Issue No. 423 9th NOVEMBER 2026 CEYLON INDEPENDENT @+94 77 230 0305

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

ISRAEL AT THE CROSSROADS:

NETANYAHU'S SURVIVAL STRATEGY THREATENED AS EISENKOT GETS THE MANDATE



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ISRAEL AT THE CROSSROADS: NETANYAHU'S SURVIVAL STRATEGY THREATENED AS EISENKOT GETS THE MANDATE

Israeli President Isaac Herzog has officially handed former military chief Gadi Eisenkot the first crack at piecing together a governing coalition following the rather messy October 27 general election. The decision came after 67 lawmakers in the 120-seat Knesset threw their weight behind Eisenkot during presidential chats, leaving incumbent Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu trailing behind with just 46 backers.

Still, the brutal arithmetic of Israeli parliamentary politics means Eisenkot is in for a proper uphill struggle. His core four-party alliance commands a modest 48 seats, while Netanyahu's right-wing and religious bloc sits on 53. Arab-led parties scored a record 19 seats and backed Eisenkot simply to freeze out Netanyahu, but the former general has already ruled out inviting them into formal cabinet chairs. Eisenkot now has 28 days to charm rivals, settle feuds, and land a 61-seat majority, or face another deadlock that sends voters straight back to the polling booths.

Handing over the mandate is a massive bump in the road for Benjamin Netanyahu, but it also lays bare the absolute fracture running through Israeli public life. For millions of citizens, this vote was never about dry policy papers or standard fiscal debates. It was a straight-up national referendum on Netanyahu himself, a man whose stubborn hold on the top job has left the country split right down the middle.

Public opinion across the nation is a proper battlefield. Die-hard supporters still view Bibi as the ultimate political chess master and an indispensable guard dog for national security. On the flip side, a fed-up and increasingly loud majority sees a leader who has spent years putting his own political survival ahead of basic state stability. Constant street protests, public burnout, and genuine outrage over government antics have turned daily politics into a non-stop soap opera of mistrust.

At the heart of Netanyahu's desperate scramble to hang onto the keys of official office lies a very personal headache: his looming court dates. Facing serious trial charges including bribery, fraud, and breach of trust, the Prime Minister's chair isn't just a position of authority for him, it is his primary get-out-of-jail card. Staying at the top gives him the muscle needed to push through judicial tweaks, spar with prosecutors, and drag his heels through the legal system. For Bibi, losing power isn't just an awkward career setback, it carries very real, very unappealing legal consequences.

This existential fight to dodge the dock explains why Netanyahu clung so tightly to his hardline partners in the first place. His coalition with far-right and ultra-Orthodox outfits was stitched together precisely because those groups were happy to offer him legal cover in exchange for policy wins and state cash.

It is worth noting however, that while political commentators in West Jerusalem endlessly obsess over Knesset mathematics and Netanyahu's personal legal troubles, the true weight of his decades-long tenure has been borne by Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. For millions, Netanyahu's time in power represents far more than clever political maneuverings or domestic soap operas. It stands as an era of calculated territorial fragmentation, systematic displacement, and unprecedented humanitarian disaster.

For years, Netanyahu's strategy toward Palestine relied on a divide-and-rule playbook, keeping the Palestinian Authority weak in the West Bank while propping up Hamas in Gaza specifically to ensure Palestinians remained politically split and unable to press for an independent state. What followed under his war cabinet was a military onslaught of staggering proportions, leaving more than seventy percent of Gaza's residential infrastructure in ruins, wiping entire extended families off the civil registry, and reducing historic urban centers to sprawling fields of gray dust.

The physical destruction of Gaza was accompanied by engineered humanitarian horror. Hospitals were flattened or stripped of power, water sanitation networks were systematically dismantled, and basic food shipments were restricted to the point where international agencies warned of human-made famine.

In the occupied West Bank, Netanyahu's reliance on extreme right-wing coalition partners opened the floodgates for state-sanctioned land grabs and aggressive settlement expansions, while armed settler violence and arbitrary raids turned daily life into an exhausting exercise in survival.

