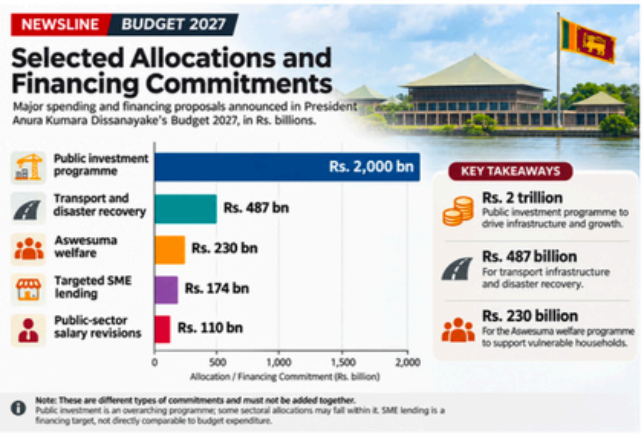
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THE ECONOMY IS RECOVERING. BUT WILL THE PEOPLE?

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's Budget 2027 promises investment, tax relief and welfare. The test is whether the benefits reach ordinary Sri Lankans.



Budget allocations and financing targets are not additive; categories may overlap.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's Budget for 2027 represents an attempt to move Sri Lanka beyond the difficult years of economic collapse and recovery towards a period of investment, employment generation and sustained growth. Presented to Parliament on Thursday, November 12, the Budget combines tax concessions, welfare commitments, public-sector salary adjustments and substantial allocations for infrastructure and business development.

The proposals are ambitious. They also raise an important question: can the Government convert financial allocations and policy announcements into tangible improvements in the lives of ordinary Sri Lankans?

The distinction matters. A country may achieve fiscal stability while its citizens continue to struggle with household expenses, inadequate incomes, unemployment and limited economic opportunity. Recovery in government finances is essential, but it is not an end in itself.

The 2027 Budget must therefore be judged not only by the size of its allocations or the strength of its fiscal projections, but by what it eventually delivers.

THE BUDGET AT A GLANCE

The principal measures announced include an increase in the personal income tax threshold, targeted welfare improvements, subsidised financing for smaller enterprises and an extensive programme of public investment.

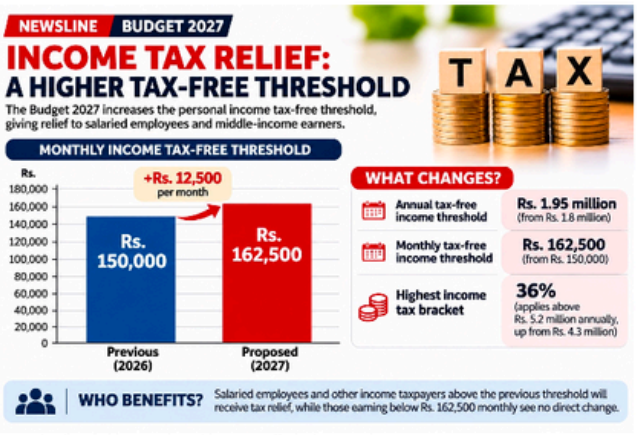
Budget measure	Announced provision	Principal beneficiaries
Personal income tax	Annual tax-free threshold rises to Rs. 1.95 million	Income taxpayers
Monthly tax-free threshold	Rs. 162,500, up from Rs. 150,000	Salaried employees
Highest income tax bracket	36% marginal rate begins above Rs. 5.2 million annually	Higher-income taxpayers
Education	VAT exemption for printed books and school exercise books	Students and families
Public-sector salaries	Rs. 110 billion	Public employees
Aswesuma welfare	Rs. 230 billion	Eligible vulnerable households
Disability allowance	Increased to Rs. 12,500 monthly	Eligible persons with disabilities
Kidney patient allowance	Increased to Rs. 12,500 monthly	Eligible kidney patients
Concessional business lending	Rs. 174 billion targeted	SMEs and entrepreneurs
Transport and disaster recovery	Rs. 487 billion	Infrastructure users and affected communities
Public investment programme	Approximately Rs. 2 trillion	Economy-wide, subject to implementation

The table summarises reported Budget announcements. Proposed measures remain subject to their applicable legislative, administrative and implementation requirements.

