

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

DIGITAL NOMADS:

HAS SRI LANKA SET THE BAR TOO LOW?

All the Twos - 22

BUT IT'S NOT BINGO!

Former Deputy Tourism Minister

FAIZER MUSTHAPHA

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DIGITAL NOMADS: HAS SRI LANKA SET THE BAR TOO LOW? USD 22/DAY

"All the Twos - 22" but its not Bingo!

Former Deputy Tourism Minister Faizer Musthapha questions whether a visa that can translate into a qualifying remittance of just US\$22 per person per day is compatible with higher-value tourism - and says infrastructure and domestic air connectivity require urgent attention

By Faraz Shauketaly

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka's Digital Nomad Visa is coming under scrutiny over whether its comparatively low financial threshold is consistent with the country's wider strategy of attracting higher-value visitors and maximising foreign-exchange earnings from tourism.

Under the Department of Immigration and Emigration's Digital Nomad Visa scheme, the principal applicant is required to demonstrate a minimum monthly remittance of US\$2,000.

The published requirements permit a spouse and dependants to accompany the applicant, with an additional US\$500 monthly remittance becoming necessary only when the number of dependants exceeds two.

The arithmetic is striking. A principal applicant qualifying at exactly US\$2,000 a month has an income equivalent to US\$66.67 a day. Accompanied by one dependant, the qualifying remittance falls to the equivalent of US\$33.33 per person per day. With two dependants it amounts to just US\$22.22 per person per day.

Former Deputy Minister of Tourism Faizer Musthapha PC MP, who has also served in Cabinet, says those numbers appear at odds with the direction in which Sri Lanka should be attempting to take its tourism industry.

Musthapha pointed to Sri Lanka's performance in 2025, when the country recorded its highest annual tourist arrival figure, while arguing that the more important measure for an economy dependent on foreign exchange is not simply how many visitors arrive but how much economic value each visitor leaves behind.

According to official tourism statistics, the average duration of stay had fallen to around 8.2 days in 2025. Taking official tourism earnings, arrivals and the reported average duration together produces an approximate daily tourism yield of US\$164.36 per visitor, Musthapha noted.

Against that background, he questioned the economic logic of setting the Digital Nomad Visa threshold at a level which, for a principal applicant accompanied by one dependant, represents qualifying resources of only US\$33.33 per person per day and, with two dependants, only US\$22.22.

Several tourism industry stakeholders who spoke to NewsLine expressed similar concerns, describing the US\$22-US\$33 equivalent threshold as counterproductive if Sri Lanka's objective is to move towards higher-value rather than simply higher-volume tourism.

The comparison is particularly significant because Sri Lanka has historically generated well over US\$100 per tourist per day over several years. In 2023, official tourism statistics put average expenditure per tourist per day at US\$164.40, with an average stay of 8.44 nights. In 2024, the corresponding daily expenditure figure rose to US\$181.15, while the average stay was 8.42 nights.

The 2025 numbers therefore raise a broader issue. Sri Lanka achieved record arrivals, but the average duration of stay declined and the approximate daily yield calculated from the official statistics slipped from the exceptionally strong level recorded in 2024. The challenge facing tourism policymakers is consequently not simply attracting more people but ensuring that growing arrivals translate into proportionately greater foreign-exchange earnings.

Musthapha said the Digital Nomad Visa should also not be considered in isolation from the wider structural challenges confronting Sri Lanka's tourism industry. He maintained that these issues were worthy of serious consideration by both the Cabinet and industry stakeholders if the country is serious about increasing tourism yield and spreading its benefits more evenly across the island.



Among those challenges, he identified the absence of robust air connectivity to the Eastern Province. Sri Lanka possesses some of its strongest tourism assets along the eastern coastline, yet reaching those destinations remains considerably more difficult than accessing the established tourism areas of the South.

The contrast with the Southern Province is significant. Even without relying on a fully developed international airport to drive its tourism expansion, the South has benefited enormously from the development of the expressway network. Travelling from Bandaranaike International Airport towards the southern beach resorts has consequently become substantially faster and more convenient, strengthening the accessibility of destinations stretching down the western and southern coastline.