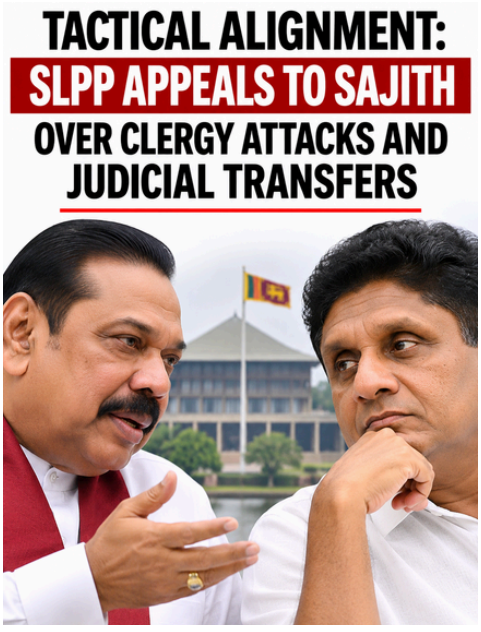
The political tragedy facing Palestinians is that even as Netanyahu's hold on power wavers, the political alternative offers little comfort. Gadi Eisenkot, the former military chief now tasked with forming a new Israeli government, brings his own heavy footprint to the Palestinian context.

As creator of the infamous Dahiya Doctrine, which calls for using disproportionate force and razing civilian infrastructure in enemy territory, Eisenkot's military career is defined by aggressive campaigns against Palestinian populations. Furthermore, Eisenkot has explicitly rejected a two-state solution and supports continued settlement presence in the West Bank.

Now, with Eisenkot holding the official pen to draft the next administration, the cracks in Netanyahu's defensive wall look wider than ever. Over the next four weeks, Israel finds itself at a massive crossroad. The country must decide whether to gamble on a fragile new coalition guided by a quiet former general, or watch its longest-serving political survivor pull out every trick in the book for one last, chaotic stand.

TACTICAL ALIGNMENT: SLPP APPEALS TO SAJITH OVER CLERGY ATTACKS AND JUDICIAL TRANSFERS

In an interesting turn of parliamentary strategy, the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) has formally reached out to Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa, seeking his direct intervention to force two high-priority parliamentary debates. The request, delivered through an official letter penned by SLPP General Secretary Attorney Sagara Kariyawasam, spotlights two sensitive national flashpoints: targeted pressures against the Buddhist clergy and sudden transfers within the judiciary.



The timing of the SLPP's outreach is obviously calculated. With the upcoming Budget debate set to dominate the parliamentary calendar and absorb national attention, Kariyawasam warned that these pressing issues risk being pushed to the sidelines unless the opposition acts in unison to secure immediate debate floors.

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

TACTICAL ALIGNMENT...

The first issue raised by the SLPP focuses on growing concerns regarding Buddhist monks, citing recent incidents involving law enforcement actions, institutional scrutiny, and coordinated social media campaigns aimed at members of the clergy. By bringing the matter to Premadasa, the Pohottuwa leadership is attempting to rally broader opposition resistance around traditional cultural and religious sensitivities.

The second, and politically sharper, issue targets the executive apparatus directly. Kariyawasam highlighted the sudden transfers of judges who had recently issued rulings or court orders unfavorable to the current administration. Describing these administrative moves as deeply troubling to the public, the SLPP Secretary argued that transparent parliamentary explanations are urgently required to safeguard judicial independence and prevent public trust in the legal system from eroding further.

By appealing to Sajith Premadasa, the SLPP is attempting to leverage the Samagi Jana Balawegaya's procedural weight in Parliament to compel government responses. Whether the Opposition Leader chooses to front this specific two-pronged battle remains to be seen.

FIGHTING CRIME WITHOUT SACRIFICING FREEDOM

Sri Lanka needs effective protection against organised crime and terrorism. It also needs laws that protect democratic rights.

Sri Lanka has every reason to confront organised crime and terrorism with determination.

