

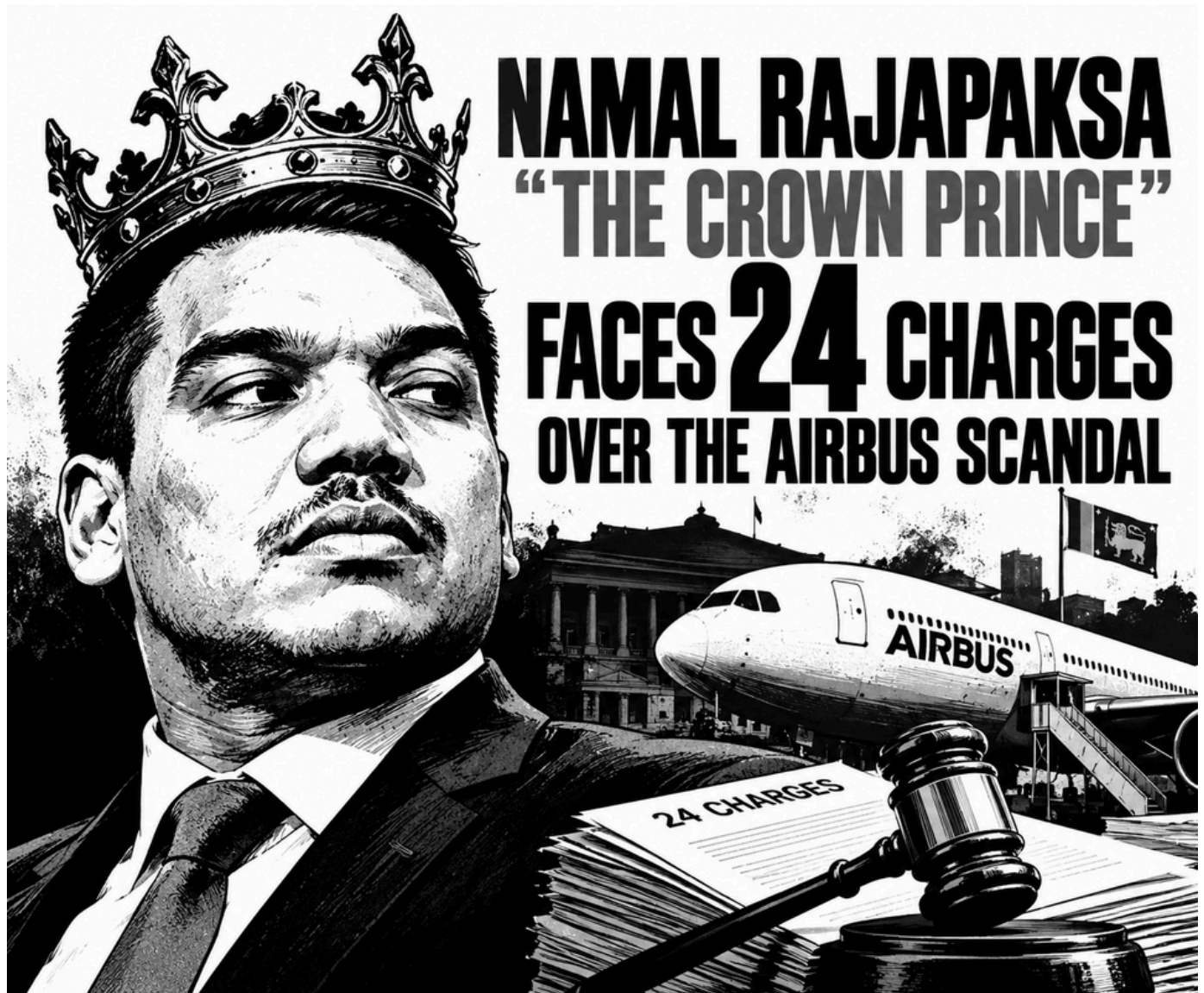


NEWSLINE

Daily by Faraz



**"Questioning
The Answers"**



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NAMAL RAJAPAKSA "THE CROWN PRINCE" FACES 24 CHARGES OVER THE AIRBUS SCANDAL

Namal Rajapaksa is officially facing a special three-judge High Court tribunal after the state filed 24 charges against him over an alleged Rs. 100 million kickback in the Airbus transaction.

State prosecutors presented a witness list of 59 individuals, signaling that one of the country's most infamous financial scandals has finally moved from prolonged police inquiries into active criminal prosecution.

The origins of this scandal reach back to an era of unbridled state procurement where multi-million-dollar fleet purchases by the national carrier were wrapped in opaque layers of intermediaries and political patronage.

Investigators allege that state-backed aviation contracts were systematically exploited for private financial enrichment, leaving the national airline to shoulder crushing debt while individuals connected to the highest corridors of power allegedly pocketed illicit payoffs.