Musthapha's argument is that tourism infrastructure has to be viewed as part of the product itself.

An attractive beach or hotel cannot achieve its full economic potential if an international visitor must spend a disproportionate amount of his or her holiday travelling to reach it.

Better connectivity, particularly to the East, could therefore increase both geographical tourism distribution and the commercial viability of investments outside the established southern tourism belt.

He also called for a fresh examination of domestic aviation, arguing that previous attempts by private operators to develop commercially viable internal air services had faced an uneven competitive environment.

Musthapha recalled that private aviation companies had at various times been required to compete with domestic passenger services operated by the Sri Lanka Air Force using helicopters and smaller aircraft. While private operators had to meet the normal taxation and commercial costs associated with running an aviation business, he said the Air Force did not operate under an equivalent cost structure.

The result, he maintained, was an inherently unequal marketplace. A private-sector entrepreneur required to recover aircraft costs, maintenance, insurance, staffing, regulatory expenses and applicable taxes could find it extremely difficult to compete on price with a State military operator whose underlying costs and fiscal obligations were fundamentally different.

Musthapha's contention is not that the State should withdraw from facilitating domestic aviation, but that policymakers should consider whether commercial passenger services can flourish without a genuinely level playing field. If Sri Lanka wants private capital to invest in reliable scheduled connections to tourism destinations, investors must have a reasonable prospect of competing commercially.

The argument has particular relevance to the East. Reliable domestic air links could substantially reduce travelling time to destinations such as Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Pasikudah and Arugam Bay, potentially opening those regions to visitors unwilling to surrender a large portion of an eight-day holiday to road travel.

That becomes even more significant when the average tourist stay has itself fallen to around eight days. Every hour consumed reaching a destination represents time that cannot be spent - and money that cannot be spent - experiencing that destination.

There is an important distinction in the Digital Nomad debate. The US\$22.22 and US\$33.33 figures are not estimates of what digital nomads will actually spend. They represent the minimum monthly remittance requirement divided between the people permitted to reside in Sri Lanka under the visa. A digital nomad may have substantial savings, assets or income above the minimum and could therefore spend considerably more.

That distinction, however, also goes to the heart of the criticism. The visa establishes the financial test by which Sri Lanka decides who qualifies for a year-long stay.

If the Government's intention is partly to attract economically valuable long-term residents, critics question why that test has been set at a level dramatically below the daily foreign-exchange yield historically achieved from conventional tourists.

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DIGITAL NOMADS...

There are compelling arguments in favour of digital nomad visas. Long-stay remote workers provide year-round demand for accommodation, restaurants, transport, telecommunications and other services. They can spread tourism expenditure beyond conventional hotels and resorts and into apartments, guest houses, cafés, small businesses and local communities.

But a long stay does not automatically mean a high-value stay. Someone living in Sri Lanka for twelve months can negotiate long-term accommodation rates, cook at home, use local transport and increasingly consume goods and services as a temporary resident rather than as a conventional tourist.

At an approximate 2025 tourism yield of US\$164.36 per visitor per day, 30 days of conventional tourism would represent almost US\$4,931 in tourism receipts. By contrast, the minimum remittance required for the principal Digital Nomad Visa applicant - potentially accompanied by two dependants - is US\$2,000 for the same period.

Put another way, the US\$22.22 per-person daily equivalent for a three-person digital-nomad household represents less than 14 per cent of the approximately US\$164 daily tourism yield calculated for 2025. For an applicant with one dependant, the US\$33.33 equivalent is about one-fifth.

No tourist arriving in Sri Lanka is required to spend US\$164 a day, nor should the tourism-yield statistic be confused with an immigration requirement. The comparison instead exposes a policy question: if Sri Lanka has historically been capable of generating considerably more than US\$100 per visitor per day, what economic objective is served by establishing such a modest financial floor for foreigners being permitted to reside here for an entire year?

For Musthapha, however, the debate needs to go considerably further than changing a number on a visa application. Sri Lanka must consider the entire tourism value chain: whom it wants to attract, how much those visitors can contribute, how easily they can reach destinations around the island and whether the regulatory environment encourages private investment capable of improving the tourism product.

