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Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath confirmed the breakthrough following a formal decision by Saudi Arabia's Public Prosecution on November 9 to drop the remaining charges against the young man from Kalmunai. The ruling brings a dramatic close to an ordeal that had threatened to end in execution over a single social media comment. Minister Herath announced that consular officials are now finalizing travel arrangements, with Anojan expected to touch down in Sri Lanka within the next one to two weeks.

The final clearance follows an intense sequence of judicial breakthroughs over the past several weeks. Anojan's nightmare began in July when the Al-Ahsa Criminal Court sentenced him to five years in prison alongside a staggering three million Saudi Riyal fine, equivalent to roughly 240 million rupees, over a Facebook comment made during a dispute concerning a street dog in Sri Lanka. Despite initial warnings from Saudi legal advisors that challenging the ruling carried severe risks, an appeal was lodged. That gamble backfired catastrophically on September 17, when the Eastern Province Court of Appeal exercised judicial discretion over religious insult and escalated his punishment to the death penalty.

Faced with the grim specter of another migrant worker tragedy, President's Counsel and Parliamentarian Faizer Mustapha stepped forward to map out a specialized legal and diplomatic rescue strategy. Recognizing that the case fell under public rights rather than private family forgiveness, Faizer Mustapha immediately volunteered his professional services free of charge alongside fellow legal counsel Upul Kumarapperuma. Mustapha argued that a rapid appeal to the Saudi Supreme Court within the strict 30-day statutory window had to be paired with high-level diplomatic engagement rooted in Islamic legal principles of repentance, given that Anojan had deleted the offending comment and issued a public apology immediately after realizing his error.

Faizer Mustapha's legal framework became the backbone of Sri Lanka's intervention. Working in coordination with the Foreign Ministry and local Saudi legal representatives, Mustapha and the Sri Lankan legal delegation traveled to Saudi Arabia in early October to hold direct consultations with law enforcement authorities and judicial officials.

Those combined legal and diplomatic efforts yielded their first major triumph on October 14, when the Saudi Supreme Court officially set aside the death sentence.

Even with execution off the table, Anojan remained detained in Dammam Central Prison facing residual penalties and the crushing financial fine. Sustained diplomatic pressure led by President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath, supported by the groundwork laid by Faizer Mustapha's legal team, ultimately persuaded the Saudi Public Prosecution to abandon the prosecution altogether on November 9.

Yesterday, Anojan's relieved family members visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Colombo to express their gratitude to the President, the Foreign Minister, and the legal team led by Faizer Mustapha whose intervention pulled their son back from the brink. While the outcome stands as a rare diplomatic victory, the case leaves behind an urgent lesson for thousands of Sri Lankan workers overseas regarding the unforgiving reality of foreign cyber laws.

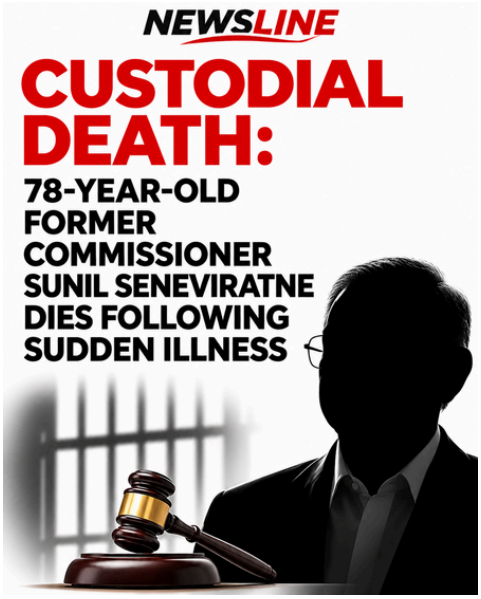
CUSTODIAL DEATH: 78-YEAR-OLD FORMER COMMISSIONER SUNIL SENEVIRATNE DIES FOLLOWING SUDDEN ILLNESS

Former Cooperative Commissioner Sunil Seneviratne has died at the Welikada Prison Hospital while being held in remand custody in connection with an alleged financial fraud investigation.

Prisons Department Media Spokesman Senaka Palletenna confirmed that the 78-year-old former senior public official passed away on Wednesday night after developing a sudden medical complication. Seneviratne, a resident of Kalalgoda, had been detained at the Magazine Prison facility pending ongoing court proceedings into allegations of financial misappropriation during his administrative tenure.

