the pressure almost unbearable. Liyanage responded by striking the penultimate delivery for six, taking Sri Lanka to 430 for eight and completing one of the most astonishing successful chases in the history of one-day international cricket.

The achievement was the second-highest successful run chase in men's ODI history. It also provided a remarkable contrast between individual brilliance and collective determination. Brook's innings deserved every accolade, and England's total would have been sufficient to win almost any ordinary contest. Sri Lanka, however, demonstrated that even a world-record individual performance cannot guarantee the result.

For Sri Lankan cricket, which has endured years of criticism over inconsistency, administration and declining international standards, the victory offers something beyond the immediate result. It demonstrates the quality that remains within the national side and the possibilities available when talent is matched by confidence and determination. It does not erase the problems confronting the sport, nor should one extraordinary afternoon become an excuse to ignore them.

Be that as it may, Thursday belonged to Sri Lanka. Harry Brook made history with his bat, but Sri Lanka made history with the scoreboard. England scored 429 runs and still lost. For once, the mathematics of cricket seemed almost as extraordinary as the cricket itself.

FORTY PETITIONS, ONE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION: IS SRI LANKA REFORMING ANTI-TERROR LAWS OR REPACKAGING REPRESSION?

Forty constitutional challenges to the proposed Protection of the State from Terrorism Bill have placed the government's approach to national security under judicial scrutiny. The central question is whether Sri Lanka can protect itself against terrorism without compromising the constitutional freedoms it is obliged to defend.

Speaker Jagath Wickramaratne has informed Parliament that he received copies of 40 petitions challenging the constitutionality of the proposed Protection of the State from Terrorism Bill (PSTA). The number is significant, although petitions alone neither establish constitutional violations nor demonstrate unanimous public opposition. What they do establish is that the proposed legislation has generated sufficient legal concern for its provisions to face examination before the Supreme Court.

Sri Lanka has lived with the Prevention of Terrorism Act since 1979. Successive governments have faced criticism over its detention provisions, safeguards against abuse and implications for fundamental rights. Replacing that legislation has long been presented as an essential reform. The question now is whether its proposed successor delivers meaningful improvements or preserves powers that critics believe require stronger safeguards.

Among the principal concerns raised by opponents are the definition of terrorism, the powers available to security authorities and the adequacy of judicial supervision. Critics argue that broadly framed offences could create uncertainty over the distinction between genuine terrorist activity and legitimate democratic expression.

Trade union action, peaceful protest and investigative journalism must remain protected within constitutional limits, while violence and genuine threats to national security must remain subject to effective criminal law.

Particular scrutiny is warranted wherever legislation permits arrest, prolonged detention or restrictions on movement and association. Such powers may be necessary in narrowly defined circumstances, but their exercise must be subject to clear legal thresholds, independent oversight and effective remedies against misuse.

The question is not whether the State should possess security powers, but whether those powers are proportionate, accountable and sufficiently protected against arbitrary application.

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FORTY PETITIONS...

There is also an economic dimension. Sri Lanka's international trade relationships, including its preferential access to European markets, exist alongside commitments concerning human rights and governance.

While no automatic loss of trade concessions follows from introducing controversial legislation, unnecessary uncertainty over fundamental rights serves neither the country's commercial interests nor its international reputation.

The Supreme Court must now examine the constitutional questions properly placed before it, including whether particular provisions require special parliamentary approval or a referendum.

That determination belongs to the judiciary, not to politicians, petitioners or commentators.

Equally, Parliament retains responsibility for ensuring that legislation is not merely constitutionally passable but demonstrably fair, necessary and workable.



Be that as it may, the government should welcome rigorous scrutiny rather than regard it as an obstacle.

Constitutional challenges are part of democracy's safeguards, not evidence of disloyalty.

Sri Lanka needs effective protection against terrorism, but security legislation must never become an instrument of political convenience.

The ultimate test is straightforward:

does this Bill protect the people as effectively as it does the state?

META AND THE PRICE OF DIGITAL DECEPTION. IS SILICON VALLEY FINALLY BEING CALLED TO ACCOUNT?

A reported multibillion-dollar penalty against Meta in New Mexico raises a question extending far beyond one technology company. Can the world's most powerful digital platforms continue to profit from personal information while treating regulatory penalties as an acceptable cost of doing business?