TAX RELIEF: WHO ACTUALLY BENEFITS?

The increase in the annual personal income tax-free threshold from Rs. 1.8 million to Rs. 1.95 million is a welcome concession for salaried employees.

The monthly threshold consequently rises from Rs. 150,000 to Rs. 162,500. Changes to the higher tax brackets also offer relief to some taxpayers.



Income tax threshold comparison. Figures are Budget proposals.

However, the benefit is not evenly distributed across the population.

A household earning Rs. 75,000 monthly receives no direct benefit from increasing the income tax threshold because its income was already below the previous taxable limit.

An employee earning Rs. 200,000, by contrast, may benefit from the higher threshold and any associated changes to the tax bands.

This is not an argument against income tax relief. It is an argument for recognising its limitations.

For many Sri Lankan families, the greater burden is the combined cost of food, electricity, transport, education and healthcare.

A tax concession is useful to those who pay the tax. For those outside the tax system, the Budget must deliver relief through other mechanisms.

TABLE 1: WHO BENEFITS FROM THE NEW TAX-FREE THRESHOLD?

Monthly employment income	Position under previous threshold	Position under proposed threshold
Rs. 75,000	Below threshold	No direct change
Rs. 150,000	At threshold	Below threshold
Rs. 175,000	Above threshold	Above threshold, with potential relief
Rs. 200,000	Above threshold	Above threshold, with potential relief
Rs. 300,000	Above threshold	Above threshold, with potential relief
Rs. 500,000	Above threshold	Above threshold, with potential relief

This table illustrates eligibility for threshold-related relief, not the precise change in tax liability. Exact savings require application of the complete 2026 and proposed 2027 tax schedules.

The Government should publish straightforward examples showing the actual monthly savings for taxpayers at different income levels.

Such transparency would allow households to understand the proposals without relying on exaggerated political claims.

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THE COST OF LIVING: SMALL CONCESSIONS, A LARGE CHALLENGE

The proposed VAT exemption for printed books and school exercise books is particularly relevant to families with schoolchildren.

Education-related expenditure can impose considerable pressure on household budgets, especially where several children attend school.

The announced reductions in Special Commodity Taxes on selected imported food products may also provide some relief.

Nevertheless, these concessions are limited in scope.

The price of essential food, transport, utilities and medicines remains central to the financial security of millions of households.

A meaningful assessment of the Budget should therefore consider the cumulative cost of maintaining an ordinary family rather than treating individual tax reductions as sufficient evidence of improved affordability.

The Government could strengthen its approach by publishing a regularly updated household affordability index covering essential food, energy, transport and education costs.

Such an index would help distinguish improvements in headline economic indicators from changes in actual living standards.

WELFARE: PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE

The allocation of Rs. 230 billion for Aswesuma demonstrates the Government's intention to maintain a substantial social protection programme.

The increase in monthly allowances for eligible kidney patients and persons with disabilities to Rs. 12,500 is also a positive measure.

However, welfare effectiveness depends on more than the total amount allocated.

A properly administered system must identify eligible households accurately, process applications promptly and prevent both wrongful exclusions and improper payments.

Sri Lanka's welfare arrangements should be evaluated against measurable indicators, including the number of eligible families receiving assistance, payment delays, appeal outcomes and the adequacy of benefits relative to essential living costs.

The objective should be to protect vulnerable citizens while creating opportunities for those capable of moving towards economic independence.

PUBLIC-SECTOR SALARIES: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN ANNOUNCEMENT AND A NEW INCREASE

The Rs. 110 billion allocation towards public-sector salary adjustments is another significant component of the Budget.

But it is important to distinguish between an entirely new salary increase and the scheduled implementation of an earlier commitment.

The January 2027 adjustments represent the final phase of a salary revision programme announced in 2025.

