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"Questioning The Answers"

THE ECONOMY MAY BE RECOVERING. BUT WHO IS RECOVERING WITH IT?

NEWSLINE SPECIAL | BUDGET 2027



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As Sri Lanka prepares for another national Budget, the real test is no longer whether the country can satisfy its creditors. It is whether economic recovery can restore the dignity, purchasing power and financial security of the people who have paid the highest price for it.

Sri Lanka approaches Budget 2027 with an uncomfortable question that cannot be answered by economic statistics alone. Has the country's recovery reached ordinary people, or has it remained largely confined to government balance sheets, international financial institutions and the reassuring language of economic stability? It is a question that deserves an answer grounded in household experience rather than political rhetoric.

A country can improve its foreign reserves, strengthen revenue collection, reduce inflation and restore confidence among international lenders without necessarily improving the daily circumstances of its citizens. Economic indicators may signal that the worst of a national crisis has passed, but they cannot, by themselves, establish that the people who endured that crisis have recovered. The distinction is particularly important in Sri Lanka, where the economic collapse inflicted considerable damage on household savings, incomes and financial security.

For a family struggling to pay electricity bills, purchase medicine, finance a child's education or put nutritious meals on the table, economic recovery is not an abstract achievement. It must be experienced through greater purchasing power, dependable employment, affordable essential services and some reasonable confidence in tomorrow. That is the challenge confronting President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and his administration as the country prepares for another annual Budget.

The Government inherited an economy battered by years of fiscal indiscipline, unsustainable borrowing, poor governance and ultimately sovereign default. Stabilisation was unavoidable, and difficult decisions had to be taken to restore fiscal credibility and international confidence. Any responsible assessment must acknowledge the importance of these measures, even where their consequences have been painful.

Yet stabilisation is not the destination. It is the foundation upon which a broader and more equitable recovery must be constructed. The purpose of restoring the national economy cannot simply be to produce healthier financial statements while leaving large sections of the population struggling to regain the living standards they once enjoyed.

Sri Lanka's economic adjustment has depended heavily on taxation, expenditure restraint and policies designed to restore fiscal sustainability. These measures have helped support the stabilisation process, but their distributional consequences require far greater attention. The burden of adjustment has not necessarily fallen equally upon those with the greatest ability to bear it.

Indirect taxation illustrates the problem particularly clearly. A wealthy household and a family dependent upon a modest monthly salary may pay the same rate of tax on a taxable purchase, although the financial consequences are dramatically different. For one household, the additional expenditure may be barely noticeable, while for another it may mean sacrificing something essential.

Utility charges present a similar dilemma. Financially sustainable electricity and water services are necessary, and permanently subsidising inefficient operations cannot provide a credible long-term solution. Nevertheless, the consequences of tariff structures for lower-income households and small enterprises must be considered alongside the financial requirements of the institutions providing those services.

The answer is not to abandon fiscal discipline or return to indiscriminate subsidies that the country cannot afford. Such an approach would risk undermining the progress already achieved and eventually impose further costs upon the same population it was intended to assist. The more responsible alternative is to design taxation, tariffs and targeted assistance in ways that protect essential consumption while preserving the financial stability of the State.

One of the weaknesses of Sri Lanka's economic debate is its overwhelming dependence upon national indicators. Growth, inflation, revenue, expenditure and debt are necessary measures of performance, but they reveal relatively little about the financial resilience of individual households. A more complete assessment would examine what remains of family income after essential monthly expenses have been met.

How much disposable income does a typical household retain after paying for food, housing, electricity, transport, education and healthcare? How has that amount changed since the economic crisis, and how does it compare with the period before the collapse? These are questions that can be investigated through existing household surveys, labour-market information and more regular publication of carefully designed affordability indicators.

The Department of Census and Statistics, the Central Bank and relevant social protection agencies already possess considerable statistical expertise. Rather than creating another expensive institution, the Government could establish a coordinated household economic security assessment using existing administrative and survey data.

A regularly published measure of household affordability, disaggregated by income group and region, would give policymakers and the public a clearer understanding of whether recovery is being shared.

Such an exercise would also expose the difference between falling inflation and falling prices. When inflation declines, the general price level does not necessarily return to where it stood before the crisis. Prices may simply be increasing more slowly, leaving households to confront permanently higher living costs unless their incomes recover sufficiently.