Extortion, drug trafficking, violence and genuine threats to national security undermine freedom as surely as arbitrary state power does. The difficult question is not whether the State needs effective laws. It is whether those laws can be strong enough to protect the public without becoming instruments of fear.

The debate has sharpened around proposed legislation dealing with organised crime and terrorism.

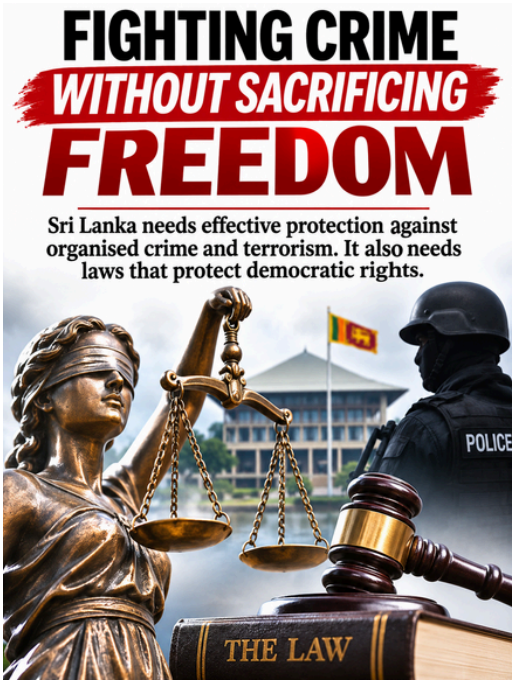
The Prevention of Organised Crimes Bill received its first reading in Parliament on October 20. The Government has described the proposed framework as a means of improving cooperation against serious and transnational criminal activity. Critics of the wider security-law agenda, including trade union and civil-liberties representatives, have warned that expansive powers could threaten lawful dissent.

Both concerns deserve serious consideration. Sri Lankans know the consequences of organised criminal networks operating with impunity. They also know the danger of broad detention powers and inadequate oversight. A democratic government should not be required to choose between security and liberty. Its duty is to secure both.

The first safeguard is precision. Criminal offences must be defined narrowly enough that citizens can reasonably understand what conduct is prohibited. Peaceful protest, robust journalism, industrial action and criticism of public officials should not become vulnerable to interpretation as security threats merely because they inconvenience those in office. A law aimed at violent or organised criminal conduct must say so clearly.

The second is meaningful judicial control. Arrest, searches, surveillance and detention require standards proportionate to the intrusion involved. Where emergency action is genuinely necessary, prompt access to an independent court should follow. Detention should not become a substitute for investigation, and the ability to challenge unlawful action must exist in practice, not only in formal language.

Third, accountability must extend to enforcement. Officers investigating serious crime need training, forensic resources and protection from improper interference. They also need enforceable rules on evidence handling, interrogations and treatment of suspects. Reliable prosecutions depend on admissible evidence and competent investigation. Coercive shortcuts can damage cases and public confidence alike.



The Government could make an immediate constructive move by publishing a clause-by-clause explanation of the bills, identifying the conduct each provision addresses, the powers it grants and the safeguards that constrain those powers. It should invite written observations from the Bar, human-rights bodies, journalists' organisations, trade unions, police investigators and victims of serious crime. Consultation is most valuable before positions harden and amendments become politically embarrassing.

A parliamentary committee could then publish a reasoned response to the principal concerns, showing which recommendations were accepted and why others were rejected. That would not give any interest group a veto over legislation. It would give citizens a clearer account of how competing rights and risks were weighed.

Independent review should not end when a law is enacted. Annual public reporting on arrests, detention periods, prosecutions, convictions, complaints and judicial findings would reveal whether exceptional powers are being used as intended. Sensitive operational details can be protected without concealing the overall pattern of enforcement.

A mandatory review after two or three years could allow Parliament to amend provisions that prove ineffective or disproportionate.

A further practical distinction is essential: organised crime is not defeated by legislation alone. Investigators require financial intelligence, witness protection, cross-border cooperation and the ability to trace criminal proceeds. Courts require capacity to hear complex cases without intolerable delay. Where existing institutions are weak, adding new offences may generate more arrests without producing more convictions.