They should not therefore be presented as though every public employee is receiving a wholly new increase of Rs. 20,000 to Rs. 80,000 in January.

The actual additional payment varies according to the applicable salary scale and the phased implementation arrangements.

This distinction is essential to an accurate assessment of the Budget.

Public-sector employees deserve transparent information about their remuneration. Taxpayers are equally entitled to understand the recurring cost of salary commitments and how they are financed.

SMALL BUSINESSES: CAN CHEAPER CREDIT PRODUCE MORE JOBS?

One of the Budget's more promising proposals is the programme of concessional financing for small and medium-sized enterprises.

The Government has targeted approximately Rs. 174 billion in lending, with designated financing arrangements offering interest rates in the region of 3% to 5%.

Agriculture, fisheries, rural businesses and enterprises operated by women are among the intended beneficiaries.

Access to affordable finance has long been a challenge for Sri Lankan entrepreneurs.

Commercial borrowing costs, collateral requirements and uncertainty over future sales can discourage investment even where a business has the potential to expand.

The proposed financing programme could therefore make a meaningful contribution to economic activity.

But lending money is not the same as creating productive enterprises.

The success of the scheme will depend on the quality of projects financed, the capacity of borrowers to repay, and the ability of businesses to reach sustainable markets.

TABLE 2: HOW THE SME PROGRAMME SHOULD BE MEASURED

Government objective	Suggested performance measure
Expand business financing	Number and value of loans disbursed
Support rural enterprises	District-level distribution of financing
Encourage entrepreneurship	Number of new businesses supported
Increase employment	Net jobs created and retained
Improve business sustainability	Repayment and business survival rates
Support exports	Additional export sales attributable to supported firms
Ensure fair access	Lending distribution by enterprise size and ownership

The Government should publish quarterly performance reports rather than relying solely on the value of loans approved.

The public deserves to know whether subsidised credit is creating employment, expanding production and improving incomes.

RS. 2 TRILLION IN PUBLIC INVESTMENT: THE DELIVERY TEST

The proposed public investment programme of approximately Rs. 2 trillion is among the Budget's most consequential commitments.

Infrastructure expenditure can generate employment, improve transport efficiency, support private investment and strengthen long-term productivity.

The allocation of Rs. 487 billion towards transport infrastructure and disaster recovery is particularly relevant to a country repeatedly affected by flooding, damaged roads and inadequate drainage systems.

However, Sri Lanka has frequently struggled to translate capital expenditure allocations into completed projects.

The problem is not necessarily a shortage of plans.

It is often the gap between approval, procurement, execution and delivery.

A large allocation that remains unspent produces little economic benefit. Equally, expenditure on poorly designed or inadequately maintained projects may create liabilities rather than lasting value.

The Government should therefore publish a national infrastructure delivery schedule identifying the projects financed under the Budget, their estimated costs, expected completion dates and responsible implementing agencies.

Progress should be reported quarterly, with explanations for significant delays or cost increases.

For flood mitigation projects, success should be measured through reductions in flooding, damage and disruption, not simply the amount spent on construction.

For transport investments, the relevant measures should include improved travel times, lower logistics costs and better access to economic opportunities.

The principle is straightforward: public investment must produce public value.

FISCAL DISCIPLINE AND THE IMF

The Government has sought to maintain its commitment to fiscal stability while increasing investment and providing targeted concessions.

This balancing act is unavoidable.

Sri Lanka's recent economic history demonstrates the consequences of unsustainable public finances, excessive borrowing and inadequate foreign

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exchange resilience.

Maintaining fiscal discipline is therefore not merely a requirement associated with the International Monetary Fund.

It is essential to protecting the country against another economic crisis.

At the same time, fiscal consolidation cannot become a permanent substitute for development.

A sustainable recovery requires higher productivity, greater export earnings, improved investment and stronger household incomes.

The President's proposal to establish a Cabinet committee to examine a possible successor IMF arrangement is significant.

It suggests that the Government is considering how international financial support and policy credibility might be maintained beyond the existing programme.

Any future arrangement should be assessed against clear national objectives.