Record arrivals are valuable, but arrivals alone are an incomplete measure of success. Tourism ultimately has to be measured against foreign-exchange earnings, visitor yield, investment, employment and how widely those economic benefits are distributed across Sri Lanka.

The Digital Nomad Visa therefore presents a useful opportunity for a wider review rather than an argument for abandoning the concept. The Government could reconsider the income threshold and treatment of dependants while simultaneously examining domestic aviation, eastern connectivity and the competitive conditions confronting private operators willing to invest in tourism infrastructure.

Be that as it may, the central contradiction remains difficult to ignore. Sri Lanka's conventional tourism industry has consistently generated well above US\$100 per visitor per day in recent years, yet its new Digital Nomad Visa can admit a principal applicant and two

dependants on a qualifying monthly remittance equivalent to just US\$22.22 per person per day.

Mr Musthapha noted that if Sri Lanka genuinely intends to move from counting tourists to measuring their economic value, the debate cannot end with how many people arrive.

He stressed, "It must include who they are, what they contribute, where they travel and whether the country has built the infrastructure necessary to persuade them to spend more of both their time and their money here."

EDITORIAL

GOVERNMENT DOES NOT COME WITH A LIMITED WARRANTY

From digital nomads and diminishing tourist stays to overcrowded prisons and repeated outbreaks of unrest, governing requires looking at the whole machine - not repairing whichever warning light happens to be flashing

There is something curious about the way public policy is increasingly discussed in Sri Lanka. A problem emerges, a response is announced and attention moves to the next problem. Yet government is not a used-car salesman entitled to offer the country a limited warranty, covering the engine while carefully excluding the gearbox, electrics and everything else likely to go wrong.

Take tourism. Sri Lanka wants more visitors, more foreign exchange and, understandably, new categories of travellers. The Digital Nomad Visa therefore sounds attractive. It associates the country with a modern, internationally mobile workforce whose members can theoretically live here for extended periods while earning their incomes elsewhere.



But the real question is not whether Sri Lanka should welcome digital nomads. Of course it should. The question is what kind of digital nomad Sri Lanka is attempting to attract and what economic return the policy is designed to produce.

A qualifying income threshold of US\$2,000 a month deserves scrutiny when measured against the country's tourism ambitions. For two people travelling together, that figure can translate into remarkably modest daily spending capacity. If Sri Lanka is attempting to move towards higher-value tourism, policy should encourage precisely that outcome rather than simply adding another category to the arrival statistics.

That becomes still more relevant when the average duration of a visitor's stay has reportedly fallen to a little over eight days. The headline arrival number may look impressive, but tourism economics cannot be measured by heads passing through immigration alone. How long visitors remain, how much they spend, where that money is spent and how widely the benefits travel through the economy matter considerably more.

The same need to examine the whole rather than its most convenient component applies somewhere considerably less glamorous: Sri Lanka's prisons.

There has been too much *kalabala* behind prison walls at too many locations for every incident simply to be placed into its own convenient box. Negombo erupted. Mahara followed. Other disturbances and security concerns have placed the prison system under increasing scrutiny. At some point the question must move beyond what happened at each individual institution to what they have in common.

Is the common denominator overcrowding? Drugs? Organised criminal networks? Inadequate intelligence? Staffing deficiencies? Rival gangs? Corruption? Poor classification of prisoners? Or is it an unhealthy combination of several of them?

That is precisely why an investigation which confines itself to identifying who started a particular disturbance risks missing the larger danger. Government should be looking at the prison estate from above - drone-like, if you will - rather than examining each outbreak through the narrow window of the particular cellblock in which it occurred.

Overcrowding makes that examination urgent. Sri Lanka's prisons have for years accommodated populations far beyond their designed capacity, with some measurements of the system placing occupancy at several times its intended capacity.

Once human beings are compressed into institutions on that scale, almost every other problem becomes more difficult: security, sanitation, rehabilitation, medical care, segregation of dangerous offenders, protection of vulnerable prisoners and the ability of officers to maintain order.