According to prison authorities, Seneviratne complained of acute physical distress inside his remand ward before being urgently transferred to the Welikada Prison Hospital for emergency medical intervention. Despite treatment efforts by the on-duty prison medical staff, he succumbed to the illness later that evening.

Seneviratne's passing adds another name to the growing list of elderly former state administrators whose long-running corruption and financial irregularity cases have stretched well into their retirement years. In Sri Lanka's sluggish judicial system, where high-profile financial probes routinely drag across multiple governments before reaching a verdict, pre-trial remand detention frequently becomes an arduous physical ordeal for aging suspects.



Prison officials stated that standard magisterial inquest procedures and a post-mortem examination have been initiated to formally determine the exact medical cause of death, in accordance with mandatory custodial protocols.

While Seneviratne's death brings criminal proceedings against him personally to an inevitable close, the broader investigative files surrounding cooperative sector financial irregularities remain active before the courts.

For an administrative system already struggling with severe prison overcrowding and aging infrastructure, the sudden demise of a high-profile remand detainee serves as a grim reminder of the toll taken when slow-moving investigations collide with fragile health behind bars.





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INDONESIA'S VICE PRESIDENT QUITS AMID IMPEACHMENT THREAT OVER INVALID HIGH SCHOOL CERTIFICATE

Indonesia's Vice President, 39-year-old Gibran Rakabuming Raka, has officially resigned after a pair of damaging court rulings threw out his high school qualifications and left him facing an almost certain vote to remove him from office.

Gibran, who is the eldest son of popular former president Joko Widodo, walked into the parliament complex in Jakarta earlier today and handed his resignation letter directly to leaders of the country's upper house. His sudden exit comes just hours before lawmakers were scheduled to debate an impeachment motion backed by over 120 MPs. Under Indonesian constitutional rules, parliament must now meet to accept his resignation, while President Prabowo Subianto has 14 days to nominate two replacement candidates for lawmakers to vote on within two months.

The political storm surrounding Gibran boils down to a basic paperwork problem that any Sri Lankan familiar with school qualification disputes will recognize immediately. Under Indonesian election law, anyone running for president or vice president must prove they completed senior high school, roughly the equivalent of passing Advanced Levels.



Gibran completed his schooling overseas in Singapore and Australia before earning a marketing degree in Singapore. When he registered to run in the 2024 election, he submitted a special equivalency certificate issued by Indonesia's Ministry of Education confirming his overseas studies matched a local high school diploma.

However, critics challenged those records in court. In October, Indonesia's Constitutional Court examined the paperwork and noted that the foreign records he used, essentially a certificate of attendance and grade transcripts from a college in Sydney, only proved he attended classes, not that he officially graduated from high school. Weeks later, on October 30, the Supreme Court went a step further and officially cancelled his government-issued equivalency certificate.

Gibran insisted throughout the controversy that earning a university degree in Singapore proved he had finished school, telling reporters he was stepping down so the dispute would not drag the country into an endless political crisis.

Beyond the missing school certificate, Gibran's resignation signals a serious crack in Indonesia's ruling political alliance. President Prabowo only won power in 2024 because Gibran's father, former president Widodo, broke away from his own party to back Prabowo and put his son on the ticket. That partnership has looked increasingly shaky in recent weeks amid public protests over the economy and wildfire handling, alongside a dramatic spying scandal last week in which Indonesia's former national police chief, widely seen as a close Widodo loyalist, was arrested for allegedly wire-tapping President Prabowo's phone.

With Gibran out of the picture, President Prabowo must now pick a replacement who can keep his fragile coalition from falling apart without handing too much power to a future political rival.

FAMILIES OF THE DISAPPEARED PETITION HIGH COURT TO REOPEN 2012 MATALE MASS GRAVE PROBE

More than a decade after judicial proceedings ground to a halt over disputed laboratory tests, families of the disappeared have launched a fresh legal bid to revive the investigation into the Matale mass grave.

A special application seeking to resume the long-stalled inquiry was taken up before the Matale High Court yesterday. The petition was filed by attorneys Himali Kularatne and Lakmal Sooriyagoda on behalf of the Families of the Disappeared, an advocacy group representing relatives of individuals subjected to enforced disappearances across Sri Lanka. Fifteen mothers whose sons vanished during the southern insurrection of the late 1980s joined the application, demanding that the court lift the temporary suspension that has frozen the case since 2015.

The grim discovery dates back to November 2012, when construction workers digging a trench for a biogas plant inside the Matale General Hospital premises uncovered human skeletal remains. Subsequent excavations led by judicial and forensic teams running through February 2013 unearthed the remains of 155 individuals buried in the pit.

