NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"



NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

WHAT IS ACTUALLY IN YOUR BOWL OR CONE? COLOMBO COURTS HIT POPULAR EATERIES WITH FINES OVER FOOD STANDARDS AND EXPIRED STOCK

Dining out in Colombo comes with an unspoken assumption: whatever is behind the counter is fresh, safe, and roughly what the menu claims it is. Two separate court rulings reported across the capital this week suggest that assumption deserves a much closer look, as food regulators handed out back-to-back penalties to well-known eateries over expired kitchen stock and mislabeled ice cream.

Leading the headlines is the fallout surrounding popular bubble tea and dessert chain Bing Chun, which boasts more than 60 outlets across the island, including over 30 in the Colombo District alone. Following a magistrate's court ruling that imposed an 84,000 rupee fine across 28 food-related offences, the company issued a lengthy public statement today, November 15, seeking to contain the reputational damage. The violations stemmed from products marketed to customers as vanilla and chocolate ice cream that failed to meet Sri Lanka's minimum legal requirements for fat content and total solids under the Food (Standards) Regulations.

In its defense, Bing Chun urged the public and media to distinguish between failing compositional standards and selling food that is toxic or unsafe to eat, noting that laboratory reports did not find the desserts contaminated or poisonous.

While the company promised to review its formulations and product descriptions, the episode touches on a basic consumer right: when customers pay for ice cream, they expect real dairy standards rather than a cheaper frozen substitute passing under the same label.

Just across town in Colombo 03, meanwhile, regulators uncovered a far more straightforward kitchen lapse. The Colombo Chief Magistrate's Court slapped a 100,000 rupee fine on Sun Light Garden Sea Food Restaurant (Pvt) Ltd, located on Abdul Gafoor Mawatha, after Consumer Affairs Authority (CAA) inspectors found a 250ml bottle of Cane Pepper Oil on the premises bearing an expiry date of December 8, 2024, nearly two years past its shelf life at the time of the September 2026 raid.

Following a complaint filed by the CAA on November 11, the court penalized the restaurant for violating Direction No. 52 under Extraordinary Gazette No. 1875/38, which strictly prohibits keeping or storing expired goods alongside or adjacent to usable food items intended for consumers.

Taken together, the two cases highlight both the value of stepped-up regulatory inspections and the persistent gap in routine accountability across Sri Lanka's hospitality sector. While an 84,000 rupee or 100,000 rupee court fine makes for an embarrassing news cycle, such amounts are barely a rounding error for high-volume commercial chains and busy city restaurants.

Meaningful consumer protection depends not only on occasional raids, but on transparent kitchen audits, accurate menu labeling, and penalties steep enough to make cutting corners bad for business.

For its part, the Consumer Affairs Authority has reminded restaurant operators to segregate and discard expired ingredients immediately, while urging diners to report suspected food standard or labeling violations via the 1977 hotline during office hours. Until self-regulation improves across commercial kitchens, Colombo's diners may want to keep that number handy.

KNUCKLES TEENAGE CHILDBIRTH TRAGEDY PROMPTS NEW 2027 CHILD CARE POLICY

Hidden beneath plastic sheets inside a remote forest cave near Meemure in the Knuckles mountain range, Ududumbara Police made a discovery this week that reads less like a modern police blotter and more like an indictment of how easily a vulnerable child can slip entirely off society's radar. A 15-year-old girl who had been reported missing from her home in the Kandy District since July was found living in the dense undergrowth alongside her two-month-old baby girl, having delivered the infant inside the cave without a doctor, midwife, or basic medical care.

Investigators tracked down the hideout only after noticing a young man repeatedly purchasing unusually large quantities of food from a local shop.

Trailing him into the forest led officers to the makeshift shelter, where the teenager and infant had been surviving on forest herbs and rudimentary care. Two men connected to the case have since been arrested and remanded until November 20 by the Teldeniya Magistrate's Court, as police pursue statutory rape and child protection investigations. Remarkably, despite the severe medical risks of an unattended adolescent birth in the wilderness, doctors confirmed that both the teenage mother and her baby are out of immediate danger.

The grim details of the Knuckles rescue prompted an urgent response from Women and Child Affairs Minister Saroja Savithri Paulraj yesterday, November 14, who announced that the Ministry is securing budgetary allocations to roll out a formal 'Alternative Care Policy' starting in 2027 to protect children caught in unsafe and vulnerable circumstances.

In her special statement, Minister Paulraj expressed relief that the girl and her newborn are safe under state protection, confirming that relevant authorities have been instructed to safeguard their ongoing physical and mental recovery. Looking beyond the immediate criminal investigation, however, the Minister pointed to a deeper social fracture: mounting economic, social, and political pressures, paired with a widening communication breakdown between parents and children, are leaving minors dangerously isolated even inside their own homes.