Outside the Colombo prison complex stands a message declaring, in effect, that prisoners have human rights too. It expresses an important principle.

A prison sentence removes liberty; it does not remove humanity.

But when institutions are packed to multiples of their designed capacity, those words risk becoming an indictment rather than an aspiration. The State cannot proclaim the rights of prisoners at the gate while maintaining conditions inside that make the practical enjoyment of those rights increasingly difficult.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake himself, while in Opposition, spoke of the rights of those held in correctional institutions and of the State's responsibility towards people in its custody. The principle was correct then. Holding office now provides the opportunity - and imposes the responsibility - to give practical effect to it.

And herein lies the connection between two subjects that otherwise appear worlds apart.

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DIGITAL NOMADS...

A Digital Nomad Visa cannot be judged merely because a visa has been created. Tourism cannot be judged merely by the number of arrivals. Prison reform cannot be judged merely by restoring order after another disturbance. Human rights cannot be satisfied merely by placing the correct words on a board outside a prison.

Government is the business of joining the dots.

If tourists are staying for only eight days, ask why and design policy to make them stay longer and spend more. If digital nomads are being invited, determine what kind of visitor Sri Lanka wants and what economic contribution the scheme should reasonably produce. If prisons repeatedly erupt, stop treating every eruption as an isolated fire and determine what combustible material is common to them all.

If prisons are grotesquely overcrowded, address the remand system, sentencing alternatives, rehabilitation, capacity and administration rather than simply deploying additional security after trouble begins.

A government cannot sell policy with a limited warranty. It owns the engine, the gearbox, the steering and the brakes.

The electorate bought the whole car.

Be that as it may.

RESERVES EDGE HIGHER - BUT THE RUPEE TELLS ANOTHER STORY

Sri Lanka's official reserves rose to US\$6.59 billion in July, offering another measure of stability - although continuing pressure on the currency provides an important qualification

By NewsLine

COLOMBO, Sunday - Sri Lanka's gross official reserves increased to US\$6.591 billion at the end of July, rising by US\$133 million from US\$6.458 billion in June, according to the latest figures attributed to the Central Bank.

The month-on-month increase amounts to approximately 2.1 per cent and provides another positive indicator as Sri Lanka continues the lengthy process of rebuilding the external buffers that were severely depleted during the economic crisis. The improvement will inevitably be welcomed by the Government as evidence that the country's external position remains considerably stronger than during the worst period of the crisis.

There is, however, another side to the numbers. The Central Bank reported at the end of July that the Sri Lankan rupee had depreciated by 7.8 per cent against the US dollar since the beginning of 2026, attributing external-sector pressure partly to the conflict in the Middle East. The Bank nevertheless said the pace of depreciation had moderated following monetary, fiscal and macroprudential measures.

That makes the latest reserve figure encouraging without necessarily making it a declaration of victory. Reserve accumulation provides the country with greater protection against external shocks, but Sri Lanka remains exposed to energy prices, geopolitical disruption, debt obligations and movements in foreign exchange earnings.



The more important test, therefore, may be whether the country can continue building reserves while maintaining currency stability and generating foreign exchange through exports, tourism, investment and remittances rather than depending excessively on borrowing.

For a country that discovered only four years ago what happens when foreign currency buffers disappear, US\$6.59 billion represents considerable progress. Be that as it may, the real measure of recovery will be whether those reserves can be strengthened while the economy itself becomes capable of earning substantially more dollars.

NEW PASSPORTS UNDER SCRUTINY AFTER QUALITY CLAIMS

Opposition MP says Sri Lankan travellers have encountered problems overseas; Government rejects allegations over the quality of the newly issued documents

By NewsLine

COLOMBO, Sunday - Questions have emerged over Sri Lanka's newly issued passports after Opposition MP Mujibur Rahman told Parliament that problems with the documents had allegedly resulted in difficulties for Sri Lankan travellers passing through foreign immigration controls.

Rahman told Parliament that a former Sri Lankan parliamentarian had been detained and questioned by British immigration authorities after the new passport reportedly could not be properly read, leading officials initially to suspect that the document might not be genuine. The allegation has not been independently established, and the Government has disputed claims that the passports suffer from quality defects.