For years, ordinary citizens watched as initial investigations crawled through bureaucratic bottlenecks, breeding widespread cynicism over whether members of powerful political dynasties would ever face genuine legal consequences in local courts.

The procedural steps taken by the judiciary reflect a sharp shift in how high-profile financial crimes are managed. Chief Magistrate Asanga S. Bodaragama made it clear that because the indictments were formally registered before the Permanent Trial-at-Bar with the approval of the Chief Justice, the lower court no longer held jurisdiction to grant bail or issue routine remand extensions.

Ordered to remain in custody until his appearance before the special tribunal, Rajapaksa now confronts a formal judicial mechanism where legal arguments must answer directly to a panel of high court judges rather than political maneuvering.

Yet, as the legal machinery grinds into motion, public skepticism remains entirely understandable.

Sri Lanka's judicial history is littered with grand anti-corruption probes that promised total accountability but ultimately dissolved into endless procedural delays, missing files, and forgotten hearings.

Fifty-nine witnesses and twenty-four charges look formidable on a court docket, but a trial is only as strong as the institutional independence backing its prosecution.

How many times have we watched high-profile indictments dominate morning headlines only to vanish into the slow gears of the legal system?

Will this Permanent Trial-at-Bar finally shatter the unwritten rule that political elite enjoy perpetual immunity, or are we simply watching another expensive legal drama play out for a public desperately tired of waiting for real accountability

SRI LANKA HAS THE SUN, THE WIND AND THE WATER. SO WHY CAN'T WE KEEP THE LIGHTS ON?

Sri Lanka's latest nationwide electricity failure has exposed a familiar contradiction. The country is investing in renewable energy, yet its ageing electricity infrastructure struggles to manage the power already available. The consequences are being borne by consumers, businesses and taxpayers.

Sri Lanka has sunshine in abundance, wind corridors capable of producing substantial electricity and hydroelectric reservoirs constructed through decades of public investment.

Yet the country continues to struggle with power interruptions, rising electricity costs and dependence on imported fossil fuels. The nationwide electricity breakdown on October 17 was another reminder that energy security remains an aspiration rather than an achievement.

The interruption disrupted electricity and water supplies, affecting households, commercial establishments and essential services. It also exposed the vulnerability of a national electricity network that must accommodate changing patterns of generation and consumption. For businesses already contending with increased operating costs, the interruption represented another entirely avoidable burden on productivity.

The government's response has been to reaffirm its commitment to renewable energy, including its ambition to generate 70 percent of electricity from renewable sources by 2030. That objective is both economically sensible and environmentally necessary.

However, the challenge is no longer simply one of generating electricity but ensuring that the national grid can accommodate and distribute it reliably.

Sri Lanka has made substantial progress in rooftop solar generation. Thousands of households and businesses have invested their own money in equipment that reduces dependence on conventional electricity generation.

Yet during periods of particularly strong sunshine, the electricity system can experience difficulties absorbing the available solar supply, requiring restrictions on generation to maintain stability.

That presents an extraordinary contradiction. A country concerned about the cost of imported fuel can find itself unable to use all the renewable electricity its citizens are capable of producing. The difficulty is not the availability of natural resources but the adequacy of transmission infrastructure, storage facilities and the technical systems required to manage increasingly complex electricity flows.

The government has acknowledged the need for substantial investment in transmission networks and battery storage. These measures are necessary, but their implementation must be accompanied by transparent financing arrangements and realistic completion schedules. Sri Lanka has witnessed too many ambitious infrastructure announcements that subsequently become trapped in administrative delays, contractual disputes and shifting political priorities.

**SRI LANKA HAS THE
SUN, THE WIND AND
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There is also the question of fairness to consumers who invested in rooftop solar systems under policies actively encouraged by successive administrations. Changes to electricity pricing and compensation arrangements may become necessary as the energy system evolves. Nevertheless, households and businesses should not be unfairly disadvantaged because policymakers failed to anticipate the consequences of their own incentive schemes.

The broader electricity debate has for years been dominated by disagreements involving public utilities, private generators, trade unions, renewable energy developers and politicians. Each has defended its preferred approach, frequently presenting technical and financial arguments that ordinary consumers have little opportunity to challenge. What is often missing is a serious examination of whether the resulting decisions deliver affordable and reliable electricity.

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For the small manufacturer whose machinery stops during an outage, the debate is not theoretical. Neither is it theoretical for the student preparing for examinations, the hospital maintaining essential equipment or the pensioner attempting to manage a limited monthly income.

Electricity is an essential service, and its reliability should be regarded as a fundamental measure of competent public administration.