These should include debt sustainability, stronger public institutions, export competitiveness and adequate protection for vulnerable households.

The Government should also explain how the proposed expenditure programme fits within its revenue projections, borrowing requirements and fiscal targets.

Without that reconciliation, the public cannot fully assess the affordability of the Budget.

THE MISSING MEASUREMENT: HOUSEHOLD PROSPERITY

Perhaps the most important question arising from Budget 2027 concerns the definition of economic success.

Governments traditionally emphasise GDP growth, revenue collection, fiscal balances, investment allocations and debt ratios.

These indicators are important.

But they do not, individually or collectively, provide a complete picture of household prosperity.

A country can report economic growth while many citizens experience little improvement in their disposable income.

A reduction in inflation means that prices are rising more slowly. It does not necessarily mean that the cost of living has returned to earlier levels.

Similarly, higher public expenditure does not automatically guarantee better public services.

NEWSLINE believes that the Government should supplement its traditional economic indicators with a transparent household prosperity scorecard.

TABLE 3: THE PEOPLE'S BUDGET SCORECARD

Indicator	What should be measured
Household purchasing power	Real disposable income after essential expenses
Employment	Sustainable jobs created and unemployment trends
Food affordability	Cost of a representative essential food basket
Education	Household education costs and access
Healthcare	Waiting times, medicine availability and out-of-pocket costs
SME development	Business survival, investment and employment
Infrastructure	Projects completed on time and within budget
Welfare	Accuracy, timeliness and adequacy of assistance
Exports	Growth in export earnings and diversification
Public accountability	Publication of expenditure and delivery outcomes

This would allow the Government, Parliament, the media and citizens to evaluate economic policy against outcomes rather than promises.

WHAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD DO NEXT

The Budget contains measures that could contribute positively to Sri Lanka's recovery.

But implementation will determine their value.

First, the Treasury should publish a comprehensive public explanation of the tax changes, including examples of their effects on households at different income levels.

Second, concessional SME financing should be accompanied by transparent eligibility criteria, accessible application procedures and independent reporting of lending outcomes.

Third, major public investment projects should have publicly available implementation schedules, measurable targets and regular progress assessments.

Fourth, welfare administration should be strengthened through transparent eligibility reviews, timely payments and effective appeals procedures.

Finally, the Government should establish a household prosperity monitoring framework that connects economic policy to the actual financial circumstances of citizens.

These are achievable reforms. They do not require abandoning fiscal discipline or creating entirely new layers of bureaucracy.

They require using existing institutions more effectively and making government performance visible to the public.

THE NEWSLINE VERDICT

Budget 2027 is not without merit.

It recognises the importance of investment, productive enterprise, infrastructure development and social protection.

The proposed business financing programme could encourage entrepreneurship. The infrastructure allocations could improve economic efficiency. The targeted tax and welfare measures could provide relief to sections of the population.

But these benefits are not automatic.

There remains a significant difference between announcing Rs. 2 trillion in public investment and completing projects that improve the economy.

There is a difference between allocating Rs. 174 billion for business lending and creating sustainable employment.

And there is a difference between improving national economic indicators and improving the financial security of ordinary households.

The President has presented an ambitious programme. His administration must now demonstrate the capacity to implement it.

Parliament, for its part, should scrutinise the fiscal assumptions, the effectiveness of proposed expenditure and the arrangements for monitoring delivery.

The Opposition has an equally important responsibility to examine the Budget constructively, identify weaknesses and propose workable alternatives rather than reducing the debate to competing political slogans.

Sri Lanka cannot afford another cycle in which ambitious promises are followed by disappointing execution.

Be that as it may, the ultimate measure of Budget 2027 will not be the applause it receives in Parliament, the size of its allocations or the confidence expressed by international institutions.

It will be whether a family can afford a decent meal, whether a young person can find meaningful employment, whether a farmer can earn a sustainable income and whether an entrepreneur can build a viable business.

The economy may be recovering. Budget 2027 must demonstrate that the people are recovering with it.