For years, the world's largest technology companies have accumulated extraordinary commercial power through the collection, analysis and monetisation of personal information. Their platforms connect billions of people, generate enormous advertising revenues and exercise considerable influence over public communication. Yet the fundamental question remains whether the systems designed to protect consumers have kept pace with the businesses they are supposed to regulate.

Reports of a substantial financial penalty against Meta in New Mexico have brought that question into sharper focus. The proceedings concern allegations about the company's representations to consumers and its handling of personal information.

Whatever the eventual outcome of the litigation, the wider issue deserves serious examination: what constitutes meaningful accountability when a corporation possesses financial resources comparable to those of national economies?

The Cambridge Analytica controversy exposed serious weaknesses in the protection of personal data and prompted regulatory action across several jurisdictions. It also demonstrated how information collected through seemingly ordinary online activity could become part of a much larger commercial and political ecosystem. The resulting public concern was not simply about privacy, but about whether users genuinely understood what happened to their information and who ultimately benefited from it.

Meta, like any defendant, is entitled to contest allegations, challenge penalties and pursue available appeals. The size of a proposed or imposed penalty does not establish that every allegation has been proved, nor does it eliminate the importance of due process. Courts must determine liability according to evidence and law, not public hostility towards wealthy corporations.

Nevertheless, the economics of enforcement deserve attention. A penalty that appears enormous to an ordinary business may have considerably less impact on a corporation generating tens of billions of dollars annually. If the financial consequences of misconduct are consistently outweighed by the commercial benefits, regulation risks becoming an accounting exercise rather than an effective deterrent.

There is also a legitimate distinction between protecting freedom of expression and regulating potentially deceptive commercial conduct.

Technology companies should enjoy the same legal protections as other businesses, but neither greater immunity nor special exemptions simply because their products facilitate communication. Consumer protection and freedom of speech are not inherently competing principles.



For Sri Lanka, where millions depend on international digital platforms, these developments carry particular relevance. Citizens deserve transparency about personal data, accessible complaint mechanisms and effective protection against misleading commercial practices, regardless of where the platform's headquarters happen to be.

Be that as it may, the real test of regulatory enforcement is not the number of billions appearing in a headline. It is whether the law changes corporate behaviour.

Silicon Valley has transformed how the world communicates. It must not be permitted to transform commercial success into practical immunity from accountability.

THE PRISON OF POVERTY: HOW A FEW THOUSAND RUPEES KEEP HUNDREDS BEHIND BARS

When Justice Minister Harshana Nanayakkara laid out the numbers in Parliament, he unwittingly exposed one of the most absurd defects of Sri Lanka's justice system. Across the island, 1,454 convicted individuals are currently sitting behind bars for one simple reason: they cannot afford to pay court-imposed fines.

These inmates are not locked away because they present a physical danger to society or because their offenses earned them a custodial sentence. They are locked away because they are broke.

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POLITICAL VICTIMS...

In a country staggering under a national debt burden, we have managed to create a penal system that effectively turns economic hardship into a jail term.

Responding to a query by Opposition MP Rohitha Abeygunawardena, the Justice Minister detailed the exact financial breakdown of these unpaid fines. Nearly half of these inmates, 641 people, are serving prison sentences over debts under Rs. 25,000. Another 361 owe between Rs. 25,000 and Rs. 50,000, while 245 owe between Rs. 50,000 and Rs. 100,000. Only 207 owe amounts above Rs. 100,000. As the Minister rightly acknowledged, the fact that a judge ordered a fine rather than prison time means the underlying offense was minor. Defaulting on that payment, however, transforms a petty infraction into a full-blown jail stint.

THE PRISON OF POVERTY

HOW A FEW THOUSAND RUPEES
KEEP HUNDREDS BEHIND BARS



The economic irony is staggering. Sri Lanka's severely overcrowded prisons currently hold 39,019 inmates, including 10,611 convicted prisoners and an overwhelming 28,408 remand prisoners still waiting for their day in court. Feeding, housing, and guarding an inmate costs the state thousands of rupees every single week. Spending hundreds of thousands of taxpayer rupees to incarcerate someone who owes the state a Rs. 10,000 fine is not just bad penal policy; it is fiscal illiteracy on a grand scale.