The government deserves support where it pursues economically sound renewable energy development. Equally, it must accept responsibility for ensuring that investment in generation is matched by improvements in transmission, storage and system management. Announcing new megawatts is meaningless if the electricity cannot be delivered when and where it is needed.

Be that as it may, Sri Lanka's electricity problem is not principally a shortage of sunshine, wind or water. It is a test of planning, management and institutional accountability. A country blessed with abundant natural resources should not remain vulnerable to darkness because successive administrations failed to build an electricity system capable of using them.

323 CONTAINERS AND A QUESTION CUSTOMS CANNOT AFFORD TO LEAVE UNANSWERED

Parliament's investigation into the release of 323 containers has been given additional time. The controversy is not simply about whether cargo was physically inspected. It concerns the integrity of Customs procedures, the protection of public revenue and the public's confidence that the rules apply equally to everyone.

Sri Lanka Customs occupies an exceptionally important position in the national economy. The department is responsible for collecting substantial public revenue, enforcing import regulations and preventing prohibited or improperly declared goods from entering the country. Its decisions affect government finances, commercial competition and the confidence of businesses operating within the law.

Against that background, the controversy surrounding the release of 323 containers without proper inspection deserves rigorous examination.

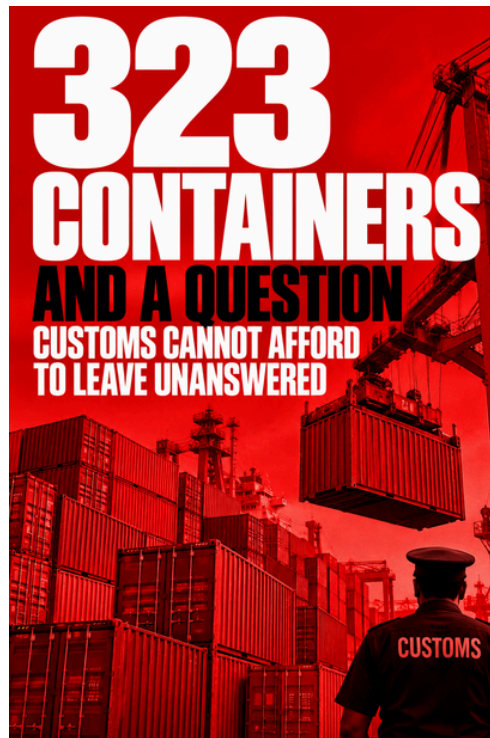
The Parliamentary Select Committee investigating the matter has been granted additional time to complete its work, extending the process until December 21. That extension should provide an opportunity to establish precisely what occurred, who authorised the relevant procedures and whether established safeguards were followed.

It would be irresponsible to conclude that the release of the containers necessarily involved criminal conduct or

revenue losses. Modern Customs administrations routinely employ risk-based clearance systems under which consignments assessed as presenting limited risk may be released without comprehensive physical examination. Such arrangements are necessary for efficient international trade and the timely movement of goods.

The central issue is therefore not whether every container should always be opened. It is whether the decisions concerning these particular consignments complied with established procedures and whether the relevant authorisations were properly documented. If exceptions were made, the public is entitled to know the legal and administrative basis upon which those exceptions were permitted.

The investigation should examine the applicable risk assessments, release instructions and records of any departures from ordinary clearance procedures. It should also establish whether the consignments were associated with particular importers, whether unusual patterns existed and whether any public officials intervened in decisions that should ordinarily have been determined through established administrative processes.



These questions are particularly important because Sri Lanka Customs has reported exceptionally strong revenue performance during 2026.

The department exceeded its annual revenue target ahead of schedule, collecting more than Rs. 2.2 trillion.

That achievement deserves recognition, but strong aggregate revenue collection does not automatically establish that every aspect of Customs administration is functioning effectively.

A department may collect substantial revenue while still experiencing weaknesses in valuation, enforcement or internal controls. Conversely, an individual clearance decision that attracts public controversy may ultimately prove to have been entirely lawful.

The purpose of a credible investigation is to distinguish evidence from suspicion and establish conclusions that can withstand independent scrutiny.

There is also a broader question concerning the relationship between Customs administration and legitimate business. Importers who comply with the law have a right to expect that competitors will not receive improper advantages through preferential treatment. Where such advantages occur, the consequences extend beyond possible revenue losses to the distortion of commercial competition.

Sri Lanka's economic circumstances make the protection of public revenue especially important. Citizens and businesses have been required to accept substantial taxation as part of the country's financial recovery. They are therefore entitled to expect that government institutions will exercise equal diligence in preventing avoidable revenue leakage and ensuring that all commercial operators meet their lawful obligations.

The Parliamentary Select Committee must resist the temptation to produce a report consisting primarily of procedural descriptions and general recommendations. Its findings should identify the decisions examined, the evidence considered and the applicable legal framework. Where wrongdoing is established, responsibility must be determined through appropriate legal processes.