The opposition must approach the issue responsibly as well. It should identify specific provisions it considers defective and propose workable alternatives, rather than treating every security measure as inherently illegitimate. The Government, in turn, should resist the temptation to dismiss all criticism as sympathy for criminals. Neither posture serves victims or the wider public.

Sri Lanka's history makes this debate especially consequential. Governments change, but the powers written into law remain available to their successors. A safeguard that seems inconvenient to today's administration may prove indispensable to tomorrow's opposition, journalist or ordinary citizen.

Be that as it may, a confident State should not fear judicial scrutiny, transparent procedures or public consultation. Those are not obstacles to effective law enforcement. They are the conditions under which lawful authority earns public trust. Sri Lanka can confront dangerous criminals without weakening the freedoms it is obliged to defend.

THE SCAM CAPITALS: IS SRI LANKA BECOMING THE NEW HUB FOR CHINESE CYBER-CRIME SYNDICATES?

The recent police raid on a quiet hotel in Nalluruwa, Panadura, yielding thirty-two Chinese nationals and twenty-three desktop computers, is no isolated incident. It is the latest data point in a troubling narrative: Sri Lanka is fast evolving into an operational base for international online financial syndicates. According to police statistics, law enforcement authorities across the island have arrested well over 1,000 foreign nationals in targeted operations over recent years. The criminal network spans several countries, pulling in operators from India, Nepal, and Thailand, but Chinese syndicates remain the dominant backbone of the trade.

The shift toward Sri Lanka comes down to regional push factors combined with local vulnerabilities. Intensive military and police roundups across Southeast Asia, particularly along the border zones of Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos, forced criminal syndicates to relocate their server setups and personnel elsewhere.

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

THE SCAM CAPITALS...

On-arrival tourist visas and lenient entry requirements allow operators to rotate large batches of foreign workers into the island with minimal initial friction. Post-crisis hotel operators, eager for steady long-term bookings, frequently rent out entire wings, boutique resorts, or coastal guesthouses without scrutinizing internal activities or massive bandwidth consumption. High-speed internet combined with fragmented cyber monitoring creates an ideal operational environment for high-frequency financial scams, range trading platforms, and pig-butchering operations.



Sri Lanka's multi-agency response, involving the Criminal Investigation Department, the Police Special Task Force, and the Police Kennels Division, has demonstrated a capacity for tactical raids when specific intelligence surfaces. Courts regularly issue search warrants, equipment is impounded, and suspects are moved into remand. However, intelligence experts point to significant gaps in overall strategy.

Law enforcement relies almost entirely on public hotlines, local tips, and municipal complaints rather than automated digital tracking of unusual network traffic or bulk SIM activations. Raids consistently scoop up lower-tier operators, data-entry handlers, and phone callers, while senior syndicate managers and local facilitators rarely appear on charge sheets. Suspects also face delayed court proceedings, language barrier bottlenecks, and eventual deportation without comprehensive asset recovery or structural dismantling of the local hosting infrastructure.

Sri Lanka's challenge mirrors broader regional struggles. Countries like Cambodia and Myanmar relied on joint police operations with Beijing to process thousands of extraditions, while Thailand tightened banking compliance rules to cut off financial flows. Without a dedicated, centralized cyber-security force and stricter oversight of bulk commercial rentals, Sri Lanka risks shifting from a temporary fallback zone into a permanent regional hub for organized digital fraud.

FOUNDATION PRESSURE: CEMENT PRICE RISE SPIKES SRI LANKA'S CONSTRUCTION COSTS

The price of a 50-kilogramme bag of cement in Sri Lanka has been increased by Rs. 100, pushing retail rates up to between Rs. 2,200 and Rs. 2,350 per bag.

Confirmed by both local manufacturers and importers, the across-the-board hike reflects escalating production expenses, higher freight fees, and persistent input cost pressures across domestic and foreign supply chains.

The economic ripple effect of this price adjustment will be felt immediately across the island's construction sector. For individual homeowners, home building has already become a moving financial target.