When asked if the government has an active state mechanism or dedicated fund to free these individuals, the Minister clarified that the Department of Prisons simply does not block non-governmental organizations, charities, or well-meaning citizens from paying off these fines. Philanthropic groups routinely step in during major national holidays to settle minor fines and secure a few releases. Relying on private charity to resolve a structural flaw in statutory law is a complete cop-out. Crowdfunded justice is not a policy strategy, and outsourcing state basic fairness to passing donors should embarrass any administration claiming to value rule of law.

If the state actually wants to tackle prison overcrowding and reduce unnecessary government expenditure, it must update its legal machinery immediately. Introducing structured installment plans for judicial fines, expanding mandatory community service sentences, and establishing automatic bail adjustments for minor default cases would instantly clear cells without requiring charitable hand-outs. Until the legislature bridges this gap, Sri Lanka will continue to run a hypocritical two-tiered system where the wealthy pay a small fine and walk home, while the poor pay with their basic human freedom.

EASTER SUNDAY INVESTIGATION: NEW INTELLIGENCE

ALLEGATIONS RAISE OLD QUESTIONS ABOUT ACCOUNTABILITY

Fresh submissions before the Colombo Fort Magistrate's Court have introduced further allegations concerning intelligence information, individuals associated with the Easter Sunday attacks and the possibility that others involved remain beyond the reach of investigators. Seven years after the bombings, the search for accountability continues to confront difficult questions about what was known, when it was known and whether crucial information was properly investigated.

Now after such a long time, we need an end to the slowness of the system. Lets find out. Lets disclose the truth and let's give closure to the victims.

The Easter Sunday attacks of April 2019 remain among the gravest failures of national security in Sri Lanka's modern history. More than seven years later, the country continues to confront unanswered questions concerning the planning of the attacks, the intelligence available to State agencies and the circumstances that allowed coordinated suicide bombings to devastate churches and hotels. The latest proceedings before the Colombo Fort Magistrate's Court demonstrate that the investigation has not reached the point at which every significant allegation can be regarded as resolved.

Additional Solicitor General Dileepa Peiris informed the court that investigators intend to question three convicted individuals who reportedly maintain that others connected to the attacks remain at large. The Criminal Investigation Department has sought permission for eight officers to record their statements between October 22 and November 8. The proposed questioning could produce further investigative leads, although the reliability and significance of any resulting evidence will have to be independently assessed.

The prosecution also referred to information attributed to a military informant who allegedly encountered Sarah Jasmine before the attacks and subsequently identified her from photographs. According to the submissions, information concerning her whereabouts was not properly acted upon, with allegations extending to the knowledge of former intelligence chief Suresh Sallay.

These are serious assertions, but they remain allegations presented during judicial proceedings rather than findings establishing criminal responsibility.

Further submissions concerned former Minister Douglas Devananda and alleged connections involving Asad Maulana, Karuna Amman and Pillayan. Devananda has denied the account attributed to him, while counsel representing Sallay has rejected allegations concerning his client's involvement in obtaining travel documents for Karuna Amman.

Those responses are important because an investigation of this magnitude must distinguish between evidence capable of being tested in court and assertions that have yet to be independently established.

EASTER SUNDAY INVESTIGATION: NEW INTELLIGENCE ALLEGATIONS RAISE OLD QUESTIONS ABOUT ACCOUNTABILITY



The public interest lies not in accumulating names but in determining what actually happened. If individuals possessed actionable intelligence before the attacks, investigators must establish whether that information was communicated, recorded and acted upon. If evidence was suppressed, the responsible individuals must be identified through lawful investigation and, where justified, prosecution. Equally, allegations that cannot withstand proper examination should not be allowed to acquire the status of established fact through repetition.

Sri Lanka has already experienced years of competing political accusations concerning the Easter Sunday tragedy. Governments have changed, investigations have continued and numerous public statements have promised that the truth would ultimately emerge.

Yet the families of those killed and injured remain entitled to something more substantial than another cycle of allegations followed by denials. They deserve a process that is independent, methodical and capable of producing conclusions that can withstand judicial scrutiny.

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EASTER SUNDAY...