Equally, if the investigation establishes that the releases complied with the law, that conclusion should be supported by sufficient documentary evidence to restore public confidence. The purpose of parliamentary scrutiny should not be to manufacture guilt but to establish the truth. Neither political convenience nor public pressure should determine the outcome.

The government has repeatedly placed accountability at the centre of its political identity. This investigation provides an opportunity to demonstrate that accountability is not confined to high-profile political prosecutions but extends to the ordinary administration of public institutions. Effective governance requires consistent standards, transparent procedures and a willingness to acknowledge deficiencies wherever they arise.

Be that as it may, the public is entitled to more than an assurance that the matter has been investigated. It deserves to know whether the system worked, whether the rules were followed and whether anyone received treatment unavailable to others. The credibility of Customs cannot be protected by silence. It must be protected by evidence.

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FORTY IRANIAN SAILORS AND A QUESTION OF CONSCIENCE. HUMANITY MUST COME BEFORE POLITICS

Sri Lanka's decision to provide emergency medical assistance to 40 Iranian sailors stranded near its southern coastline has highlighted the difficult intersection of humanitarian responsibility, international sanctions and national interest. The episode raises a question extending beyond diplomacy: what obligations does an island nation have towards people in distress at sea?

Sri Lanka's geographical position has always made the Indian Ocean central to its economy, security and international relationships. The island lies close to some of the world's most important maritime routes, carrying enormous volumes of energy, manufactured goods and essential commodities. That location creates commercial opportunities and strategic significance, but it also imposes responsibilities that cannot always be separated from international political disputes.

The recent medical evacuation of 40 Iranian sailors from vessels near Sri Lanka's southern coastline demonstrated how complicated those responsibilities can become. According to the Foreign Ministry, the sailors were brought ashore at Galle after authorities received a request for emergency medical assistance. Following initial treatment, arrangements were made for their repatriation to Iran.

The operation occurred against the background of continuing hostilities involving Iran and the United States, with Iranian vessels reportedly stranded near Sri Lankan waters as a consequence of restrictions affecting maritime movements.

Sri Lankan authorities had previously acknowledged the presence of 19 vessels approximately 24 nautical miles from the coastline, with reports of shortages affecting their crews.

The government's earlier caution reflected concerns about national interests and the possible consequences of dealings involving sanctioned entities. Those concerns cannot simply be dismissed. Sri Lanka remains economically vulnerable and maintains important relationships with countries whose positions on the conflict differ sharply. International sanctions can create complex legal and commercial risks for shipping agents, financial institutions, fuel suppliers and other service providers.

Government officials therefore have a responsibility to ensure that assistance is provided within the applicable legal framework.

But the existence of sanctions does not eliminate the humanitarian dimension of maritime emergencies. A sailor suffering from a serious medical condition is not merely a representative of the country whose flag his vessel carries. He is a human being requiring assistance, and that distinction matters.

International maritime practice recognises the importance of assisting people in distress at sea, although the precise obligations of coastal states, shipmasters and other parties depend upon the circumstances and applicable law. Sri Lanka's decision to facilitate medical treatment should therefore be assessed not simply as an act of diplomatic accommodation but as a response to an identifiable humanitarian need.

The episode also raises practical questions about the management of future emergencies. If vessels remain stranded in the region, Sri Lanka may receive further requests involving medical treatment, food, drinking water or other essential supplies. Authorities should establish clear procedures for evaluating such requests, including coordination between the Navy, Foreign Ministry, health services, port authorities and relevant international organisations.



A transparent framework would reduce uncertainty and help prevent humanitarian decisions from becoming unnecessarily politicised.

The government should also explain the distinction between prohibited commercial transactions and humanitarian assistance that may be legally permissible. Without such clarity, private service providers may become reluctant to assist even where the law allows them to do so.

That hesitation could have serious consequences for crews facing deteriorating conditions. The issue is not whether Sri Lanka should disregard international legal obligations or expose its economy to avoidable risks. It is whether the country can develop a principled and legally sound approach that protects human life while respecting the complexities of its international relationships.

There is a wider issue concerning Sri Lanka's foreign policy. Successive administrations have emphasised the importance of maintaining balanced international relationships and avoiding unnecessary entanglement in conflicts between major powers.

That approach is understandable for a country whose economic survival depends upon trade, investment and international cooperation.

But neutrality should not be confused with indifference. A state can maintain diplomatic independence while fulfilling humanitarian responsibilities.

Indeed, a consistent commitment to protecting human life may strengthen rather than weaken its international credibility. Sri Lanka has experienced the consequences of conflict, displacement and human suffering within its own borders, and its people understand the importance of assistance offered when political circumstances are difficult.