This distinction is fundamental to understanding public dissatisfaction during periods of improving economic performance. A government may accurately report that inflation has been brought under control while a household may equally accurately report that it remains unable to afford what it purchased several years earlier. Both statements can be true, and responsible economic management must recognise the difference.

Budget 2027 therefore presents an opportunity to shift the national conversation from recovery as a statistical achievement to recovery as a measurable improvement in people's lives. That does not require abandoning commitments to creditors or disregarding the country's fiscal limitations.

It requires greater discipline in deciding how available public resources are allocated and how effectively they are used.

Healthcare offers one immediate opportunity. Investment in functioning diagnostic equipment, reliable medicine supplies and effective hospital management can improve access to treatment without necessarily requiring the construction of expensive new facilities. Better procurement, preventive maintenance and transparent monitoring of essential medical services could produce substantial public benefits from resources already committed to the health sector.

Education and public transport offer similar possibilities. A more reliable transport system can reduce the financial and time costs imposed upon working families, while improvements in educational access and quality can strengthen long-term earning potential. These are not merely social expenditures but investments in productivity, employment and economic participation.

The Government should also place greater emphasis on small and medium enterprises, which provide livelihoods across the country and have considerable potential to generate employment outside the major urban centres. Access to finance, predictable regulation, timely government payments and reduced administrative obstacles may be more valuable to many businesses than expensive incentive schemes. A practical Budget should identify specific barriers to enterprise and establish measurable commitments to removing them.

Agriculture requires particular attention because rural household security depends not only upon production but also upon storage, transport, market access and the prices farmers ultimately receive. Public investment in irrigation maintenance, agricultural logistics and transparent market information could improve productivity and reduce losses without perpetuating

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

THE ECONOMY MAY BE...

dependence upon poorly targeted subsidies. These are areas in which relatively modest improvements in implementation can have meaningful consequences for household incomes.

There is also an urgent need to examine the efficiency of public expenditure. Every rupee lost through waste, unnecessary procurement costs, administrative duplication or poorly executed projects represents money unavailable for essential public services. Stronger expenditure monitoring, competitive procurement and the publication of measurable project outcomes should therefore be regarded as central elements of economic reform rather than optional exercises in good governance.

The administration has an opportunity to demonstrate that fiscal responsibility and social fairness are complementary rather than competing objectives. Protecting vulnerable households need not mean abandoning financial discipline, just as maintaining financial discipline should not become an excuse for overlooking the consequences of policy decisions. The challenge is to identify interventions that are affordable, properly targeted and capable of producing verifiable improvements.

The Opposition has responsibilities of its own. Criticising the burden of taxation or the inadequacy of public services is legitimate, but credible alternatives must explain how proposed relief would be financed and what expenditure would be reduced or revenue replaced. Sri Lanka has already experienced the consequences of economic promises made without sufficient regard for their long-term affordability.

Political competition should therefore centre upon the quality of proposed solutions rather than the volume of accusations exchanged. The Government deserves recognition where policies produce demonstrable progress and criticism where they fail to deliver. Equally, opposition proposals should be assessed on their economic merits rather than accepted or rejected according to political allegiance.

The country would benefit from a Budget process that makes these comparisons easier. Alongside the conventional presentation of revenue and expenditure, the Ministry of Finance could publish a concise assessment of how major proposals are expected to affect households at different income levels. Such an exercise would strengthen transparency and encourage a more informed national discussion about the choices facing the country.

A further improvement would be the publication of clear performance targets for major public expenditure programmes. Citizens should be able to establish whether additional healthcare spending has reduced waiting times, whether transport investment has improved reliability and whether support for enterprise has generated sustainable employment. Announcing an allocation is not the same as delivering a result, and the distinction should become a central measure of government performance.

Sri Lanka cannot afford another period in which economic progress is judged primarily by the confidence of financial markets while public frustration continues to accumulate. Investor confidence and international credibility are important because they support growth, investment and employment. Their ultimate value, however, must be assessed through the opportunities and improvements they help create for the population.

The coming Budget will not resolve every structural weakness in the economy, nor should citizens be encouraged to expect an immediate return to the conditions that prevailed before the crisis. Sustainable recovery takes time, particularly in a country confronting substantial debt obligations and competing demands upon limited public resources. What people can reasonably expect is a credible direction, transparent priorities and measurable evidence that their sacrifices are producing benefits.