The possibility that convicted individuals possess information concerning others who remain at liberty is particularly important. Investigators must establish whether those statements are supported by independent evidence, whether the individuals have previously supplied similar accounts and whether their claims can be corroborated through communications records, financial transactions or other reliable material. A conviction for participation in an attack does not automatically make every subsequent assertion credible, but neither should potentially relevant information be dismissed without examination.

There is also a broader institutional question. Intelligence agencies necessarily operate with secrecy, but secrecy cannot become a permanent barrier to accountability when mass-casualty attacks have occurred. Proper judicial supervision, lawful access to relevant records and credible examination of official conduct are essential if the country is to distinguish genuine national security requirements from attempts to conceal administrative or criminal wrongdoing.

Be that as it may, the Easter Sunday investigation cannot be judged by the number of sensational allegations made in court or Parliament. Its success must ultimately be measured by the quality of evidence obtained, the fairness of the proceedings and the ability of the justice system to establish responsibility without political interference.

Seven years after the attacks, Sri Lanka still owes the victims and their families a credible accounting of what happened. The latest disclosures may provide important leads, but their real significance will depend on whether investigators can turn those leads into admissible evidence and, where warranted, lawful accountability.

MAGISTRATE SEEKS CONTEMPT PROCEEDINGS CONCERNING THE IGP. CAN THE POLICE IGNORE A COURT ORDER?

A Gampaha Magistrate has directed that court records concerning the Inspector General of Police be forwarded to the President of the Court of Appeal for consideration of contempt proceedings. The dispute follows judicial directions intended to prevent police officers from instituting unfounded criminal cases against innocent citizens, raising an important question about whether the country's highest police authority has adequately complied with the court.

The rule of law is frequently invoked in Sri Lanka, particularly by politicians promising institutional reform and equal treatment before the courts.

Yet its meaning becomes considerably more practical when a judicial order requires action from a powerful State institution. The proceedings before the Gampaha Magistrate's Court concerning the Inspector General of Police have brought that question into sharp focus.

At issue is not merely a disagreement over administrative procedure, but whether directions intended to protect citizens from wrongful prosecution have been properly implemented.

The controversy arose from proceedings in which the Magistrate found that police officers had instituted baseless drug-possession allegations against an innocent individual. The court ordered compensation of Rs. 200,000 and directed the Inspector General of Police to issue a nationwide circular intended to prevent similar abuses. The purpose of that direction was clear: an individual should not be exposed to criminal proceedings without a proper evidentiary basis, and police officers must understand their obligations before bringing accusations before a court.

Subsequent proceedings reportedly revealed that instructions had been issued covering only three police divisions rather than the entire country. The Magistrate questioned whether this limited response complied with the original direction and whether the material presented by police lawyers accurately represented the extent of implementation. The court consequently directed that the relevant records be forwarded to the President of the Court of Appeal for consideration of contempt proceedings.

An important legal distinction must be maintained. The referral does not establish that the Inspector General of Police has committed contempt of court, nor does it constitute a conviction. Any such determination belongs to the court possessing the relevant jurisdiction, following the procedures and safeguards required by law. Nevertheless, the Magistrate's decision is sufficiently serious to warrant public scrutiny of the police administration's response.

The underlying issue extends far beyond one individual or one police division. When police officers bring criminal allegations without sufficient evidence, the consequences can be devastating. An innocent person may face arrest, detention, legal expenses, reputational damage and disruption to employment and family life. Even where the courts eventually dismiss the allegations, the harm caused by an unjustified prosecution may never be fully repaired.

Drug-related investigations present particular risks because allegations involving narcotics can carry severe penalties and substantial social stigma. Effective enforcement against trafficking and possession remains essential, but enforcement powers must operate within the law. The legitimacy of the police depends not simply on the number of arrests recorded but on whether investigations are conducted fairly, evidence is properly obtained and innocent people are protected from arbitrary action.

There is also an institutional obligation that cannot be overlooked. If a court directs a nationwide administrative measure, the police hierarchy should be able to demonstrate clearly whether the direction was implemented, when instructions were issued and which officers received them. Where practical or legal difficulties prevent full compliance, the proper response is to seek clarification or pursue available legal remedies. Administrative convenience cannot substitute for obedience to lawful judicial directions.