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HAPPINESS AND JOY

Faiszer Musthapha and Upul Kumarapperuma were overjoyed at the news that Sivarasan had been released and would soon be returning home after nearly facing the death sentence.



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GLOBAL MICROSOFT OUTAGE KNOCKS OUTLOOK, TEAMS, AND COPILOT OFFLINE

If your office inbox has been looking suspiciously quiet or your morning video calls refused to connect, you can hold off on blaming your local internet service provider. Microsoft has been locked in a prolonged technical battle since Thursday night, to restore core cloud services after a massive global outage disrupted Outlook, Microsoft Teams, Copilot, SharePoint, and Microsoft 365 across at least 74 countries.

The trouble started late Thursday evening Sri Lanka time, quickly escalating into one of the most stubborn cloud disruptions of the year. At the peak of the meltdown, outage-tracking platform Downdetector logged more than 130,000 user complaints for Outlook alone, alongside tens of thousands of reports from frustrated professionals locked out of Teams chats, shared documents, and AI tools. Even Microsoft's own service health dashboard briefly buckled under the strain, leaving IT administrators scrambling in the dark for answers.



For businesses and remote workers in Colombo and across Asia waking up to start their Friday workday, the timing could hardly have been worse.

Emails vanished into limbo, calendar invites stopped syncing, and browser tabs attempting to load Outlook returned blunt HTTP 503 Service Unavailable errors. In an era where entire corporate workflows sit inside a single cloud ecosystem, a server hiccup in Redmond effectively puts millions of desks on an unscheduled coffee break.

Despite early speculation online that hackers might be behind the blackout, both Microsoft and government officials in affected regions such as Australia quickly ruled out a cyberattack.

According to Microsoft's engineering updates, the culprit was far less dramatic but deeply disruptive: a configuration issue caused a cluster of backend servers to fail automated health checks and drop offline unexpectedly. That sudden loss of capacity dumped massive traffic onto the remaining infrastructure, overwhelming core processes in a classic domino effect.

Getting the lights back on has proved unusually tricky. Engineers paused all routine software updates, rerouted global traffic, and began restarting affected servers in batches. At one point, several servers that had been brought back online became unresponsive all over again once live user traffic hit them, forcing technicians to throttle connections and pace the recovery.

By early this afternoon, Microsoft reported seeing positive results for server stability and increased capacity, though it warned users to expect a gradual recovery rather than an instant switch-back.

For everyday users still seeing error screens today, there is little to do on your own device beyond waiting out the server rebalancing and avoiding repeated rapid refreshes, which only add to the traffic jam. More broadly, the disruption serves as a timely reminder for workplaces everywhere; putting every email, meeting, and document inside one digital basket works wonderfully until the handle snaps.

VIRAL THREATS AND COURT ORDERS: BALANGODA KASSAPA THERO HELD UNTIL NOVEMBER 26 AFTER ANURADHAPURA UNREST

The fallout from Thursday's chaotic confrontation near the Ruwanweli Maha Seya took a sharp turn into both viral controversy and criminal custody today, as the Anuradhapura Magistrate's Court remanded Ven. Balangoda Kassapa Thero and six others until November 26 while disturbing hospital footage of the monk circulated widely online.

In the newly emerged video, recorded inside the Anuradhapura Teaching Hospital following yesterday's arrests, Ven. Kassapa Thero is seen seated on a hospital bed flanked by medical staff and uniformed police officers.

Far from projecting the calm restraint normally associated with a peaceful Satyagraha, the monk appears to unleash a tirade of verbal abuse and direct threats against the officers assigned to guard him, adding an embarrassing public postscript to a protest that had already spiraled badly out of control.

The legal consequences arrived just hours later when the Chief Magistrate personally visited the hospital ward to inspect the arrested monks and civilians receiving treatment. Following the inspection, the court ordered Ven. Kassapa Thero along with three other Buddhist monks and three laypersons, including two women, to be placed in remand custody until November 26.

The suspects face charges ranging from defying prior court orders to vacate the sacred precincts to obstructing police duties and assaulting Ven. Rajanganaye Saddharathana Thero during Thursday's brawl.