With basic materials such as sand, gravel, and structural steel continuing to fluctuate, adding another cost layer to cement forces middle-class families to scale back architectural plans, delay extensions, or halt ongoing home projects mid-construction.

For commercial real estate developers and contractors, the hike compresses thin operating margins. Small-scale contractors, who typically procure supplies on a project-by-project basis rather than through bulk long-term contracts, face immediate cash flow stress.

Fixed-budget public infrastructure projects and private developments will likely face contract revisions or costly timeline extensions, further dampening employment for daily-wage construction laborers.

When viewed within the regional context of South Asia, Sri Lanka's cement market remains uniquely vulnerable. Neighboring economies such as India and Pakistan benefit from extensive domestic limestone reserves, integrated integrated power grids, and massive economies of scale that keep cement prices relatively stable and low.

India's retail cement prices generally hover around equivalent regional baselines due to heavy domestic production capacity and lower internal freight overheads.

In contrast, Sri Lanka relies heavily on imported clinker and raw materials, leaving domestic prices directly exposed to global energy price spikes, international shipping freight volatility, and currency fluctuations.

As more than 60 percent of all building inputs in the country depend on foreign trade lines, any foreign currency pressure or global supply chain friction manifests rapidly as direct retail price increases at local hardware stores.

This latest price revision serves as a stark reminder of the structural fragile state of Sri Lanka's post-recovery construction sector.

Without long-term stabilization of raw material imports and localized manufacturing incentives, the dream of affordable housing and timely infrastructure delivery will remain uncomfortably out of reach for thousands of citizens.

WILL KANDY'S SCATTERED TERMINALS FINALLY MERGE BY 2027?

The announcement that the 69.3 million dollar Kandy Multimodal Transport Terminal (KMTT) will finally open to the public before the third quarter of 2027 carries a familiar sting of post-dated optimism. Speaking during a recent site inspection, Deputy Minister of Transport and Highways Dr. Prasanna Gunasena outlined a phased blueprint that relies on gradual terminal relocations, newly widened four-lane feeder roads, and satellite bus hubs along major entry corridors.

Yet, with official projections placing visible traffic relief as far off as 2029 or 2030, the city's residents and business owners are left dealing with a bitter reality: a decade of administrative stalls, broken promises, and self-inflicted urban gridlock.

To understand how Kandy's predicament, we must look at the geography of a city trapped in a topographical bowl. Nestled between the Hantana mountain range and the Mahaweli River, Kandy's historic heritage core was never designed to absorb the over 380,000 commuters and 50,000 vehicles entering its narrow arterial roads daily.

Rather than modernizing transport infrastructure to match this growth, state planners created a sprawling, unorganized transit nightmare.



The multi-bus-terminal model became Kandy's fundamental urban flaw. Instead of a single hub, nine separate, makeshift bus stands, ranging from Goods Shed to Torrington, Market, and the Clock Tower, were scattered across the city center.

Hundreds of intercity and regional buses were forced to crisscross the city's bottlenecks simply to transfer passengers or idle along narrow curbsides.

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

WILL KANDY'S SCATTERED...

The result was immediate and severe: average vehicular speeds during peak hours plummeted to an agonizing 5 kilometers per hour, turning a brief trip across town into a multi-hour ordeal.

The economic cost of this structural failure has been massive. Studies on Kandy's traffic gridlock revealed that commuters lose up to 27 percent of their monthly productive working hours trapped in traffic queues. For a regional commercial capital, that translates to millions of lost man-hours, wasted fuel, and inflated logistics costs for local supply chains. Tourism, Kandy's primary economic engine, suffered as visitors spent more time stuck in fumes along William Gopallawa Mawatha than visiting cultural sites. Investors routinely bypassed the hill capital for regions with reliable transport networks, freezing high-value commercial development.

The very project designed to fix this mess, the World Bank-funded KMTT at Goods Shed, spent years bogged down in bureaucratic paralysis. Originally envisioned under earlier urban master plans, the project faced endless delays driven by political shifts, land acquisition disputes, and institutional friction between municipal authorities and central government ministries.