The government deserves recognition for facilitating the medical evacuation. At the same time, the public is entitled to know whether adequate arrangements exist for future cases and whether humanitarian considerations are being assessed consistently. A principled response to distress at sea should not depend upon the nationality of those requiring assistance or the political preferences of powerful countries.

Be that as it may, the real measure of a nation's independence is not merely its ability to resist external pressure. It is also its willingness to act according to principle when doing so becomes inconvenient. Sri Lanka cannot resolve the conflict in the Middle East, nor can it determine the policies of Washington or Tehran.

But it can decide how it treats forty exhausted sailors who require medical care, and in that decision lies something far more enduring than diplomatic calculation. It lies the question of whether humanity still has a place in the conduct of international affairs.

THE TEA SECTOR WAGE CRISIS: COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS IN ADMINISTRATIVE LIMBO

The ongoing dispute over daily minimum wages for regional plantation company workers has once again reached a deadlock, exposing the deep structural failures of Sri Lanka's traditional tea industry.

Despite multiple wages board notifications and ministerial directives ordering a mandatory increase in the daily basic wage, regional plantation companies continue to challenge the financial feasibility of the mandate in court, citing falling global auction prices, rising fertilizer costs, and declining crop yields.

The result is an administrative stalemate that leaves over one hundred thousand plantation families trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty and economic vulnerability.

For generations, estate workers have formed the backbone of Sri Lanka's foreign exchange earnings, laboring under physically demanding conditions for

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THE TEA SECTOR...

wages that have consistently lagged behind national inflation rates. The reluctance of plantation companies to implement wage increases without corresponding productivity hikes reflects an industry struggling to modernize. While global tea markets increasingly demand certified, ethically produced teas, domestic plantation management models remain largely unchanged from the colonial era, relying heavily on cheap manual labor rather than technological innovation and land productivity enhancements.

THE TEA SECTOR WAGE CRISIS: COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS IN ADMINISTRATIVE LIMBO



The administration's intervention in the wage dispute highlights the limits of state price-fixing in a commercial export sector.

Issuing statutory wage directives without addressing underlying productivity challenges, land usage rights, or tea smallholder logistics creates friction that threatens the long-term viability of the export tea sector.

When plantation companies threaten to reduce working days or scale back estate maintenance to offset higher wage bills, the workers ultimately end up earning the same monthly take-home pay despite higher daily rates.

Resolving the plantation wage crisis requires a fundamental restructuring of the estate management system rather than temporary political band-aids.

Transitioning toward revenue-sharing models, where estate families are granted land plots to manage independently while selling green leaf back to central processing factories, offers a sustainable path forward.

Until the government and plantation companies commit to genuine structural reform, estate workers will remain caught between corporate inertia and state promises that fail to deliver at the end of the month.

INDIA OPENS PORTS TO 25 STRANDED SRI LANKAN FISHING VESSELS AMID CYCLONE ARNAB

When Cyclonic Storm Arnab began rapidly gathering strength over the Bay of Bengal, it left nearly two dozen Sri Lankan multi-day fishing trawlers exposed to violent ocean conditions near India's maritime boundary.

Trapped in deep waters where gale-force winds and rising swell threatened to capsize vessels, the crews faced a perilous situation. However, swift diplomatic action between Colombo and New Delhi led to a critical decision: India opened its territorial waters to provide emergency sanctuary for 25 stranded Sri Lankan fishing boats.

The crisis unfolded as the Department of Meteorology issued an urgent warning for sea areas between latitudes 10°N and 20°N and longitudes 80°E and 95°E.

With Cyclonic Storm Arnab churning toward the Andhra Pradesh coast, meteorologists forecast sustained winds between 80 and 140 km/h and wave heights reaching up to four meters.

Recognizing that the vessels could not outrun the storm or return to Sri Lankan ports in time, the Ministry of Fisheries, Aquatic and Ocean Resources made an emergency diplomatic request to the Indian Government through the High Commission of India in Sri Lanka. India responded promptly, granting permission for the 25 multi-day vessels to cross into its territorial waters and drop anchor at designated safe locations along its coast.

Officials from the Department of Fisheries immediately radioed the stranded crews, ordering them to abandon high-risk fishing grounds and proceed to Indian safe harbors under guided safety protocols.

Meanwhile, vessel owners on the island were briefed on distress procedures as naval and maritime authorities in both countries coordinated to track the fleet's real-time movement. This emergency response offers a notable contrast to the usual news surrounding the Palk Strait and Bay of Bengal, where bilateral maritime headlines are often dominated by illegal trawling disputes, net confiscations, and naval arrests. When severe weather strikes, legal boundaries give way to humanitarian obligation.

The prompt clearance granted to the Sri Lankan trawlers illustrates the practical value of established bilateral disaster response frameworks, proving that humanitarian protocols can operate smoothly even amid complex maritime geopolitics.