For the administration, this is an opportunity to move beyond demonstrating that the economy has been stabilised and towards establishing that recovery can be shared. For the Opposition, it is an opportunity to contribute realistic alternatives rather than rely upon public dissatisfaction alone. For the country, it is a chance to place household security at the centre of economic policy without repeating the mistakes that contributed to the collapse.

Be that as it may, the ultimate measure of economic recovery is not how confidently a government can announce that the country is doing better. It is how convincingly an ordinary family can say the same thing.
That is the test Budget 2027 must meet.

SRI LANKA TO LAUNCH FIRST AUTONOMOUS PASSENGER DRONE DEMONSTRATION AT PORT CITY

The skyline of Colombo takes an innovative step into the future later today as Sri Lanka conducts its first official demonstration flight of an electric autonomous passenger drone at Colombo Port City.

The flight, featuring the Chinese-manufactured EHang EH216-S autonomous aerial vehicle, marks the launch of a comprehensive six-month pilot project designed to evaluate zero-emission urban air mobility across the island. Operating without an onboard pilot, the two-seater aircraft relies on sixteen independent propellers, twelve high-capacity battery units, and centralized ground-control systems equipped with automated fail-safe protocols. Today's flight showcases how electric vertical take-off and landing technology can transform Sri Lanka's transport landscape, opening up skyways for high-end tourism, rapid urban commuting, and emergency medical logistics.

The initiative is a collaborative push between government regulatory bodies and international technology partners. Key institutions, including the Civil Aviation Authority of Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Defence, the Sri Lanka Air Force, the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission, and the Port City Economic Commission, have established strict safety protocols to support the trials. Officials view the technology as a potential game-changer for regional connectivity. Commercial routes linking Colombo directly to Bandaranaike International Airport, as well as iconic heritage sites like Sigiriya and coastal hubs in Jaffna, are already under preliminary feasibility review.

Beyond immediate visual spectacle, the adoption of autonomous electric aviation signals a broader modernization push for Sri Lanka's travel sector. Operating on green electrical power, these flying taxis offer a quiet, zero-emission alternative to traditional combustion transport, aligning perfectly with global eco-tourism trends.

If the initial six-month testing phase at Port City satisfies domestic safety audits and airspace management requirements, commercial passenger operations could take off within the next two to three years.



Putting a computer in the cockpit is a bold flex for a country where the coastal train lines still run on colonial-era delays. If this flying taxi can bypass Colombo's bumper-to-bumper rush hour gridlock without getting stuck behind an erratic three-wheeler, it might just become the most popular commute on the island.

RS 14.8 MILLION MISUSE: BRIBERY COMMISSION ARRESTS FORMER WATER BOARD CHAIR NISHANTHA RANATUNGA

Former Chairman of the National Water Supply and Drainage Board, Nishantha Ranatunga, was taken into custody by investigating officers from the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption following a raid linked to severe financial misconduct.

The arrest occurred after Ranatunga arrived at the Bribery Commission headquarters to record an official statement regarding an ongoing inquiry into state resource allocation. Official findings released by CIABOC reveal that the former chairman stands accused of misusing public funds amounting to approximately 14.8 million rupees to finance personal security details and private chauffeurs without legal entitlement.

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

RS 14.8 MILLION...

Investigative records detail two distinct avenues of financial abuse. First, Ranatunga allegedly directed the Water Board to pay nearly 5.8 million rupees to a private firm for two security officers assigned exclusively to his private residence. Second, investigators uncovered that he employed two personal drivers and funnelled approximately 9 million rupees in salary payments directly from capital funds allocated to state water supply development projects. State prosecutors maintain that these illegal arrangements caused massive direct financial losses to the public treasury while granting Ranatunga unlawful personal benefits during his tenure at the utility.

Following his arrest around midday, investigating officers produced Ranatunga before the Colombo Chief Magistrate's Court to face formal corruption charges. The court proceedings mark a significant step forward in state efforts to hold senior public officials accountable for diverting capital project funds into personal perks. Further investigations into institutional oversight failures at the Water Board remain underway.

INFRASTRUCTURE, INTEGRITY, AND CAPITAL: UNPACKING ADB'S $300 MILLION WATER SECTOR LIFELINE

Sri Lanka is getting another 300 million dollars from the Asian Development Bank. The money is earmarked for two big jobs: fixing up broken water supply networks and building actual sanitation infrastructure.