Going a step further, the Magistrate ordered that all seven suspects undergo psychiatric evaluations as well as medical screenings to determine whether narcotics had been used. Police also informed the court that Ven. Kassapa Thero already had an open arrest warrant issued by the Trincomalee Magistrate's Court after failing to appear for a separate case on November 11, prompting the Anuradhapura bench to direct officers to produce him before the Trincomalee court as well.

Thursday's unrest erupted when a group led by Ven. Rajanganaye Saddharathana arrived at the site where Ven. Kassapa Thero and fellow protesters had set up a fast-unto-death campaign against the Anuradhapura Sacred City Development Plan and in support of releasing Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero. Verbal arguments rapidly turned physical, leaving Saddharathana hospitalized with a head injury after allegedly being struck with a wooden pole, before police moved in to clear the unauthorized structures and arrest the participants.



For a demonstration framed around defending sacred heritage, ending up in remand custody under orders for drug and psychiatric screenings while video of a hospital-bed shouting match goes viral is a sobering reminder of what happens when street agitation collides head-on with the rule of law.

JENSEN HUANG STEPS DOWN: THE SCANDALS, TIMING, AND WASHINGTON SHADOWS

Silicon Valley loves a redemption arc, yet even the best public relations teams in California could not script a survival plan for Nvidia co-founder Jensen Huang. Yesterday, November 12, the longtime face of the artificial intelligence boom abruptly resigned as chief executive, president, and board member effective immediately, bringing a stunning end to a 33-year run that turned a graphics card startup into a multi-trillion-dollar juggernaut.

The unraveling began in late October when The New York Times reported that Huang had engaged in an extramarital affair with Huang Le, a Singapore-based datacenter executive known as Alice Huang whom US intelligence agencies suspect of having ties to Chinese intelligence. Although Huang admitted the infidelity in an internal memo to staff on November 8, insisting he had no idea of any alleged espionage links, the fallout snowballed fast. Shareholder lawsuits followed, Nvidia's market valuation slipped below four trillion dollars, and reports surfaced of additional workplace relationships involving two female Nvidia employees. By Thursday, the board installed Chief Financial Officer Colette Kress as interim CEO and prepared Huang to testify before Congress.

While the personal indiscretions gave corporate governance hawks plenty of ammunition, the timing of the leaks has raised sharp eyebrows among market watchers and political observers alike.

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Just days before the explosive intelligence disclosures hit the front pages, Huang broke ranks with Silicon Valley's billionaire class by publicly endorsing California's Proposition 40 wealth tax. While tech titans poured millions into defeating the ballot measure or quietly relocated their residences out of state, Huang casually remarked that he was fine paying a potential seven to eight billion dollar tax bill, noting he was not afraid of taxes, only of being poor. Watching the one billionaire willing to defend wealth taxation get torched by a sudden torrent of classified leaks right afterward struck many observers as remarkably convenient.



Beyond tax politics, the episode has fueled intense speculation about deeper geopolitical intervention from Washington. US intelligence agencies reportedly knew about Huang's relationship for over a year, and Secretary of State Marco Rubio had already circulated a classified warning inside the administration. Critics point out that Huang had been lobbying hard to loosen American export restrictions on advanced chips to China, putting him directly at odds with national security hawks determined to keep AI hardware out of Beijing's reach. Whether the sudden public exposure was an organic security reckoning or a calculated push to remove a chief executive too eager to do business with China, the result is identical: Washington now has a far more pliable leadership structure atop America's most critical chipmaker.

DEEPFAKE GOVERNOR ON YOUR FEED: CENTRAL BANK WARNS AGAINST AI INVESTMENT SCAMS

If you happen to scroll past a Facebook video today showing Central Bank Governor Dr. Nandalal Weerasinghe casually offering hot stock tips or promising effortless returns on a new investment scheme, keep scrolling and hold onto your wallet.

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) issued an urgent public warning today flagging a fresh wave of fraudulent, AI-generated videos and sponsored advertisements circulating across social media that digitally clone the Governor's likeness and voice to lure unsuspecting investors.