But the incident does underscore a persistent structural vulnerability in Sri Lanka's deep-sea fishing sector. As climate change increases the frequency and intensity of unseasonal Bay of Bengal cyclones, multi-day crews spending weeks at sea remain highly exposed to rapid storm development.

While diplomatic intervention secured a safe outcome this time, how much longer can traditional fishing fleets rely on ad-hoc emergency clearances before regional maritime safety standards and early-warning communications are permanently upgraded?

CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY IN PALESTINE: UN INQUIRY DESTROYS ISRAEL'S SELF-DEFENSE NARRATIVE

When the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry released its comprehensive fifth report to the General Assembly, it did not bother hiding behind diplomatic euphemisms.

The findings were stark, brutal, and impossible to ignore. The UN formally concluded that Israeli authorities and security forces have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, including extermination, systematic torture, rape, and severe persecution across the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

With over 75,000 Palestinians killed since October 2023, including at least 21,500 children, the report makes it glaringly obvious that the carnage in Gaza and the escalating violence in the West Bank are part of a coordinated strategy of displacement and destruction rather than isolated military errors.

CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY IN PALESTINE: UN INQUIRY DESTROYS ISRAEL'S SELF-DEFENSE NARRATIVE



Let us point out the obvious. This is not the fog of war or an unfortunate collateral casualty count. This is a deliberate state policy orchestrated from the top down. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his hardline security cabinet have spent years weaponizing starvation, dismantling medical infrastructure, and unleashing settler violence with absolute impunity.

When a state systematically targets schools, hospitals, refugee camps, and humanitarian workers while detaining civilians in conditions explicitly designed to

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inflict maximum physical and mental ruin, the label of genocide is no longer a political exaggeration. It is a documented legal reality.

Yet, holding Netanyahu and his military commanders accountable remains nearly impossible because of the geopolitical armor provided by their international benefactors. In Washington, figures like Donald Trump and successive American administrations have consistently acted as diplomatic bodyguards for the Israeli state.

By offering unconditional military aid, vetoing every meaningful ceasefire resolution at the UN Security Council, and attacking international judicial bodies like the International Criminal Court, Western superpowers have effectively written a blank check for war crimes. They demand adherence to a rules-based international order while actively shielding their closest regional ally from its consequences.

The hypocrisy of the global north stings sharper than any shrapnel. International law is loudly invoked when it suits Western foreign policy objectives, but it is instantly dismissed or undermined when allied regimes are the ones sitting in the dock.

Meanwhile, ordinary civilians in Gaza and the West Bank bear the full weight of this diplomatic cowardice, paying with their lives for a political stalemate designed by men in air-conditioned capitals thousands of miles away.

So where does this leave us? If a United Nations commission can document mass graves, systematic torture, and the extermination of tens of thousands of children yet produce zero practical consequences for the perpetrators, what is the point of international law at all?

If global superpowers continue to grant perpetual immunity to war criminals, are we simply watching the slow death of any collective moral standard on this planet?

PRIDE OVER PAYCHECKS: CAN STRICTER WORKLOAD RULES SAVE SRI LANKAN CRICKET FROM ITSELF?

When Sri Lanka Cricket Transformation Committee member Sidath Wettimuny stepped up to the microphone in Colombo to outline new player regulations, the message was unmistakable.

The era of national cricketers treating the Sri Lankan jersey as a convenient pit stop between high-paying overseas T20 gigs is drawing to a close. Under the newly tightened rules, national players will be restricted to a maximum of two overseas franchise leagues per year, alongside their participation in the domestic Lanka Premier League. For an administration trying to restore discipline to a talent-rich but fragmented national squad, the policy shift marks a long-overdue attempt to put country before commercial contracts.

The rationale behind the crackdown is rooted in recurring logistical and physical embarrassments. In the past, official restrictions on franchise participation existed only on paper. Players frequently bounced from one global league to another, arriving back in Colombo exhausted, jet-lagged, and nursing soft-tissue injuries just days before crucial international series.

Under the proposed measures, the rules have teeth. Players must now return to Sri Lanka at least ten days before any international commitment to complete proper preparation. Furthermore, the issuance of No Objection Certificates for foreign leagues will be directly tied to rigorous player fitness benchmarks.



This friction between national duty and franchise cricket is hardly unique to Sri Lanka, but it hits island boards far harder than heavyweights like India or England. When top-tier domestic stars chase lucrative contracts across global tournaments, the financial temptation is entirely understandable.

Careers in professional sports are notoriously short, and players naturally want to secure their financial futures. Yet, when national representation turns into a tired afterthought where athletes show up undercooked and overplayed, public trust evaporates. Fans sitting in the stands or watching late-night broadcasts do not care about a player's franchise batting average when the national team collapses under basic fitness strains.