Here is where the capital goes.

Two hundred million dollars funds physical construction work. Colombo and Lunugamwehera get new water treatment plants, storage reservoirs, and distribution pipes to supply 1.3 million people in the Western and Southern provinces. Up in Jaffna, the money pays for sewerage networks, pumping stations, and wastewater treatment for nearly 250,000 residents.

The remaining 100 million dollars funds policy reforms. That means adjusting water tariffs, changing how the National Water Supply and Drainage Board operates, and trying to get the utility back onto sound financial footing.

The timing is obvious. For a country dragged down by debt and years of financial chaos, getting concessional capital to fix basic utilities is a relief. Right now, billions of rupees wash down the drain every year because of non-revenue water. Leaking pipes, outdated meters, and illegal connections bleed the state dry. Fixing the physical network stops the loss of water and money.

The real question is how state officials handle the money.

Anyone who has watched public works in this country over the last thirty years knows the pattern. A foreign lender signs off on millions, politicians line up for photos, and then the project stalls. Procurement fights start, scope changes get added, costs balloon, and the finished asset ends up late and under-delivered. Taxpayers get stuck paying off foreign loans for infrastructure that barely functions.

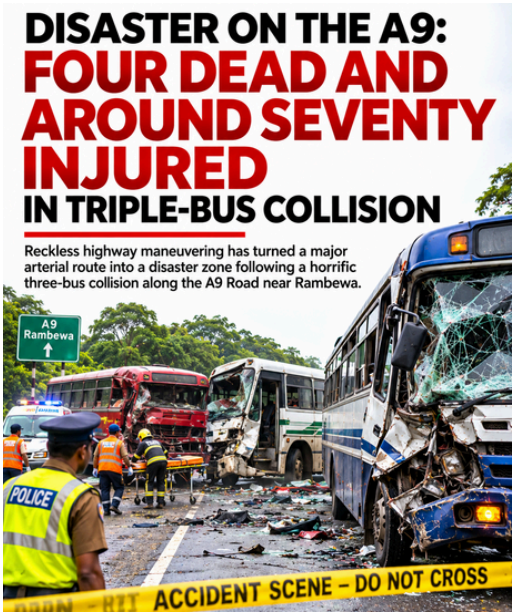
This ADB package cannot follow that old script.

Ministry officials and Water Board engineers have to keep procurement clean and hold contractors to strict timelines. If a vendor underperforms or tries to inflate costs, the state needs to enforce penalties rather than hand out extensions.

The ADB Sri Lanka Country Director, Shannon Cowlin, noted that reliable water systems are essential for economic growth. She is right. But foreign loans only build lasting assets if our own institutions manage the money with basic discipline and honesty.

DISASTER ON THE A9: FOUR DEAD AND AROUND SEVENTY INJURED IN TRIPLE-BUS COLLISION

Reckless highway maneuvering has turned a major arterial route into a disaster zone following a horrific three-bus collision along the A9 Road near Rambewa that left four people dead and roughly seventy others injured. The sheer scale of the wreckage underscores the terrifying vulnerability of commuters who rely daily on public transport services across Sri Lanka



The catastrophe unfolded near the Rambewa-Weli Oya Junction within the Mihintale Police Division during morning rush hour. According to reports released by Sri Lanka Police, a Sri Lanka Transport Board bus travelling southward from Vavuniya toward Rambewa initiated an overtaking maneuver against a private bus heading in the same direction. The overtaking state bus collided head-on with another Sri Lanka Transport Board bus approaching from the opposite direction, while the private bus became violently entangled in the crash. The force of the impact crumpled the front cabins of both state buses, trapping passengers in the debris.

Emergency responders faced chaotic scenes as dozens of passengers were pinned inside the mangled frames of the vehicles. Local residents and police officers pulled bleeding survivors from the wreckage before dispatching the wounded across regional medical centers. Authorities confirmed that approximately seventy injured passengers were admitted to hospitals in Medawachchiya and Anuradhapura for urgent trauma care, stretching local medical staff to their limits. The bodies of the four deceased victims, three men and one woman, were transferred to the Rambewa Hospital morgue for formal post-mortem examinations.