The Government has repeatedly emphasised its commitment to strengthening the rule of law and restoring confidence in public institutions. This case provides an opportunity to demonstrate what those commitments mean in practice. The Police Department should clarify the status of the original circular, explain the scope of instructions issued and establish whether additional measures are necessary to prevent wrongful prosecutions.

Be that as it may, respect for judicial authority cannot depend on the rank of the official receiving an order. A citizen must comply with the law, a police constable must comply with the law, and the country's most senior police officer is subject to the same fundamental obligation.

The proceedings have not established contempt, and the Inspector General must receive every protection afforded by due process. But the wider question is already before the public: when a court identifies an abuse and orders measures to prevent its repetition, can Sri Lanka's institutions demonstrate that those measures have actually been carried out?

SRILANKAN AIRLINES DENIES CYBERATTACK. BUT WHO WILL INDEPENDENTLY VERIFY THE SECURITY OF ITS SYSTEMS?

SriLankan Airlines has rejected parliamentary allegations that hackers compromised its computer systems and demanded a US\$50,000 ransom. The national carrier maintains that its investigations found no unauthorised access, data theft or disruption to operations. The denial is categorical, but the controversy raises important questions about cybersecurity, public accountability and the protection of passenger information.

When Opposition MP Dayasiri Jayasekara told Parliament that hackers had allegedly penetrated SriLankan Airlines' computer systems and demanded a ransom of US\$50,000 in cryptocurrency, the claims were sufficiently serious to demand an immediate response.

An airline's information technology infrastructure is not merely another collection of corporate computers. It supports reservations, passenger records, financial transactions, internal communications and essential operational functions. Any credible allegation that such systems have been compromised therefore carries implications extending well beyond the company itself.

SriLankan Airlines responded on Wednesday with an unequivocal denial. The airline said the allegations appeared to originate from an external cyber-related claim published on June 29 and maintained that subsequent investigations found no evidence of unauthorised access to its systems. Management also rejected suggestions that passenger or operational information had been stolen, that services had been disrupted or that the airline had received a ransom demand. According to the company, no negotiations with alleged hackers took place.

Those statements are important and must be accurately reflected in any assessment of the controversy.

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Parliamentary privilege allows elected representatives to raise matters of public concern, but it does not automatically establish the accuracy of allegations made under its protection. Equally, a corporate denial does not eliminate the public interest in understanding how the allegations were investigated and what technical safeguards exist. The responsible approach is to examine the available evidence rather than presume either that the airline was compromised or that every concern has been conclusively resolved.

The distinction matters particularly in cybersecurity, where the absence of visible disruption does not necessarily establish the absence of an attempted intrusion. Sophisticated attacks can involve unauthorised access to email accounts, extraction of information or exploitation of vulnerabilities without immediately affecting passenger services. Conversely, criminal groups sometimes make exaggerated or entirely fabricated claims about possessing confidential information. Establishing the truth requires technical examination rather than political assertion.

SriLankan Airlines should therefore consider whether it can provide an independently verifiable account of the investigation undertaken following the June allegation. That need not involve disclosing sensitive security arrangements or information that could assist potential attackers. A properly framed statement identifying the scope of the examination, the independent expertise involved and the conclusions reached would help establish confidence without compromising security.

The airline's ownership makes the question particularly relevant to the public. As a State-owned enterprise with substantial financial obligations and an important role in international connectivity, SriLankan Airlines is accountable not only to passengers and commercial partners but also to taxpayers. A serious cybersecurity incident could expose the company to operational disruption, reputational damage and financial liabilities. Preventive investment and independent assurance should therefore be treated as essential components of corporate governance.

The Government must also consider the wider implications for critical national infrastructure. Airlines, ports, financial institutions, hospitals and electricity networks increasingly depend on interconnected digital systems. Their vulnerability to cybercrime cannot be addressed solely through statements issued after allegations become public. Effective protection requires continuous assessment, clearly defined reporting obligations and credible arrangements for responding to incidents.