The real test of these new regulations await till when a star player pushes back against the restrictions, or when a major league offers a life-changing pay packet that clashes with a home bilateral series. Can piece-of-paper rules and fitness certificates truly compete with multi-million-dollar global T20 markets, or will administrators buckle the moment a key match is lost without our biggest names? If Sri Lanka Cricket expects players to bleed for the flag, it must ensure the system rewards loyalty just as heavily as the global franchise circus does.

U.S. EMBASSY BRINGS AMERICAN INNOVATION TO COLOMBO FOR REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON THE FUTURE OF MARITIME TRADE

SHOWCASING AMERICAN TECHNOLOGY FOR SMARTER, SECURE, MORE CONNECTED PORTS

COLOMBO, October 27, 2026 – Today U.S. Ambassador Eric Meyer addressed port stakeholders from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, and Maldives at a U.S. Embassy-hosted regional workshop showcasing how trusted, secure American technology can transform maritime trade. Bringing together regional port decisionmakers and 11 American technology companies, the workshop highlights U.S. innovations that can streamline port operations, move cargo faster, reduce shipping costs, and strengthen supply chains, while opening new commercial opportunities for American businesses across the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka's Deputy Minister of Ports and Civil Aviation Janitha Kodithuwakku and Sri Lanka Ports Authority Chairman Dr. Parakrama Dissanayake joined the Ambassador for the opening.



Building on the United States' recent announcement of a \$17 million grant to modernize the Port of Colombo, the two-and-a-half-day workshop, Advancing Maritime Single Windows and Port Community Systems, focuses on the digital infrastructure that keeps modern ports moving. The U.S. grant will support the development of two connected systems: a Maritime Single Window (MSW), allowing ships to submit arrival, departure, and regulatory information through one digital platform, and a Port Community System (PCS), connecting shipping companies, port operators, Customs, Immigration, and businesses to exchange cargo and logistics information in real time.

Together, these systems will replace fragmented paperwork and processes with a more efficient, connected network—helping information move ahead of cargo, accelerating approvals, and reducing costly delays.

“The Port of Colombo has earned its place as a major gateway for global trade, connecting American businesses to markets across South Asia and beyond,” said U.S. Ambassador Eric Meyer. “American innovation can help write the next chapter of that story.”

When ports operate smarter, ships spend less time waiting, businesses spend less money moving goods, and families benefit from more reliable trade.



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We want U.S. companies at the forefront of this transformation, bringing world-class technology and expertise to strengthen the supply chains our economies depend on and open new doors for American businesses across the Indian Ocean.”

“Behind every ship arriving in Colombo is a network of people, businesses, and systems that keeps global trade moving,” said Sri Lanka’s Deputy Minister of Ports and Civil Aviation Janitha Kodithuwakku. “By improving how our ports operate and how information is shared, we can reduce delays, lower costs for Sri Lankan exporters and importers, and make our businesses more competitive in international markets. Our partnership with the United States brings valuable technology and expertise to this effort, strengthening Colombo’s role as a regional trade hub and the supply chains connecting Sri Lanka to the world.”

“The future competitiveness of the Port of Colombo will depend not only on how much infrastructure we build, but also how efficiently we utilize the infrastructure we already have. These two digital systems—PCS and MSW—will help us achieve precisely that,” said Sri Lanka Ports Authority Chairman Dr. Parakrama Dissanayake.

Eleven U.S. technology companies participating in the workshop include CargoSprint (Advent eModal), Cavotec USA, Conccentric Industries, ESGPlus, Kale Info Solutions USA, Kaleris, Kavi Global, OptiRiver USA, OSI Systems/Rapiscan Systems, SANS Institute, and Varex, showcasing American solutions in port management, cargo tracking, cybersecurity, and secure data exchange.

Experts from the U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Coast Guard, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection are also sharing their experience in modern port operations, trade facilitation, and security.

The workshop is organized under the Quad Ports of the Future Partnership, an initiative supporting more efficient, secure, and digitally connected ports across the Indo-Pacific.

EUROPE IS REVOLTING. THE REAL CRISIS IS A POLITICAL SYSTEM THAT NO LONGER DELIVERS.

From France’s violent demonstrations to Spain’s housing protests and Belgium’s resistance to austerity, Europe is confronting a deeper crisis of democratic legitimacy. Beneath the unrest lies a generational economic fracture and an uncomfortable question: what happens when citizens retain the right to change their governments, but increasingly doubt their ability to change their circumstances?