This tragedy highlights a pervasive and lethal culture of hazardous driving that continues to plague public transit networks. Drivers operating heavy passenger vehicles frequently treat national highways like racing circuits, engaging in reckless overtaking contests to secure passengers at upcoming stops. State transport boards and private bus associations have repeatedly promised self-regulation and driver retraining programs, yet aggressive driving habits persist unchecked on high-speed corridors. Commercial bus operators routinely gamble with human lives in pursuit of daily revenue targets.

As the Mihintale Police Division continues its investigation into the driver errors that triggered the crash, grieving families are left to reckon with another preventable tragedy on the roads. Safe public transport should be a fundamental guarantee for every commuter rather than a game of chance played out on asphalt every single morning. Until transport authorities implement strict speed monitoring and uncompromising penalties for reckless driving, innocent citizens will continue paying the price for transit lawlessness.

RAIN MONSOONS AND VECTOR RISKS: SRI LANKA'S ONGOING DENGUE CHALLENGE

The return of inter-monsoonal downpours across Sri Lanka has pushed the nation's public health apparatus back onto high alert, with total dengue cases officially crossing the 107,000 mark for the year.

Epidemiological data from the National Dengue Control Unit shows that over half of all reported infections remain heavily concentrated in the Western Province. High population density and urban waterlogging create ideal conditions for mosquitoes to breed. With nationwide fatalities past 78, health officials warn that ongoing weather disturbances will trigger a post-monsoonal surge unless people take basic precautions at home.

The Ministry of Health has launched a six-day prevention drive targeting 74 high-risk Medical Officer of Health divisions. Teams of public health inspectors,

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Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

RAIN MONSOONS...

police officers, and military personnel are moving door to door. Authorities are also using drones to inspect high-rise rooftops, industrial gutters, and abandoned construction sites that inspectors cannot reach on foot. Property owners who leave stagnant water standing on their land face heavy legal fines.

State inspections only cover so much ground. The Aedes aegypti mosquito breeds in clean, stagnant water as small as a bottle cap, meaning the real work happens inside individual households and workplaces.



Keeping your family safe starts with a quick weekly check around your property. Clear out roof gutters, discarded containers, indoor plant saucers, refrigerator drip trays, and air-conditioning runoffs. Using mosquito repellent containing DEET or Icaridin during early mornings and late afternoons offers solid personal protection. Fitting mesh screens on windows and sleeping under bed nets also keeps indoor areas clear.

Recognizing symptoms early is just as important. If someone in your home develops a sudden high fever, severe headache, pain behind the eyes, or joint aches, get them to a doctor quickly. Avoid taking over-the-counter painkillers like ibuprofen, aspirin, or mefenamic acid, because these drugs increase internal bleeding risks during a dengue infection.

Dengue control comes down to daily habit. Clearing standing water around your home and getting checked early at the first sign of fever keeps the virus from spreading through the community.





THE COST OF A CLICK: WHY STRICT CYBER LAWS MUST PROTECT CHILDREN FROM SOCIAL MEDIA EXPOSURE

What began as an innocent family moment ended in a prison cell and a deportation order. In a landmark ruling, a United Arab Emirates court sentenced an expatriate woman to one month in jail followed by immediate deportation after she uploaded a video of her five-year-old relative to Snapchat without the parents' consent.

The footage showed the child mispronouncing a food item at a private family gathering. Within hours, the clip racked up over 11,000 views, triggering formal complaints from the child's father over privacy violations and psychological harm. The court firmly rejected the defense that the post was a harmless joke, establishing that under federal cybercrime statutes and child protection laws, sharing a minor's likeness without parental authorization is a criminal offense regardless of intent.

This ruling sends a necessary message in a digital landscape where the boundary between public entertainment and child exploitation has become dangerously blurred. For too long, parents, relatives, and casual social media users have treated children as content, uploading millions of candid photos and videos every single day. While the person posting may harbor zero malicious intent, the digital reality beyond the upload button is vastly different.



The moment a child's image hits a public network, control over that file vanishes forever. Digital security experts and law enforcement agencies regularly warn that open social media profiles serve as primary harvesting grounds for international predatory networks. Sophisticated bad actors routinely crawl public platforms, scraping innocent images of children at play, on beaches, or in private family settings. These files are then archived, traded on dark web forums, or manipulated using generative artificial intelligence tools for vile purposes.