Forensic assessments conducted at the time pointed toward brutal, systematic executions rather than natural deaths or historic burials. Renowned forensic archaeologist Professor Raj Somadeva and Judicial Medical Officer Dr. Ajith Jayasena documented severe skeletal trauma across the remains, including gunshot fractures, blunt force injuries, signs of decapitation, and iron nails driven into human skulls. Based on personal artifacts recovered alongside the bones, Professor Somadeva concluded that the burials belonged to the 1987 to 1990 period of violent political unrest in the south.

However, the judicial inquiry hit a major procedural roadblock in 2015. Bone samples dispatched to Beta Analytic, a radiocarbon dating laboratory in the United States, returned results placing the remains prior to 1950. Citing the sharp contradiction between the foreign carbon dating report and local archaeological evidence, the Matale Magistrate's Court laid the case by, effectively halting accountability efforts for over eleven years.



Both Professor Somadeva and Dr. Jayasena strongly contested the Beta Analytic findings, raising concerns that environmental contamination in the soil or improper sample handling could have skewed the radiocarbon readings and contradicted the physical artifacts buried with the victims.

For the aging mothers who have spent nearly four decades searching for answers, the 2015 suspension felt less like a scientific impasse and more like an indefinite burial of the truth. Speaking outside the court complex, Families of the Disappeared President Britto Fernando confirmed that the petition specifically asks the High Court to order the resumption of the original Magistrate's Court inquiry so the conflicting forensic evidence can be properly adjudicated.

The Matale High Court has scheduled the next phase of the hearing for January 13, when petitioners' counsel Himali Kularatne and Lakmal Sooriyagoda are expected to file comprehensive written submissions outlining the legal grounds to restart one of Sri Lanka's most haunting unresolved investigations.

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KEEPING THE RECEIPTS: OPPOSITION UNVEILS OVERSIGHT PORTAL ON SIDELINES OF 2027 BUDGET

As Parliament convenes this morning to begin the seven-day Second Reading debate on the 2027 Appropriation Bill, the Opposition has already staged its opening counter-offensive on the sidelines of the legislative complex. Rather than waiting for the floor debate to open after President Anura Kumara Dissanayake delivered his administration's third national budget yesterday afternoon, opposition lawmakers spent the run-up to the Rs. 4.99 trillion spending plan sharpening their fiscal critique.

Led by Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa, a pre-budget workshop brought together opposition parliamentarians, economists, and academics to dissect the government's economic report card alongside the budget rollout. If the administration used yesterday's speech to project a story of disciplined stabilization and a transition toward capital expansion, the opposition's counter-narrative is clear: the ledger looks tidy only because ordinary households are footing an unsustainable bill.

While President Anura Kumara Dissanayake was busy laying out his administration's third national budget yesterday afternoon, the Opposition was staging its own counter-programming right on the sidelines of Parliament. Instead of waiting around for the official debate to open this morning, opposition lawmakers decided to get their punches in early, gathering economists and academics to tear into the government's economic report card before the ink on the 2027 Appropriation Bill had even dried.

Led by Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa, the pre-budget huddle had one clear message: the government's rosy recovery numbers only look good on paper because ordinary Sri Lankans are getting squeezed dry to pay for them.

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Knowing full well that loud speeches in the chamber rarely outlive the morning news cycle, the Opposition also unveiled a digital receipt book on the sidelines of the budget rollout. Launched on November 11, the new website oversight.lk is built to track whether ministerial promises actually survive contact with reality. The platform is set to monitor how well the government has delivered on past budget pledges, alongside tracking ministry performance, state spending, and those always entertaining government audit reports.

For anyone tired of watching grand budget proposals quietly vanish into thin air by mid-year, a public tracking tool is a genuinely useful idea, even if it comes with plenty of political spin attached.

Of course, keeping receipts works both ways. Once all those numbers are sitting online, voters will be watching just as closely during today's debate to see if the Opposition brings real financial math to the table, rather than simply demanding lower taxes and bigger welfare handouts in the exact same breath.

SCAMMING WARNING: NO WORK VISAS FOR SALE: DUTCH EMBASSY FLAGS FAKE IMMIGRATION LETTERS IN SRI LANKA

If someone promises you a fast-track ticket to a lucrative job in Amsterdam complete with official-looking Dutch government paperwork, hold onto your wallet and keep walking. The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Colombo has issued a blunt warning to the Sri Lankan public after reports surfaced that local fraudsters are peddling bogus European job offers and forged immigration letters.