The SJB parliamentarian also questioned the reduction in the number of passport pages from 64 to 48 while the Rs.6,000 issuance charge remained unchanged.

He alleged that the new documents lacked observation or extension pages and claimed that printing quality was inadequate, including instances where immigration stamps could bleed through the paper.

Public Security and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ananda Wijepala rejected the allegation that the passports were of inferior quality.

He said the reduction in pages was consistent with international standards and pointed out that other countries had adopted similar arrangements. The Minister also said litigation surrounding the procurement of five million passports remained before court while the Government continued efforts towards introducing an e-passport.

The competing claims leave an obvious question that should be relatively straightforward to settle.

If Sri Lankan passport holders have encountered difficulties because foreign border-control equipment cannot reliably read the documents, the authorities should establish how many such incidents have been reported, in which jurisdictions they occurred and whether foreign immigration authorities have formally raised concerns.



A passport is not simply another document produced by the State. It is Sri Lanka's principal internationally recognised identity document, and even isolated questions over its readability or security can create considerable difficulty for travellers.

The Government is therefore entitled to reject allegations it considers unfounded. Be that as it may, publication of the technical standards and clarification of whether any formal complaints have been received from overseas authorities would do considerably more to settle the issue than political assertion from either side.

GRENADE ATTACK ORDERED FROM OVERSEAS, POLICE SAY

Four arrested over Ratmalana attack as investigators point once again to an alleged overseas link and rivalry between organised criminal groups

By NewsLine

COLOMBO, Sunday - Four suspects have been arrested over a grenade attack on a residence in Ratmalana, with Police investigations indicating that the assault was allegedly carried out on the instructions of an organised criminal operating from overseas.

The attack took place on August 5 at a house on Sri Gnanendra Mawatha in Ratmalana, where two hand grenades were reportedly thrown at the residence. One exploded while the second failed to detonate, but no deaths or injuries were reported.

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GRENADE ATTACK...

Mount Lavinia Police subsequently launched an investigation and arrested four suspects during operations conducted in Moratuwa and Ratmalana on Saturday. The suspects, aged 21, 26, 28 and 30, are residents of the two areas.



More significantly, preliminary investigations have led Police to believe that the attack was ordered by an organised criminal presently living overseas and was connected to a dispute involving rival criminal groups. That aspect of the investigation once again raises the increasingly familiar problem of Sri Lankan criminal networks allegedly being directed by individuals who remain beyond the immediate reach of local law enforcement.

The Ratmalana incident may therefore be considerably more than an isolated attack on a private residence. If investigators establish that the instructions originated overseas, attention will inevitably turn to how such orders are transmitted, how locally based operatives are recruited and financed, and whether the financial and communications trails can be used to identify those directing violence from abroad.

The arrests represent an important first step. Be that as it may, the greater challenge for law enforcement is increasingly not merely catching those accused of carrying out the instructions, but reaching those alleged to be giving them.

372,310 FACE THE A/L TEST FROM MONDAY

One of Sri Lanka's biggest annual examinations begins at 2,532 centres with candidates urged to arrive early and comply strictly with examination rules

By NewsLine

COLOMBO, Sunday - More than 372,000 students will begin sitting one of the most consequential examinations of their lives on Monday when the 2026 GCE Advanced Level Examination gets underway across Sri Lanka.

The examination will run from August 10 until September 5 at 2,532 examination centres throughout the country. According to Commissioner General of Examinations Indika Kumari Liyanage, 372,310 candidates are expected to sit the examination, comprising 264,496 school candidates and 107,814 private candidates.

The Department of Examinations has established 326 coordinating centres and 32 regional collection centres as part of the nationwide operation required to conduct the examination. The official amended timetable has also been published by the Department.

Candidates have been advised to arrive at their examination centres sufficiently early and to ensure they carry the required admission documentation. The examination authorities have also reminded candidates to observe the regulations governing the examination, an exercise which requires extensive coordination among schools, examination officials, Police and other public institutions.