The final blow came with the 2022 economic crisis. As foreign exchange reserves collapsed and Sri Lanka defaulted on external debt, construction ground to a complete halt. The designated site sat idle, while the surrounding roads deteriorated into temporary parking zones for idling private and SLTB buses.

Now, as the government resumes work and promises satellite stations along major feeder routes to feed into the newly set 2027 opening target, the one thing we can all say in unison is, it's about time. For over a decade, Kandy was forced to pay the price of state inefficiency in lost revenue, ruined productivity, and suffocating gridlock. Moving nine bus terminals out of the city center is an overdue rescue operation for an economy choked by its own road.

SRI LANKA DIPS ITS TOES INTO PILOTLESS FLYING CARS

While regular Colombo traffic continues to grind to a halt after a heavy downpour, state planners have decided the best way around congested roads is simply to fly over them. Minister Anura Karunatilake announced that Sri Lanka plans to launch commercial passenger drone operations within two to three months, provided initial trial flights scheduled at Colombo Port City go off without a hitch.

The project relies on technology from Chinese firm EHang, which specializes in pilotless electric vertical take-off and landing aircraft. The initial rollout targets high-end tourism, offering visitors aerial views of Colombo before potentially expanding to heritage hotspots like Sigiriya and Jaffna.

Globally, the flying taxi market is projected to swell beyond 17 billion dollars over the next decade, but early adoption around the world remains largely confined to regulatory sandboxes, high-visibility expos, and tightly controlled trial corridors. China has taken the lead in policy backing for its low-altitude economy, yet western regulators are moving far more cautiously over battery range limits, noise profiles, and safety redundancy protocols.



When it comes to the local economic return, expectations need a realistic calibration. While high-tech passenger drones generate undeniable promotional buzz and provide an exclusive attraction for foreign tourists, they do not offer an immediate solution to everyday public transport headaches. Bringing in two-seater autonomous aircraft is an exciting tech milestone, but until the infrastructure scales beyond niche joyrides, the economic impact will stay firmly tied to luxury tourism rather than easing municipal traffic gridlock.

If the Civil Aviation Authority and the Defence Ministry grant final clearance, Sri Lanka will join a select club of countries testing autonomous passenger flights. For now, local commuters can watch pilotless drones float over Port City while waiting for the next bus.

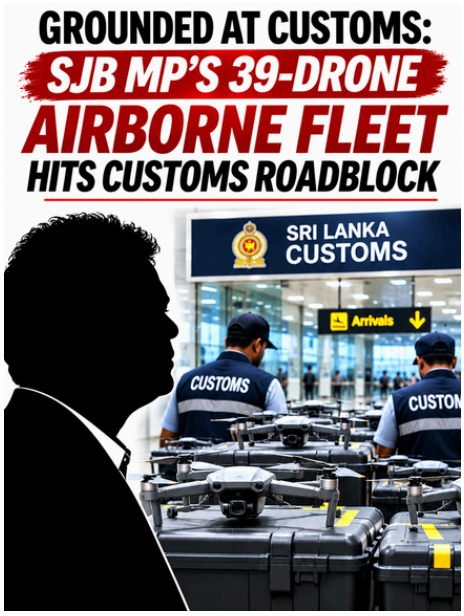
GROUNDED AT CUSTOMS: SJB MP'S 39-DRONE AIRBORNE FLEET HITS CUSTOMS ROADBLOCK

If Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Nalin Bandara Jayamaha was planning a major aerial campaign, Sri Lanka Customs just grounded the entire operation right at the arrival gate.

Customs officials at Bandaranaike International Airport detained a luggage load of thirty-nine drones brought into the island by the opposition lawmaker upon his return from Singapore. According to Customs Spokesperson Chandana Punchihewa, the fleet was impounded on the spot after the MP failed to present the necessary regulatory paperwork required to clear high-tech flying equipment through the green channel.

The detention has triggered a bureaucratic paper hunt. Authorities instructed the parliamentarian to secure and submit formal clearance certificates from a trifecta of state agencies: the Department of Import and Export Control, the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC), and the Ministry of Defence. Until those stamps of approval arrive, all thirty-nine aircraft will remain locked in Customs storage.