She urged parents to foster open dialogue and build unwavering trust so young people feel safe turning to their families during a crisis rather than disappearing into silence or danger. Equally telling was her candid admission regarding the state itself: government institutions and frontline responders dealing with vulnerable citizens must become far more approachable, accessible, and trustworthy if distressed teenagers are ever going to seek help before a situation spirals into tragedy.

ITALY SLAPS META WITH €805 MILLION FINE OVER DEFAULT FACEBOOK PHOTO ACCESS

Most smartphone users tap "Allow" on app permission pop-ups without reading the fine print, assuming they are simply enabling the ability to upload a single photo when they choose.

Yesterday, November 14, Italy's data protection authority decided that Meta took advantage of that exact habit, slapping Meta Platforms Ireland Limited with a massive €805 million (roughly $887 million) fine for quietly scanning Android users' photo galleries without clear, specific consent.

The penalty centers on a Facebook feature introduced in 2023 called "Get suggestions from gallery when browsing Facebook," which automatically scans photos, videos, and related metadata stored on a user's phone to prompt potential social media posts while they scroll.

Following an investigation launched in July 2025 after a complaint by the Bolzano-based Consumers' and Users' Protection Centre, the Italian regulator, known as the Garante, concluded that the tool violated Article 122 of Italy's Privacy Code.

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

ITALY SLAPS META...

Under European ePrivacy rules, a personal smartphone is legally treated as part of an individual's private sphere, meaning apps cannot rummage through local storage without free, specific, and informed permission.

According to the Garante's technical analysis, Facebook bundled gallery access into a single, broadly worded authorization prompt covering multiple unrelated app functions.

Worse still, the gallery suggestion tool was switched on by default, quietly sweeping up roughly 20 million Android users across Italy. Even though Meta introduced minor tweaks after the complaint was filed, regulators dismissed those changes as too late and ineffective for anyone who had not updated their app or had already clicked through the original prompt.

The €805 million bill, representing roughly 0.47 percent of Meta's global annual turnover, reflects not just the scale of the 20 million affected users, but also the regulator's frustration with Meta's conduct.



The authority pointed to a prior 2019 privacy sanction against the tech giant, the ongoing nature of the breach, and what it bluntly described as Meta's lack of cooperation during the inquiry.

Meta also failed in its attempt to get the case transferred to Ireland's more industry-familiar regulator, as the Garante ruled that ePrivacy violations do not fall under Europe's cross-border "one-stop-shop" mechanism.

Under the ruling, Meta has 60 days to disable the feature by default, roll out a standalone, unambiguous consent prompt, and clearly explain to users how to turn the tool off, including for people who already granted access in the past.

While this specific probe did not examine whether private camera rolls were fed into artificial intelligence training models, a practice Meta denies, the Garante noted it may separately investigate a newer 2026 feature that processes gallery images in the cloud.

Meta has rejected the regulator's findings and announced plans to appeal.

For everyone else, the ruling is a timely reminder to check your phone's app permissions: granting an app access to your camera roll just to post a holiday picture should never double as an open invitation to browse your entire photo library.

CHANDRA MALINI RAJAPAKSA, WIFE OF FORMER SPEAKER CHAMAL RAJAPAKSA, PASSES AWAY

In Sri Lankan public life, the spotlight rarely wanders far from the loud theater of parliamentary chambers and election platforms, leaving those who anchor prominent political households largely out of the daily headlines.

Today, November 15, family members and political circles in the South are mourning the passing of Chandra Malini Rajapaksa, the longtime wife of former Speaker and veteran Cabinet Minister Chamal Rajapaksa, who died while receiving medical treatment at the Karapitiya Teaching Hospital in Galle.

Born Chandra Malini Wijewardene, she met Chamal Rajapaksa in the early 1970s during a transitional chapter in his life, shortly after he left the Ceylon Police Force to serve as Assistant General Manager at the State Trading Corporation.

The couple married on January 3, 1975, beginning a partnership that spanned more than five decades across some of the most turbulent and defining chapters in modern Sri Lankan politics.



While her husband went on to represent the Hambantota District continuously in Parliament from 1989 until stepping down from electoral politics in 2024, holding key portfolios ranging from Irrigation and Agriculture to Ports and Aviation, as well as serving as the 19th Speaker of Parliament between 2010 and 2015, Chandra Malini Rajapaksa largely chose a measured, understated role away from partisan glare.