Be that as it may, SriLankan Airlines has denied the allegations, and that denial deserves proper weight. Those who made the claims must also be prepared to substantiate them. The public interest is not served by sensational accusations that cannot be supported, but neither is it served by a culture in which assurances are expected to replace independent scrutiny. The immediate question is whether the airline can demonstrate that its systems were adequately examined and that the information entrusted to it remains secure. For passengers, employees and taxpayers, that assurance matters considerably more than the political argument surrounding the original allegation.

THE COLOMBO PORT'S US\$392 MILLION LOGISTICS DREAM COLLAPSES. NOW THE LOSSES ARE EMERGING.

The abandonment of the South Asia Commercial and Logistics Hub project has begun producing measurable financial consequences. Access

Engineering expects to recognise a company-level loss of approximately Rs. 310 million, while the Sri Lanka Ports Authority proposes a replacement public-private partnership. The question is whether the original project failed because of commercial circumstances, inadequate planning or weaknesses in the agreements governing one of Sri Lanka's most valuable national assets.

When the South Asia Commercial and Logistics Hub was announced in 2023, it was presented as a major investment capable of strengthening Colombo's position as a regional maritime and logistics centre. The US\$392 million project brought together China Merchants Port Holdings, the Sri Lanka Ports Authority and Access Engineering in a venture intended to develop modern logistics infrastructure at the Port of Colombo. The commercial possibilities were substantial, particularly for a country seeking to expand the value generated by its strategic location along major international shipping routes.

Three years later, the project has been abandoned, and attention has shifted from promised investment to the financial consequences of its collapse. Access Engineering has disclosed that it expects to recover approximately Rs. 1.45 billion from its investment of around Rs. 1.76 billion. The difference represents an anticipated loss of approximately Rs. 310 million in the company's standalone financial statements.

Its consolidated accounts have already reflected earlier losses, and the company does not currently anticipate another material loss at group level.

These distinctions are important because the financial consequences of a failed investment must be reported accurately. The Rs. 310 million figure relates to Access Engineering's anticipated company-level accounting treatment and should not automatically be presented as the total loss arising from the venture. The financial exposure of the Sri Lanka Ports Authority, any contractual termination costs and the wider economic consequences of the abandoned development require separate examination.

The original shareholding structure gave China Merchants Port Holdings a 70% interest, while the Sri Lanka Ports Authority and Access Engineering each held 15%.

That arrangement placed a strategically important development under majority foreign ownership, although such structures are not inherently unusual in international infrastructure investment. The relevant questions concern the commercial terms, the allocation of risks and the protections available to Sri Lanka if the venture failed to proceed.

The Ports Authority has now announced its intention to pursue a replacement development through a competitive public-private partnership process. In principle, competitive procurement can improve transparency and produce stronger commercial outcomes. But a new bidding exercise does not answer why the previous arrangement collapsed, what obligations remain outstanding or whether the State has recovered everything to which it is contractually entitled.

The Government should disclose the reasons for termination, subject to legitimate commercial confidentiality, and explain whether the original agreements contained provisions governing compensation, delays and withdrawal by investors. It should also establish whether any expenditure incurred by the Ports Authority can be recovered. Without that information, the public is being asked to move from one investment announcement to another without understanding what happened to the first.

There is a wider economic dimension. Colombo's port facilities are among Sri Lanka's most important revenue-generating assets, and their development has implications for shipping lines, logistics operators, employment and foreign exchange earnings. Delays in expanding capacity or introducing new services can carry opportunity costs even where those costs do not appear directly in a company's financial statements. A project that fails before delivering its promised facilities represents more than a disappointing corporate transaction.

The proposed replacement venture must therefore be assessed against clear commercial and operational benchmarks. The public should know what infrastructure will be delivered, the expected investment, the timetable, the proposed ownership structure and the safeguards protecting the State's interests. Parliament should also have an appropriate opportunity to scrutinise significant long-term commitments involving public assets.

Be that as it may, Sri Lanka cannot afford to treat major infrastructure announcements as achievements in themselves. Agreements matter only when they produce functioning facilities, sustainable returns and demonstrable benefits to the national economy. The collapse of the South Asia Commercial and Logistics Hub provides an opportunity to examine whether the country's approach to investment negotiations is sufficiently rigorous.

The Government now proposes another partnership. Before celebrating it, the public is entitled to know precisely what went wrong with the last one and who ultimately bears the cost.



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