The sheer volume of the haul naturally raises a few curious eyebrows across the political establishment. Bringing a single drone home from a trip to Singapore is standard retail therapy for any tech enthusiast, but lugging nearly forty unit devices through airport customs pushes into commercial logistics territory. Whether the MP was acquiring hardware for high-definition election campaign footage, agricultural mapping, or simply stocking up on expensive souvenirs for the opposition frontbenches remains an unsaid mystery.



What is certain is that navigating Sri Lanka's defense and telecommunication permit channels is rarely a swift affair. While Nalin Bandara works his way through the paperwork, his personal air force stays strictly grounded, serving as a thirty-nine-piece reminder that even lawmakers cannot fly past customs clearance.



NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

CAPITAL UNDER WATER: WHY COLOMBO KEEPS SINKING UNDER HEAVY RAIN

If Colombo had an official anthem, as of late, it would feature the sound of car engines dying in four feet of dirty water. In a ritual local residents know all too well, one evening of heavy rain turned city streets into rivers, leaving thousands of commuters stranded, shopkeepers wading through flooded inventory, and city authorities scrambling for emergency blueprints.

The immediate trigger for the chaos was a cloudburst that delivered 129 millimetres of rainfall over the span of a few hours on Friday evening. To grasp the sheer volume of water involved, that equates to roughly 129 litres dumping onto every single square metre of the city in one burst. Multiply that across Colombo's urban footprint, and the skies effectively dropped billions of litres of water onto a concrete jungle with nowhere left for it to soak in.



The physical reality on the ground was immediate and unforgiving. Major thoroughfares across the city transformed into slow-moving canals. Luxury SUVs and modest three-wheelers found themselves equally neutralized, lining flooded roadsides with hazards flashing in unison. Office workers in the central business district found their evening commutes extended into midnight endurance tests, while low-lying residential areas saw water creeping over doorsteps, destroying electrical appliances, and submerging ground-floor living quarters.

As has become custom, the online public reaction moved far faster than the city's drainage capacity. Social media platforms erupted into a frenzy of commentary, satirical memes, and outrage. Citizens posted videos of submerged intersections alongside sharp critiques of decades of urban planning.

Commentators pointed out the absurd predictability of the crisis, noting that every monsoon cycle brings the exact same headlines, the exact same political promises, and the exact same floating plastic containers bobbing down main avenues. The digital debate quickly turned political, with critics demanding accountability while defenders argued that no municipal system could absorb a sudden, tropical deluge of such density.

The government and municipal authorities responded by convening emergency high-level discussions featuring Colombo Mayor Vraie Cally Balthazaar, senior officials from the Urban Development Authority, the Road Development Authority, the Sri Lanka Land Development Corporation, and the Tri-Forces. The official diagnostic, however, produced a stark mathematical paradox: Colombo's existing drainage infrastructure was historically designed to handle roughly 30 millimetres of rainfall per hour. When hit with more than four times that capacity in a single window, the system simply suffered total structural indigestion.

Beyond the raw volume of rain, officials highlighted a familiar triad of systemic failures: decades of unauthorized constructions built directly over natural drainage corridors, indiscriminate plastic waste disposal clogging vital canal networks, and the relentless conversion of natural wetland buffers into concrete real estate. In response, the government announced a special task force to push forward short-, medium-, and long-term remedies. Proposed measures include launching immediate dredging operations, enforcing legal penalties for illegal dumping, and drawing up plans to demolish unauthorized structures blocking major waterways.

Yet for the average Colombo resident who has watched successive administrations announce identical task forces after every major downpour, official assurances are greeted with skepticism. The fundamental way forward requires more than post-disaster committees and temporary water pumps. It demands a serious, long-term overhaul of urban engineering: restoring depleted wetland basins, modernizing subterranean storm-water channels, and enforcing strict zoning laws without political interference. Until those structural changes take precedence over short-term band-aids, the citizens of Colombo can rest assured of one predictable certainty: the next time the clouds burst, they will once again be reaching for their rubber boots.