Yet within Giruwapattuwa and across the Deep South, she remained a familiar and steady figure alongside her husband through decades of grassroots campaigning, community engagements, and family milestones.

She was also the mother of two sons, Shasheendra and Shameendra. Her eldest son, Shasheendra Rajapaksa, followed the family path into public administration and politics, serving as the Chief Minister of the Uva Province and as Basnayake Nilame of the historic Ruhunu Maha Kataragama Devalaya.

As the matriarch of the senior branch of the Medamulana Rajapaksa household, she navigated both the heights of political influence and the intense public scrutiny that inevitably accompanied one of the country's most prominent political families.

Even as political tides shifted dramatically in recent years, her passing at Karapitiya Teaching Hospital marks the close of a personal era for the 84-year-old former Speaker and his immediate family.

CONSUMER WATCHDOG SUMMONS LAUGFS GAS OVER 1,775 RUPEE PRICE HIKE

Households across Sri Lanka barely had time to digest the numbers in the 2027 national budget before getting hit with a much more immediate math problem at the local gas depot. Starting at midnight on November 13, LAUGFS Gas stunned consumers with a massive price hike across its domestic cylinders, prompting the Consumer Affairs Authority (CAA) to summon company executives to explain how cooking gas suddenly jumped by more than a third overnight.



Under the revised pricing structure, the retail price of a standard 12.5-kilogram domestic LAUGFS cylinder surged by an eye-watering 1,775 rupees, leaping from 4,965 rupees to 6,740 rupees. Smaller households relying on the 5-kilogram cylinder fared no better in percentage terms, seeing their bill climb by 732 rupees, from 1,988 rupees to 2,720 rupees. In response to the public outcry, the CAA has instructed senior representatives of the company to appear before the regulator at 10:00 a.m. tomorrow, November 16, to justify the steep upward revision.

LAUGFS Gas has pointed its finger squarely at global headwinds, attributing the sharp adjustment to rising international Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) benchmarks alongside elevated marine freight and insurance premiums, which the company claims have substantially driven up the landed cost of importing bulk supplies into Sri Lanka. While global energy volatility and shipping surcharges are real pressures in international commodity markets, a 35 percent overnight leap in retail prices naturally invites scrutiny from regulators tasked with ensuring that external cost arguments are not being used to pad domestic margins.

For everyday consumers and small food vendors, the timing could scarcely be worse. Cooking gas is not an optional luxury item that families can simply pause

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

CONSUMER WATCHDOG...

until shipping rates cool down; every spike at the cylinder counter ripples directly into the cost of lunch packets, bakery goods, and household grocery budgets already stretched thin by years of economic adjustment. Moreover, sharp price disparities in the local LPG market inevitably trigger panic buying, supply bottlenecks, and consumer confusion as households scramble to switch cylinders or ration kitchen fuel.

Tomorrow morning's inquiry at the CAA will test whether the regulator is merely going through the motions of seeking an explanation or whether it is prepared to demand transparent, itemized procurement invoices before letting a 6,740-rupee price tag stand. Sri Lankan consumers have heard plenty of lectures about global market formulas over the past few years; what they want from their regulators tomorrow is proof that someone is actually checking the math.

HIGH COURT SETS NOVEMBER 18 RULING ON BID TO SUSPEND NAMAL RAJAPAKSA'S BAIL

In Sri Lanka's anti-corruption courts, the toughest battle is often fought long before a single witness takes the stand at trial, and it usually revolves around one loaded legal phrase: "exceptional circumstances." On November 18, the Colombo High Court will decide whether that threshold was properly met when a lower court granted bail to Parliamentarian Namal Rajapaksa in the long-running Krrish bribery investigation.

Colombo High Court Judge Lal Ranasinghe Bandara fixed the date after hearing sharp legal arguments over a revision petition filed by the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC). The Bribery Commission is seeking an immediate interim injunction to suspend the November 3 bail order issued by Colombo Chief Magistrate Asanga S. Bodaragama, arguing that releasing Rajapaksa violated strict statutory rules governing major graft cases.

At the center of the dispute is Section 149(1) of the Anti-Corruption Act, which mandates that suspects charged under a formal certificate from the Bribery Commission must remain in remand custody until the conclusion of their trial unless exceptional circumstances are established.

Representing CIABOC, legal counsel argued that the Magistrate's decision to grant bail on a 100,000 rupee cash bond and three sureties of five million rupees each disregarded these statutory safeguards. Prosecutors also raised alarms over witness protection, contending that former employees linked to the transaction had only felt safe enough to come forward once the suspects were placed behind bars following Rajapaksa's arrest on September 4 over the alleged 70 million rupee Transworks Square land bribe.