In a notice released yesterday, diplomatic officials confirmed that several hopeful job seekers have already fallen victim to these rackets. Scammers have been circulating counterfeit approval letters bearing the name of the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service, banking on the desperation of Sri Lankans looking for overseas employment to extract hefty upfront fees for jobs that simply do not exist.

The Embassy's message leaves very little room for wishful thinking. For almost every standard line of work, the Netherlands does not issue work visas to non-European nationals. Outside of rare exceptions for highly specialized professionals in high-tech industries, any agent claiming to have secured a general labor, hospitality, or clerical visa for the Dutch market is selling pure fiction.

Diplomatic officials also made it clear that the Embassy itself plays zero role in recruiting workers or facilitating overseas job placements. That distinction matters, because confidence tricksters routinely drop the names of foreign missions to lend an air of legitimacy to their pitch right before asking for a bank transfer.

Foreign employment scams remain one of Sri Lanka's most stubborn cottage industries, thriving on slickly forged letterheads, urgency, and the reluctance of victims to double-check claims with official sources before handing over life savings or mortgaging family property. Once the money disappears, the middleman usually vanishes right along with the promised flight ticket.

The Embassy has urged prospective applicants to bypass intermediaries and verify any purported offer directly with the actual employer in the Netherlands before making a single financial commitment. Those who have already been approached with dubious paperwork or parted with their money are advised to report the matter immediately to Sri Lankan law enforcement agencies and the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment.

Until fraudsters face swift consequences on home soil, the old rule of overseas recruitment holds firmer than ever: if a European visa sounds too easy to be true, the only thing getting exported is your cash.

YELLOW CYLINDERS RETURN: LAUGFS GAS RESUMES DELIVERIES AFTER 3,000-TONNE SHIPMENT ARRIVES

Households across the country tired of juggling empty yellow cylinders or hunting down expensive electric hotplates can finally breathe a sigh of relief, as LAUGFS Gas PLC confirmed it will resume domestic LPG deliveries in phases starting immediately.

The relief comes courtesy of the vessel GAS GOODWILL, which berthed in Sri Lankan waters yesterday carrying over 3,000 metric tonnes of liquefied petroleum gas.

Company officials stated that once the cargo finishes unloading at the terminal, bottling plants will kick back into gear to refill cylinders and push fresh stock out through the islandwide distributor and dealer network.

For anyone who has spent the past several days driving from junction to junction only to be greeted by padlocked cages and apologetic shopkeepers, the announcement brings welcome news.

However, before you load your empty cylinder into the boot and race off to the nearest retail point, a bit of patience will still go a long way.

LAUGFS Gas has cautioned that refills will hit local shops gradually rather than all at once. Because trucks must clear terminal storage, fill thousands of cylinders, and cover regional routes, availability will improve street by street over the coming days.

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Showing up unannounced at a retail outlet this morning without checking first might still earn you nothing more than a wasted trip and a frustrated sigh.

To save consumers the fuel and hassle of blind searches, the company is urging households to call ahead and confirm stock directly with their nearest authorised LAUGFS dealer before leaving home. Customers can also dial the company's dedicated hotline on 1345 to get real-time updates on where fresh consignments have landed in their area.



While LAUGFS thanked customers for enduring the recent supply squeeze with patience, the disruption has once again reminded Sri Lankan kitchens just how quickly daily routines unravel when cooking gas shipments hit a snag. Restaurants, small bakeries, and working families who rely on the yellow cylinders have borne the brunt of the shortage, forced either to scramble for alternatives or put meal prep on hold.

With 3,000 metric tonnes now flowing into the distribution pipeline, the immediate crunch should steadily ease through the weekend. Still, smart shoppers would do well to make that quick phone call first, confirm the delivery lorry has actually unloaded at their local dealer, and secure their refill before the inevitable rush clears the shelves all over again.

YOSHITHA RAJAPAKSA ABSENT DUE TO BACK AILMENT AS PROSECUTION NEARS END OF EVIDENCE

The long-running money laundering trial against Yoshitha Rajapaksa hit another speed bump in the Colombo High Court yesterday after his legal team informed the bench that a sudden back ailment prevented him from attending proceeding.

When the case was called before High Court Judge Udesh Ranatunga for the recording of further evidence, President's Counsel Sampath Mendis, appearing for the accused, submitted a medical certificate to court explaining that his client was suffering from a back-related condition and could not be physically present.