ASOKA WIJEGUNARATNE

By Faraz Shauketaly

There are some departures that leave us saddened. Others leave us bewildered, searching for answers that may never come. And then there are departures that make us question how much we really understand about the human heart and the human mind. Asoka's departure belongs, painfully, to that last category. To make any sense of a senseless tragedy, one I suppose must appreciate that Love can coexist with distress.

I knew Asoka as a man family man; of warmth, affection and an unmistakable devotion to those he loved. A planter by training, he understood the intricacies of tea – tea production and management held no secrets for Asoka. He carried that knowledge with the quiet confidence of someone who knew his profession well.

But it is not the planter I shall remember most.
It is Asoka the husband, the father the man whose thoughts so often returned to the personswho occupied the very centre of his world.

Vidhya and his three babies.

He married the love of his life. And he once described his love for her in a way that has remained with me ever since. She was, he said, part of his DNA.

I remember thinking how wonderfully uncomplicated that description was. He wasn't searching for poetry. He wasn't trying to impress anyone. He was simply explaining something that, to him, required no explanation.

Loving Vidhya was as natural as breathing. The children - his babies - almost always left him speechless.

I travelled with Asoka in and outside Sri Lanka. And travelling with him revealed another dimension of the man.

There was always a list.

Not a list of places he wanted to see or experiences he wanted to collect. It was a list of things to take home. Goodies, little purchases, things that someone back home might enjoy.Especially for his babies. The kids.

I can still picture him attending to that list with a seriousness that was both amusing and touching.

To an outsider, it might have appeared ordinary. To me, it revealed something rather extraordinary.

Even when he was away, his heart remained at home.

Those little shopping expeditions were, in their own way, expressions of love. He did not need an occasion to remember someone. Remembering was simply part of his being Thaathi.

And I witnessed that affection firsthand.

Which is why the circumstances of his departure are so profoundly difficult to reconcile with the man I knew. In Sri Lanka we must have more assistance for those that need guidance in financial and legal matters. Assistance that inspires the knowledge there are a myriad ways out – that distress is not a solo burden.

We human beings are complicated creatures. We can laugh while carrying sorrow. We can offer comfort while desperately needing it ourselves. We can love another person beyond measure and still find ourselves confronting private difficulties that even those closest to us may never fully understand. And there are stories that will never reveal the answers - some may take them to their graves.

Distress and love are not mutually exclusive.

That is something I believe we must remember when reflecting upon Asoka's final days.

I do not know what thoughts occupied his mind in those last moments. I would not presume to know. And I believe we owe him the dignity of not pretending otherwise.

But I do know something else.

I know the affection I witnessed. I know the tenderness with which he spoke of Vidhya and his babies. I know the man who travelled with a shopping list because taking something home mattered to him.

And I know that a tragic departure cannot retrospectively invalidate a lifetime of love.

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Be that as it may, there will inevitably be questions. There will be sadness, perhaps confusion, and the terrible human temptation to search for explanations where none may be available.

But we should resist allowing the manner of a person's departure to become the definition of his existence.

For Vidhya, and the children, the loss must be beyond anything words can adequately express. No tribute can fill that absence. No explanation can make the silence easier.

But perhaps there is a small measure of comfort in knowing that the love Asoka spoke of was not merely something he declared in private.

Others saw it. I saw it. And I remember it.

Asoka: I wish there had been more conversations, more journeys, more opportunities to laugh about those inevitable shopping lists.

I wish there had been more time.

There is much about life that we cannot understand, and perhaps even more about death that we never will.

But when I think of you, I will not allow the confusion of your departure to overwhelm the warmth of your memory.

I shall remember the planter who knew his craft, the traveller who never forgot home, and the husband who believed his love for Vidhya and the children, was written into his very DNA.

Your final moments do not erase the man you were. Nor do they diminish the love you gave.

Farewell, Asoka. And whenever I think of those shopping lists, I suspect I shall smile.

Even through the confusion.

Rest peacefully,
Faraz Shauketaly