Defending the lower court's ruling, President's Counsel Ali Sabry mounted a forceful pushback on both procedural and humanitarian grounds. On the law, Sabry cited established Supreme Court precedents to argue that an interim injunction cannot be used to grant the exact same final relief sought in a main revision petition before the case is fully heard. On the facts, he pointed to the life-threatening cardiac condition of Rajapaksa's mother, noting she had suffered a 95 percent blockage in her heart, and asked the bench how any human being could dismiss a parent's critical medical emergency as an ordinary circumstance.



In practical terms, Wednesday's ruling will not immediately alter Rajapaksa's physical location, as separate remand orders tied to the SriLankan Airlines Airbus investigation continue to keep him in custody regardless of the Krrish bail order.

RAUFF HAKEEM BLASTS GOVERNMENT'S 4.26 BILLION RUPEE ISRAELI DRONE DEAL

When a cash-strapped government pushes through a multi-billion-rupee defense purchase without calling for competitive tenders, questions in Parliament are guaranteed. When that deal involves Israeli defense technology and allegations of intelligence gathering for Washington, the political temperature rises considerably. During the parliamentary budget debate this week, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) Leader MP Rauff Hakeem launched a blistering attack on the administration's 4.261 billion rupee procurement of four surveillance drones from Israel, questioning both the lack of open bidding and the geopolitical wisdom of the purchase.

Taking the floor in the legislature, Hakeem zeroed in on the speed and opacity of the transaction, which passed via a supplementary estimate on November 5 to establish an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) system for the Sri Lanka Air Force. "Why the sudden urgency? Without calling for tenders, they are proceeding directly with the purchase," Hakeem demanded, before floating unsubstantiated suspicions over potential commissions tied to the government-to-government deal.

More explosively, the veteran parliamentarian accused the government of turning Sri Lanka's military into an intelligence proxy in the Indian Ocean. Alleging that the aircraft were actually intended to track Iranian vessels and feed intelligence to the United States, Hakeem warned ruling party MPs against dragging the Sri Lanka Navy and Air Force into foreign power rivalries. "Don't get yourselves into trouble by engaging in such activities. You have already created enough problems," he cautioned, while slamming the government's broader foreign policy posture on global flashpoints ranging from Iran and Venezuela to the ongoing humanitarian suffering of Palestinians in Gaza.

The government's official rationale, laid out earlier this month by Deputy Defence Minister Aruna Jayasekera, paints a far more domestic and operational picture. According to Jayasekera, Sri Lanka's Exclusive Economic Zone spans 517,000 square kilometers, an oceanic expanse roughly 27 times larger than the island's landmass, making round-the-clock patrols with conventional manned aircraft prohibitively expensive. Under the revised government-to-government arrangement with Israeli manufacturer BlueBird Aero Systems (a subsidiary of state-owned Israel Aerospace Industries), the Air Force is slated to receive four tactical drones rather than the two originally envisioned, alongside operator training and three years of maintenance support.



Technically, the fleet includes two ThunderB drones capable of 14-hour flights and two vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) platforms with up to 20 hours of endurance, designed to operate from constrained spaces to monitor suspicious vessels, assist with cyclone and flood response, and locate missing fishermen. Financially, the Defence Ministry insists the 4.261 billion rupee (roughly $12.8 million) tab requires zero fresh Treasury cash, as the funds are being reallocated under Financial Regulation 66 from existing savings in the Air Force's helicopter maintenance budget.

Even if every rupee comes from internal Air Force savings and every flight hour is spent watching fishing trawlers and storm fronts, Hakeem's intervention highlights a recurring vulnerability in Sri Lankan statecraft. Bypassing open tenders under the banner of "emergency procurement" while signing off on sensitive foreign defense contracts ahead of a planned December agreement leaves the door wide open to accusations of backroom dealing and geopolitical alignment. In a region where every radar ping is watched closely by rival powers, transparency is not a luxury the government can afford to skip.





NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE: SOUTH KOREA'S TOP TAX EXAM SCORER ADMITS USING MICROCAMERA AND AI TO CHEAT

In a country where standardized test scores practically dictate social mobility, career trajectories, and family pride, scoring near-perfection on a notoriously brutal professional exam usually makes you an overnight folk hero. Instead, it proved to be the undoing of the top scorer on South Korea's 2026 Certified Tax Accountant exam, who confessed today, November 15, that his historic marks were engineered by a 110,000-won ($80) spy rig and generative artificial intelligence.