By Kithmi Gunaratne

Across Europe, the streets are becoming a referendum on political leadership. In France, hundreds of thousands have protested over deteriorating education, public

services and living costs. Spain’s housing crisis has contributed to the collapse of a parliamentary term, while Belgium has witnessed mass mobilisation against austerity. These movements are neither coordinated nor politically identical, yet they expose a contradiction at the heart of European democracy: political institutions remain established, but the economic settlement that once sustained confidence in them is increasingly difficult to defend.

Europe’s crisis is not that democracy has ceased to offer citizens a voice. It is that political participation increasingly appears insufficient to secure the economic opportunities democracy once promised.

A continent confronting its governments

France illustrates the scale of the discontent. On 17 October, approximately 550,000 people demonstrated nationwide, according to the Interior Ministry, while organisers estimated 800,000. Student protests over educational inequalities had converged with wider grievances concerning purchasing power and public services. Although most demonstrations were peaceful, violent confrontations, looting and attacks on public buildings exposed the severity of the unrest. President Emmanuel Macron’s administration subsequently promised education reforms, including additional university places and changes to admissions. Yet student organisations continued to challenge the adequacy of these concessions.

Spain offers a particularly revealing political comparison. The eviction of 87-year-old Maricarmen Abascal from her Madrid home on 23 September, followed by her death on 7 October, became a symbol of housing insecurity. Demonstrations and protest encampments spread across the country. Parliament’s rejection of emergency housing decrees on 2 October contributed to Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez’s decision to call an early general election for 29 November. Housing had moved beyond an economic grievance to become a question of parliamentary survival.

In Belgium, approximately 30,000 demonstrators marched through Brussels on 9 October, according to police estimates, opposing proposed fiscal measures affecting wages, pensions and purchasing power. Railway workers, teachers, students and civil servants joined the mobilisation, while separate confrontations prompted police to deploy tear gas and water cannons. The breadth of participation illustrated how anxieties over public expenditure can transcend occupational and generational divisions.

These are distinct disputes, with different institutions and political circumstances. Their significance lies not in an imagined European rebellion, but in the recurring difficulty governments face in reconciling economic management with public expectations.

The prosperity that excludes

The economic evidence exposes another dimension of this divide. Eurostat reported that European Union house prices increased by 4.7% in the year to the second quarter of 2026, compared with a 3% rise in rents. Portugal recorded a 16.5% annual increase in house prices, the highest among reporting member states.

Price growth alone cannot establish declining affordability; household incomes, housing supply and borrowing costs also matter. Nevertheless, sustained property inflation exposes an increasingly consequential division between those who own appreciating assets and those whose

earnings must finance access to them. Economic expansion can therefore coexist with diminished opportunity, particularly for younger generations attempting to establish financial independence.

This is the generational contradiction confronting Europe’s social contract. Younger citizens are expected to contribute towards pensions, healthcare and public obligations while facing substantial barriers to the housing and economic security earlier generations associated with stable employment. The issue is not simply whether Europe generates prosperity, but how that prosperity is distributed across generations.

When economic necessity becomes political exclusion

Europe’s postwar settlement emerged from the conviction that democratic stability required more than elections. Public healthcare, education, employment protections and social security established a relationship between political representation and material advancement. The 2008 financial crisis weakened that settlement, while subsequent austerity intensified arguments over who should bear the costs of recovery.

Governments today confront genuine fiscal constraints. Ageing populations, sluggish productivity, debt burdens and increasing defence expenditure restrict their choices. Yet presenting economic decisions as unavoidable technical necessities obscures their political consequences. Budgets determine whose security receives protection, whose opportunities contract and how the costs of adjustment are distributed.

Here lies the deeper democratic problem. Governments derive legitimacy from citizens while defending controversial decisions through fiscal rules, debt obligations and financial-market expectations. These constraints are real, but their distributional consequences remain political choices. When voters can replace governments without perceiving meaningful improvements in their circumstances, democracy risks becoming procedurally functional but materially unresponsive.

The crisis beyond the streets

Economic insecurity also creates opportunities for nationalist and populist movements to channel dissatisfaction towards immigration, national identity and established political institutions. These movements have diverse constituencies and cannot be explained by economic grievances alone. Nevertheless, blaming migrants for structural problems risks obscuring failures of housing investment, productivity and public planning.

Governments must prevent violence and protect democratic freedoms, but restoring order cannot substitute for rebuilding confidence. For countries beyond Europe, including Sri Lanka, the lesson is equally relevant: fiscal reform requires economic credibility, but its durability ultimately depends upon public legitimacy and equitable outcomes.

Europe’s unrest does not establish that democracy has failed. Peaceful protest remains evidence of democratic vitality. The deeper danger is a political system that continues to function institutionally while losing its capacity to deliver materially.

Governments may restore order to the streets, but they cannot indefinitely preserve legitimacy by managing the consequences of an economic settlement they refuse to reconsider. Europe’s real crisis begins when citizens no longer believe that changing their government can change their future.

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