What a relative views as a cute viral clip can easily end up in the hands of online predators within minutes.

Beyond the threat of predatory exploitation lies the immediate risk of psychological damage and cyberbullying. Children thrust into public online spaces face severe humiliation, identity theft, and permanent digital footprints created long before they are old enough to understand consent. A child smiling at a smartphone camera is not granting informed consent for their face to be broadcast to thousands of strangers.

It is high time governments step up with aggressive legal frameworks to curb this reckless behavior. Voluntary guidelines and platform self-regulation have failed to stem the tide. Strict penal enforcement, heavy fines, and custodial sentences are essential tools to force a cultural shift in how society treats children's digital privacy.

The takeaway for anyone with a smartphone is straightforward. Once a video or photo goes public, you lose control of where it ends up. Social media views are temporary, but the safety risks and privacy issues for a child are permanent. Keeping children off public feeds is not about ruining the fun, it is about basic safety.

FOUR CHINESE NATIONALS REMANDED FOR POACHING SINHARAJA FLORA AND FAUNA

Sri Lanka's delicate rainforest ecosystems have once again turned into high-stakes crime scenes, following the arrest and remanding of four Chinese nationals caught attempting to smuggle hundreds of endemic insects and reptiles out of the world-famous Sinharaja Forest Reserve.

The suspects, comprising three men and one woman, were intercepted during a joint operation by Department of Wildlife Conservation officers following intelligence gathered by the Panahaduwa Range Protection Office of the Udawalawe National Park. Wildlife rangers apprehended the group operating within the sensitive buffer zone of Sinharaja, a UNESCO World Heritage Site recognized as the island's primary bastion of virgin tropical rainforest. A thorough search of their belongings yielded a shocking haul of more than 250 animal specimens belonging to roughly 40 distinct endemic species, ranging from rare arboreal reptiles and camouflage geckos to vibrant indigenous beetles and spiders.

Produced before the Kalawana Magistrate's Court on November 9, the four suspects were ordered to be remanded in judicial custody until November 23 while law enforcement expands its investigation. To preserve the seized contraband and return live creatures to their natural habitat, the Magistrate instructed that all specimens be transferred

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

FOUR CHINESE...

immediately to the National Museum in Colombo for official scientific identification by experts, after which surviving creatures will be released back into protected forest reserves. Preliminary inquiries indicate that this was not a casual eco-tourism holiday; the suspects had visited Sri Lanka on multiple prior occasions, pointing toward an organized pattern of international biopiracy and genetic resource theft.



This high-profile raid is part of a disturbing spike in international poaching networks targeting Sri Lanka's unique biodiversity. Just days prior to the Sinharaja arrests, judicial authorities imposed a staggering fine exceeding 10 million rupees on another group of foreign nationals caught looting genetic resources from the Babawa Uddarakanda forest reserve. Similar incidents in recent years have seen European and East Asian wildlife traffickers attempt to smuggle live scorpions, tarantulas, and endemic vipers out of the country through Bandaranaike International Airport, often utilizing specialized climate-controlled luggage or concealed shipping containers.

Environmental legal experts emphasize that the illicit global trade in rare flora and fauna is driven by lucrative black markets for exotic pets, traditional medicines, and specialized biological research abroad. Endemic species found exclusively in Sri Lanka's wet-zone forests command astronomical prices among international collectors and commercial breeders. However, the removal of micro-fauna severely disrupts delicate rainforest food chains and strips the nation of its irreplaceable natural heritage.

The recurring breaches have sparked widespread calls from conservationists for stricter surveillance around protected ecological buffers, harsher penal sanctions for biological smuggling, and enhanced coordination between airport customs and wildlife authorities.

The court proceedings in Kalawana point to a clear shift in how Sri Lanka handles wildlife crime. By handing down steep fines and remanding suspects instead of issuing quick bail, judges are sending a direct message to international syndicates.

The country's rainforests are not an open market for illegal collectors, and anyone caught stripping these ecosystems will face real legal consequences.

39 DRONES AND A DEDICATED DAD: MP BANDARA CLEARS THE AIR OVER AIRPORT DETENTION

A few days ago, Samagi Jana Balawegaya Parliamentarian Nalin Bandara recently found himself grounded at Bandaranaike International Airport, not over a legislative debate, but over a suitcase packed to the brim with thirty-nine commercial camera drones and high-grade microphones.