Appearing on camera in a face mask on the YouTube channel "Attorney Lee Don-ho," the test-taker, identified only by his surname Han, admitted to orchestrating a high-tech cheating scheme across both rounds of the national licensing exam in April and July. Using a concealed microcamera, an earpiece, and a smartphone, Han photographed test questions inside the exam hall, transmitted them to an AI tool for instant solutions, and had the answers relayed back to him under the noses of two exam supervisors. He also confessed to deploying the exact same setup during the first stage of the Certified Public Accountant exam earlier in March, before turning in a written confession to Seoul police.



Han might have gotten away with the heist had he shown a shred of restraint. In the first round of the tax exam, he missed just a single question out of 160, posting an unprecedented 397.5 out of 400. That included flawless 100 percent scores in subjects like Commercial Law and Introduction to Tax Law, a notoriously punishing paper where average scores hover in the 30s and over 70 percent of candidates fail. When he boasted about his scores on an online study forum and claimed he achieved them purely through self-study, practicing tax accountants immediately cried foul, noting that a perfect sweep across those subjects is practically impossible.

The news lands just four days before Thursday's annual national college entrance exam, the Suneung on November 19, a high-pressure marathon that South Korean teenagers spend years preparing for.

The scandal has triggered urgent crisis meetings at the presidential office after opposition lawmakers pointed that standard radio-frequency detectors recently failed to catch smart glasses during mock trials, leaving proctors reliant on spotting stray indicator lights or faint audio leaks.

Prime Minister Han Seong-sook's office has pledged strict oversight, thermal imaging checks, and criminal complaints against anyone caught using wearable tech or AI on Thursday. Still, the episode exposes an uncomfortable truth for examination boards worldwide: while proctors are still checking pockets for cheat sheets, test-takers are smuggling a silicon tutor straight into the hall.

SRI LANKA'S LAKDHANAVI WINS $75 MILLION INDIAN POWER PLANT TENDER

For years, the economic conversation between Colombo and New Delhi has largely flowed in one direction, dominated by headlines about Indian credit lines, Adani port terminals, and cross-border energy grids coming into Sri Lanka. Fast forward to now, a Sri Lankan engineering firm flipped that script in one of India's most strategic maritime territories. Lakdhanavi Limited, the flagship subsidiary of LTL Holdings, has officially secured a turnkey contract worth approximately 25 billion rupees ($75 million) to construct a 57-megawatt natural gas-fired power plant in India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Located at Hope Town in Port Blair on South Andaman Island, the facility represents Lakdhanavi's breakthrough entry into India's fiercely competitive Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC) power market. The contract was awarded by NTPC Vidyut Vyapar Nigam Limited (NVVN), a wholly owned subsidiary of India's state-owned energy giant National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) Limited, following a rigorous international competitive bidding process in which Lakdhanavi outpaced global rivals to emerge as the lowest-priced bidder (L1).

The formal agreement was signed on September 21, 2026, at the NTPC Office Complex in Noida, New Delhi, alongside discussions on broader operational collaboration between NVVN and the Sri Lankan group.

From an engineering standpoint, the Hope Town project is tailored to solve a longstanding energy bottleneck in the Bay of Bengal archipelago.

Historically reliant on costly, high-emission diesel generators shipped from the Indian mainland, the Andaman Islands have been transitioning toward cleaner, reliable baseload power backed by Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) infrastructure. Under the agreement, Lakdhanavi's engineering division will execute the complete EPC scope on a turnkey basis, while Finland's Wärtsilä Corporation will supply the high-efficiency power-generating engines.

The win builds on nearly three decades of technical credibility. Founded in the late 1990s, Lakdhanavi has delivered over 1.1 gigawatts of power projects across the region, including Sri Lanka's landmark 350 MW Sobadhanavi combined-cycle LNG plant at Kerawalapitiya, alongside major thermal and renewable installations in Bangladesh, Nepal, the Maldives, and Oman.

Its parent conglomerate, LTL Holdings, remains Sri Lanka's largest power-sector entity, with a 35 percent stake held by the state-owned National Transmission Network System Provider (Pvt) Ltd under the Ministry of Energy.

Welcoming the deal after meeting LTL's leadership, Energy Minister Anura Karunathilake hailed the award as proof that homegrown Sri Lankan technical expertise can compete and win in major regional markets. Eng. Nuhuman Marikkar, Chief Executive Officer of both Lakdhanavi Limited and LTL Holdings, echoed that sentiment, noting that the contract reflects international confidence in the group's ability to deliver complex energy infrastructure on schedule.



At a time when Sri Lanka's economy desperately needs high-value service exports and foreign exchange inflows beyond traditional garments and tourism, watching a Colombo-based engineering team win a $75 million Indian public-sector tender is a welcome reminder of what local technical talent can achieve when given a level playing field.