The absence came as an unwelcome surprise to the prosecution, which had arrived prepared to wrap up its entire evidentiary phase during yesterday's sitting. Deputy Solicitor General Janaka Bandara informed the court that the state had fully expected to conclude presenting its case on the day, noting that only three prosecution witnesses remained on the list to testify.

Rather than letting the delay drag the trial out unnecessarily, the prosecution told the bench it intends to summon all three remaining witnesses on the very next sitting date so the state can close its case without further interruption. Accepting the medical submission, Judge Ranatunga fixed November 26 for the resumption of the trial and issued direct orders for the final three witnesses to appear before court that morning.



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The case stems from indictments filed by the Attorney General under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. Prosecutors allege that Rajapaksa unlawfully acquired assets by spending more than Rs. 730 million to purchase five valuable parcels of land located across Dehiwala and Ratmalana, funds the state contends could not be accounted for through legitimate income.

For a trial involving hundreds of millions of rupees in disputed prime real estate, yesterday's adjournment offers a brief two-week breather. Come November 26, however, assuming the back troubles ease up on schedule, the prosecution will finally look to close its chapter of the evidence and put the ball squarely in the defense's court.

MO MARKETPLACE

CYCLONE SCARS AND NEW RAINS: NBRO ISSUES LANDSLIDE ALERTS AS BAY OF BENGAL SYSTEM NEARS

When heavy rain rolls into Sri Lanka, we have a bad habit of treating official weather alerts like background noise until a hillside gives way or a weekend river bath turns into a search-and-rescue operation. That complacency could carry a steep price over the next few days, as disaster officials warn that soil already weakened by Cyclone Ditwah faces a fresh round of drenching rain.

Speaking at a media briefing in Colombo, National Building Research Organisation geologist Wasantha Senadeera flagged active landslide warnings across twelve divisional secretariat divisions spanning seven districts. Residents in Nagoda in Galle, Dehiowita, Deraniyagala, Bulathkohupitiya, and Yatiyantota in Kegalle, Eheliyagoda and Ayagama in Ratnapura, Ella in Badulla, Paathadumbara in Kandy, Wellawaya in Moneragala, and Norwood and Hanguranketha in Nuwara Eliya have been told to stay sharp. The danger is compounded by the fact that Cyclone Ditwah left thousands of hillside families sitting on unstable slopes earlier this year. Senadeera noted that ground erosion is already underway, advising residents to watch out for telltale warning signs such as muddy, sand-laden water suddenly gushing from slopes or cracks widening in walls and floors.

Making matters worse, the sky is not clearing anytime soon. Department of Meteorology Forecasting Director Merril Mendis confirmed that a disturbance brewing over the Bay of Bengal is expected to intensify into a deep depression and track parallel to Sri Lanka's eastern coast.

Starting today, November 13, heavy downpours are forecast across the Western, North Central, Central, and Sabaragamuwa provinces. According to Mendis, wet weather will likely stick around until January before an El Niño-driven dry spell sets in between January and April.

Yet the most preventable tragedies rarely happen inside homes; they happen when people ignore basic common sense during outings. The Disaster Management Centre revealed a sobering statistic at the same briefing: eleven people drowned across Sri Lanka over just the past two weeks after bathing in high-risk rivers and streams, including recent incidents where sudden flash surges swept away groups in areas like Deniyaya.

Stopping these repeat disasters requires moving beyond issuing press releases every time clouds gather. On the ground, local authorities and police need to physically barricade popular bathing spots, waterfalls, and swollen riverbanks during red and amber alerts rather than relying on polite requests for tourists to stay away.

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At the same time, long-promised relocation schemes for over 30,000 families living in high-risk landslide zones cannot remain stuck in bureaucratic files while the soil beneath their homes turns to mud.

For the rest of us, survival starts with paying attention. Cancel that weekend waterfall trip, keep out of muddy streams where upstream rain can trigger a wall of water in seconds, and if the ground around your home starts shifting or water turns gritty with sand, pack your essentials and leave before the hillside makes the decision for you.

BIKINIS IN THE BUSH: ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY PROBES ALLEGED PHOTOSHOOTS INSIDE NATIONAL PARK

Sri Lanka's national parks are usually famous for leopard sightings, charging elephants, and safari jeeps jockeying for the best camera angle, yet the latest wildlife controversy swirling online has very little to do with animals. The Ministry of Environment has launched an investigation following widespread online debate over alleged commercial bikini photoshoots taking place inside protected wildlife sanctuaries.