Scammers have discovered that few faces carry more financial authority in Sri Lanka than the head of the Central Bank, and artificial intelligence has made it disturbingly easy to put words into his mouth. According to the CBSL, these deceptive clips splice real footage with synthetic voiceovers and lip-syncing software to make it appear as though the Governor is personally endorsing private trading platforms, quick-rich schemes, or exclusive financial advice. Clicking on the accompanying links typically funnels users toward phishing pages designed to harvest banking credentials, personal identity data, or outright cash deposits that vanish the moment they are transferred.

While the Central Bank has issued similar alerts over the past year as deepfake technology became cheaper and more convincing, the latest surge on Facebook suggests online fraudsters are aggressively targeting everyday Sri Lankans feeling the pinch of high living costs and looking for ways to stretch their savings. Information security analysts at Sri Lanka CERT have repeatedly noted that impersonation scams involving high-profile public figures remain one of the primary vectors used to trick social media users into handing over money and sensitive data.



In its notice today, the CBSL explicitly reminded the public that neither the institution nor its Governor promotes commercial investment products, private trading apps, or guaranteed-return schemes on social media. Citizens are urged to verify any financial announcements strictly through the Central Bank's official website and verified communication channels before making any financial commitments. The bank also appealed to social media users not to share or forward suspicious clips, even out of curiosity or amusement, as every share helps scammers reach another potential victim.

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WHERE IS HARSHA? PRIME MINISTER QUESTIONS SJB LEADERSHIP SHUFFLE AS 2027 BUDGET DEBATE OPENS

Parliamentary tradition is a sacred, if occasionally tedious, beast in Sri Lanka, where everyone usually knows their script before stepping up to the dispatch box. So when the Second Reading debate on the 2027 National Budget kicked off in the legislature today, November 13, Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya immediately seized on a glaring absence that broke years of legislative custom.

Addressing the House, the Prime Minister openly questioned why Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP Harsha de Silva did not deliver the Opposition's opening response to the budget. Pointing out a practice she had observed since entering Parliament in 2020, Dr. Amarasuriya noted that Dr. de Silva has traditionally led the charge for the opposition benches following every budget speech, setting the analytical tone for economic critiques.

Watching Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa handle the initial remarks instead prompted the Prime Minister to ask whether the departure signaled a deeper ideological shift within the SJB or a quiet internal disagreement over how to tackle the government's 7.93 trillion rupee spending plan.



The backdrop to this parliamentary head-scratching is a jittery opposition trying to find its footing amid a complex economic recovery.

In the days leading up to the budget presentation, SJB economic policy teams and associated think tanks like the Advocata Institute had been leaning hard into critiques of indirect tax burdens, slow state execution, and tax exemptions for luxury developments like Colombo Port City.

Yet when the debate actually opened, the Prime Minister accused the Opposition Leader of leaning into misleading narratives regarding the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank rather than presenting a coherent alternative fiscal blueprint.

The government clearly relished the chance to poke at opposition unity, stating that they were eager to hear Dr. de Silva's eventual contribution to determine whether backbenchers and senior economic spokespersons in the SJB actually share the leadership's stated positions.

For an opposition trying to project itself as a credible government-in-waiting while navigating internal leadership dynamics and shifting policy stances, a disorganized start to the biggest debate of the legislative calendar is an avoidable stumble.

As the seven-day Second Reading debate rolls on toward the final vote on December 14, the real question is whether the opposition can pivot from scoring procedural points over who gets to hold the microphone to offering a rigorous, data-driven critique of a budget that touches every household in the country.

For now, the ruling benches are more than happy to sit back and watch the SJB argue over who reads the script.

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MAYOR WARNS OF LEGAL ACTION AS AI-GENERATED MALL FLOOD VIDEOS GO VIRAL

If your social media feed this week featured dramatic video clips of muddy floodwaters rushing past escalators and storefronts inside Colombo's One Galle Face shopping mall, you were watching a cunning blend of genuine weather misery and digital fiction. Following days of severe cloudbursts that genuinely turned major thoroughfares across the capital into navigable rivers, Colombo Mayor Vraie Cally Balthazaar has announced that municipal authorities are preparing legal action against the creators and distributors of AI-generated deepfake videos designed to weaponize real civic anxiety for online clout.