The Advanced Level examination occupies an unusually important position in Sri Lanka because performance determines access to the country's highly competitive State university system. For tens of thousands of young Sri Lankans, the examination beginning Monday therefore represents considerably more than another academic assessment.

It will also be a major logistical exercise extending over almost four weeks. Be that as it may, behind the statistics are 372,310 individual candidates for whom Monday morning marks the beginning of a potentially life-changing few weeks.

INDIA SENDS MORE BRIDGES - BUT THE BIGGER TEST IS REBUILDING WHAT DITWAH DESTROYED

Third consignment brings five more modular bridges as part of New Delhi's US\$450 million reconstruction package; Indian Army engineers will install them across Sri Lanka

By NewsLine

COLOMBO, Sunday - India has handed over another major consignment of Bailey bridges to Sri Lanka as the rebuilding of roads and other infrastructure destroyed by Cyclone Ditwah continues, more than eight months after the disaster exposed the vulnerability of transport links across several parts of the country.

The latest consignment, weighing approximately 251 metric tonnes, forms part of India's US\$450 million post-disaster reconstruction and rehabilitation assistance package.

The third donation comprises five modular Bailey bridges valued at more than US\$5 million, according to reports on the handover.

India's Deputy High Commissioner Maitrey Kulkarni handed over the latest equipment to Deputy Minister of Co-operative Development Upali Samarasinghe.

The Indian High Commission said Indian Army engineers would install the bridges at locations across the island in an effort to restore connectivity and strengthen infrastructure damaged by the cyclone.



The bridges are, however, only one component of a considerably larger Indian commitment.

The US\$450 million package announced in December comprises US\$350 million in concessional Lines of Credit and US\$100 million in grant assistance, placing India among the most significant external contributors to Sri Lanka's post-Ditwah reconstruction programme.

The scale of the work confronting Sri Lanka remains substantial. In the aftermath of Ditwah, a parliamentary oversight committee was told that the Road Development Authority alone had suffered losses approaching Rs.75 billion from damage to roads and bridges.

Restoring a bridge is therefore not merely an infrastructure project: in rural communities it can determine access to schools, hospitals, markets and employment.

There is also a broader question for the Government. Eight months after the cyclone, the public should be able to see not simply how much assistance has been pledged, but where reconstruction money is being spent, which projects have been completed, which remain outstanding and when communities still living with damaged infrastructure can expect normal connectivity to return.

The Bailey bridges provide a highly visible example of reconstruction actually reaching the ground. Be that as it may, US\$450 million is a substantial programme, and its ultimate success should be measured not by the value of assistance announced or equipment handed over, but by how quickly damaged communities are reconnected and permanent infrastructure is restored.

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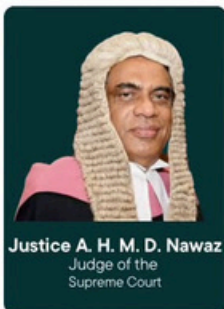
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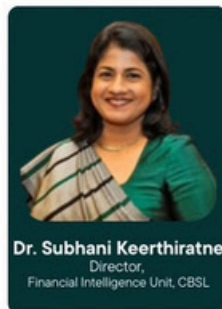
SEMINAR ON THE CHANGES TO SRI LANKA'S ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING REGIME

Three amendments were passed by Parliament on 9 July 2026 to strengthen Sri Lanka's AML/CFT regime in line with international standards and enhance the country's framework for combating money laundering, terrorist financing, and financial crime.

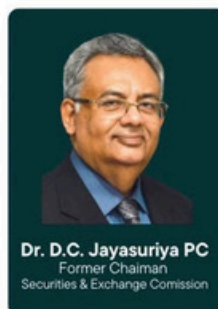
Guest Speaker



Key note Speaker



Speakers



This seminar will discuss the changes made to the following Acts that are crucial and needs to be complied by the financial institutions and stakeholders. The Three Acts that were amended are,

1. Prevention of Money Laundering Act, No. 5 of 2006 (as amended)
2. Financial Transactions Reporting Act, No. 6 of 2006 (as amended)
3. Convention on the Suppression of Terrorist Financing Act, No. 25 of 2005 (as amended)

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