The uproar began after images of foreign models posing in swimwear against rugged jungle backdrops surfaced on social media, drawing sharp criticism from conservationists and prompting a former senior wildlife official to demand a formal inquiry. Critics argue that turning protected nature reserves into open-air fashion studios without proper oversight not only undermines park regulations, which strictly prohibit visitors from exiting safari vehicles in designated high-risk zones, but also exposes participants to serious safety hazards in habitats teeming with wild elephants and predators.

Under Sri Lankan wildlife regulations, any commercial photography, filming, or promotional production inside a national park requires prior written authorization, specific fee payments, and strict adherence to environmental guidelines set by the Department of Wildlife Conservation. Beyond the debate over what constitutes appropriate attire on a safari, conservation advocates say the real issue is enforcement: if commercial crews are bypassing permit rules or stepping out of jeeps for staged shoots, what does that say about monitoring on the ground?

As the social media storm gathered pace, online commentators attempted to link the viral wildlife park images to promotional posts shared by Anilka Rooms and Eco Estate, a hospitality property operating near Yala and Udawalawe. However, industry observers note that the estate's legitimate tourism promotions and the unverified allegations involving commercial shoots inside state-run national parks remain completely separate matters, with no confirmed evidence connecting the property to any unlawful park activity.

While the Environment Ministry has confirmed that a probe is now underway to establish whether any park rules were breached, neither the Department of Wildlife Conservation nor the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority has issued an official statement clarifying whether permits were granted or whether the photographs were even captured inside protected park boundaries.



For everyday visitors who pay hefty entrance fees and are routinely lectured by trackers to keep their arms inside the jeep at all times, the controversy hits a familiar nerve. Whether the inquiry uncovers an unauthorized commercial shoot or simply another case of social media outrage running ahead of the facts, wildlife authorities will need to show that park rules apply equally to everyone, regardless of how many followers are watching.

FASTING TO A FRACTION: VIDEOS CAPTURE VIOLENT BRAWL AND POLICE CRACKDOWN AT ANURADHAPURA PROTEST SITE

What was supposed to be a solemn hunger strike near the sacred precincts of the RuwanweliMaha Seya quickly devolved into absolute chaos yesterday when rival factions collided in full view of the public. Venerable Balangoda Kassapa Thero and two other monks had hunkered down for a fast-unto-death protest, locking horns with authorities over the controversial Anuradhapura Sacred City Development Plan while demanding the release of Venerable Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero. But the high-stakes demonstration took a violent turn when another prominent monastic figure, Rajanganaya Saddharathana, showed up at the site with a group of supporters.

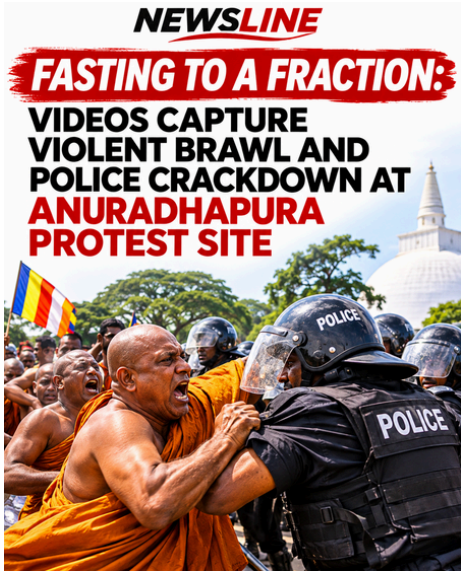
What followed, as captured in widely circulated video footage, was pure bedlam. Verbal sparring between the two camps rapidly degenerated into a full-scale physical brawl right by the hallowed stupa grounds. In the middle of the melee, Saddharathana took a heavy blow to the head from a wooden pole, sustaining a bleeding wound that required an emergency trip to the hospital.

Watching a religious protest descend into street-fighting with sticks is a grim reminder of how quickly ideological friction can boil over when egos and public cameras mix.

The intervention of law enforcement did little to instantly calm the waters.

Police officers moved in swiftly following the clash, attempting to dismantle the temporary tents and structures the fasting monks had erected despite earlier court orders to vacate the zone.

That move triggered another wave of shouting matches and tense standoffs between furious demonstrators and police lines.



By the time the dust finally settled, the fasting protest had come to an abrupt and unceremonious end. Authorities took Venerable Balangoda Kassapa Thero and several other monks into police custody, clearing the site while investigators sifted through the wreckage of broken poles and shattered tempers.

For a movement that set out to challenge urban development blueprints and champion controversial clerical causes, ending up split between a hospital emergency ward and a police cell makes for a disastrous public relations strategy.