Returning from a trip to Singapore alongside his wife, the opposition MP was stopped by Sri Lanka Customs after officers flagged the hefty consignment of unmanned aerial vehicles tucked into their luggage.

As speculation swirled across social media regarding covert military hardware, Bandara swiftly held a press conference to set the record straight, explaining that the high-tech cargo was merely stock for his son's budding commercial rental and equipment supply venture.

With commendable parental devotion, Bandara insisted that he was simply acting as a family courier, rejecting any insinuation that he attempted to sneak thirty-nine buzzing gadgets past customs officials.

The MP emphasized that every single item had been dutifully declared at the red channel upon arrival.

The minor snag in his baggage retrieval, he admitted, was that while his son's business possessed clearance from the Civil Aviation Authority, it lacked the mandatory stamp of approval from the Ministry of Defence.

According to Bandara, a harmless paperwork misunderstanding led the family to believe their existing permits covered the latest batch of imports. He reassured the public that the detained items were small, peaceful camera drones intended for filming weddings and commercial events, rather than tactical reconnaissance hardware.

Defending his son's entrepreneurial spirit, Bandara remarked that he was proud to see his offspring running a legitimate enterprise, even if it occasionally required dad to haul three dozen flying contraptions through airport security.

Customs Spokesperson Chandana Punchihewa confirmed that the thirty-nine drones remain safely in storage pending the presentation of the missing Defence Ministry paperwork and the payment of standard import duties. Bandara assured reporters that the correct stamps would be secured within days, allowing the consignment to take flight legally.

This goes to show that even seasoned politicians aren't immune to the classic baggage claim headache.

34 DEAD OFF SENEGAL: THE DEADLY HUMAN COST OF ILLEGAL MARITIME MIGRATION

The Atlantic waters off the coast of West Africa have claimed yet another devastating toll, as a small wooden pirogue carrying dozens of hopeful migrants capsized between Dakar and Saint-Louis. According to reports from the Senegalese Press Agency, at least 34 bodies have been recovered from the treacherous sea, while emergency rescue teams have so far managed to pull only a single survivor from the water.

The vessel was bound for Spain's Canary Islands, a notorious maritime corridor that has increasingly become a graveyard for those seeking a economic lifeline in Europe. Saliou Diouf, founder of the migrant aid organization Boza Fii, confirmed that all the recovered victims identified thus far were Senegalese nationals. Spanish human rights group Walking Borders documented 635 deaths along the Atlantic passage between January and May 2026 alone, cementing its reputation as the deadliest migration route in the region. Expressing deep condolences to the bereaved families, Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye pledged via social media to intensify state operations against human smuggling syndicates while promising expanded domestic economic programs for local youth.

This catastrophe is far from an isolated event; it represents a recurring human tragedy that spans multiple continents and oceans. Across North Africa, similar vessel overturns occur with alarming frequency. Further east, the Mediterranean route from Libya and Tunisia to Southern Europe continues to record thousands of casualties each year.

Even in South Asia, countries like Sri Lanka experience parallel migration pressures. Thousands of Sri Lankans, fleeing severe domestic inflation, currency devaluation, and structural unemployment, routinely board overcrowded, unseaworthy fishing trawlers in desperate attempts to reach Australia or the Reunion Island. Many of these voyages end in interception by naval authorities, prolonged detention, or disastrous shipwrecks in the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean.

The dangers inherent in illegal maritime migration cannot be overstated. Smuggling syndicates regularly pack human beings far beyond vessel capacities into wooden boats that lack basic navigation tools, emergency flares, life jackets, or adequate food and freshwater supplies. Passengers endure days or weeks of extreme exposure to sun, severe dehydration, hypothermia, and engine failures amidst towering oceanic swells. When panic ensues or sudden weather shifts hit, these flimsy craft flip within seconds, leaving occupants with virtually zero chance of survival in freezing, deep offshore currents.

Addressing this global crisis requires a shift away from purely punitive maritime policing. While dismantling ruthless human trafficking networks remains essential, international governments must recognize that border barriers and naval patrols only divert migration corridors into even more hazardous waters. Until destination countries and local governments collaborate to build sustainable local economic opportunities, legitimate labor pathways, and real domestic security, desperate citizens will continue to trust their lives to fragile wooden boats and unforgiving seas.