The controversy centers on a circulating 14-second clip posted on Facebook and TikTok in the wake of torrential downpours that dropped 129 millimeters of rain within hours on November 6, followed by fresh storms on November 11. The viral footage purported to show knee-deep water swirling near the mall entrance and around an Under Armour store. To anyone who spent those afternoons wading through stagnant water on Galle Road or choking in bumper-to-bumper traffic outside, the visual looked entirely plausible. That is precisely why it worked.



However, local fact-checking organization Fact Crescendo Sri Lanka quickly picked the footage apart after staff members at multiple One Galle Face retail outlets confirmed that water never actually breached the indoor shopping complex. While minor rainwater pooling was managed in the basement parking areas during the peak storms, the high-end retail interior remained entirely dry.

Technical analysis of the viral clips revealed classic hallmarks of artificial intelligence manipulation. Independent detection tools flagged a 99 percent probability of AI generation in the opening frames, pointing to distorted facial features, warped brand lettering, and unnatural fluid dynamics. Google's SynthID Detector also confirmed artificial editing across both video and audio tracks, proving that bad actors had stitched synthetic disaster imagery onto real-world weather events to maximize online engagement.

Mayor Balthazaar's warning underscores a growing headache for municipal leaders as generative AI lowers the barrier for fabricating urban crises. When flash floods hit low-lying areas of Colombo and choked traffic around Galle Face, real infrastructure challenges demanded genuine attention from city engineers and disaster management teams. Instead, emergency services and mall administrators found themselves wasting valuable time debunking digital fabrications that threatened commercial activity and public confidence.

The real danger of modern deepfakes is not that they invent catastrophes out of thin air, but that they take a very real, painful grain of truth (like the capital's persistent drainage failures) and inflate it into a pixelated panic. Real rain and flooded roads are bad enough on their own; viewers would do well to double-check their feeds before hitting share on digital floods that exaggerate a bad commute into a Hollywood disaster movie.

GOVERNMENT SERVICE ENGINEERS LAUNCH STRIKE OVER ALLOWANCE DISPUTE

While Parliament spent yesterday afternoon debating macroeconomic targets and fiscal ledgers, state engineers took a much more direct approach to the 2027 spending plan by putting down their tools. The Government Service Engineers' Association launched a nationwide token strike today, November 13, in sharp protest over the government's failure to restore the contentious Field Attendance and Transport (FAT) Allowance in the newly tabled budget.

The core grievance centers on an allowance worth 75,000 rupees that has been a staple for officers within the Sri Lanka Engineering Service since 2012 before being discontinued in 2024. Association leaders maintain that despite prior understandings that the monthly stipend would be reinstated to cushion the steep rise in field expenses and general living costs, the 2027 budget omitted it entirely.



Rather than stopping at a single-day token walkout, the union's Executive Committee has drawn a hard line. If the demand remains unaddressed, engineers will escalate into a full-scale nationwide strike and protest campaign starting Monday, November 16.

In the interim, immediate trade union actions have taken effect across ministries and departments. State engineers have officially withdrawn from all field inspections, after-hours duties, and attendance at District and Divisional Coordinating Committee meetings. They are also boycotting official opening ceremonies, provincial political gatherings, and participation in vital bid evaluation and procurement committees.

Addressing journalists at a midday media briefing held at the Trade Union Building on Professor Stanley Wijesundera Mawatha in Colombo 07, association representatives warned that the work stoppage will continue indefinitely until an immediate solution is provided. They cautioned that freezing procurement committees and halting field oversight will inevitably stall active infrastructure and development projects across the island, placing full responsibility for the resulting delays squarely on the administration.

For a government attempting to accelerate public investment and regional development in the wake of recent natural disasters, a protracted strike by the technical backbone of state engineering services could not come at a worse time.





