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HATE SPEECH HAS A PRICE: COURT OF APPEAL CONFIRMS FOUR-YEAR PRISON TERM FOR GNANASARA

For years, the firebrand rhetoric of religious chauvinism was treated in Sri Lanka as a convenient political tool, weaponized by cynical actors to stoke division, distract the public, and tear at the fragile fabric of a multi-ethnic society. But every invoice eventually comes due.

Yesterday, the Court of Appeal delivered a clear and uncompromising message, upholding the four-year rigorous imprisonment sentence handed down to Bodu Bala Sena General Secretary Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara.

In dismissing the monk's appeal seeking acquittal, the bench firmly closed the door on attempts to escape accountability for remarks weaponized against the Islamic religion.

The legal reckoning stems back to a press conference held in Kirulapone way back on March 30, 2016, where Gnanasara took aim at the Kuragala historical site. Under the guise of defending heritage, the press briefing descended into a tirade explicitly designed to insult Islam and rupture communal harmony.



Acting on indictments filed by the Attorney General under Section 291 of the Penal Code, the Colombo High Court found him guilty in 2024 and slapped him with a four-year rigorous imprisonment term alongside a Rs. 100,000 fine.

True to form, the defense machinery went into overdrive, dragging the matter to the Court of Appeal in a bid to whitewash the rhetoric and secure an acquittal. The appellate bench was having none of it.

By affirming the conviction, the court has made it abundantly clear that wearing sacred robes does not grant immunity from the criminal code, nor does it provide a license to trample upon the rights and dignity of fellow citizens.

For too long, individuals who wrapped themselves in religious nationalism operated under the dangerous delusion that they were untouchable, shielded by political patronage and institutional cowardice.

Gnanasara's legal history, marked by previous run-ins with the law and intimidation tactics, has long demonstrated a career built on sowing discord.

As Sri Lanka attempts to drag itself out of the wreckage of past mismanagement and societal polarization, the sight of extremist rabble-rousers finally facing the cold reality of a prison cell is both refreshing and long overdue.

Hate speech is not a pious expression of faith; it is a match struck near a powder keg.

About time that the judiciary recognize that dangerous reality.

SACRED CITY SHOWDOWN LANDS RAJANGANESADDHARATHANA IN POLICE CUSTODY

What was supposed to be a peaceful fast-unto-death near one of Sri Lanka's most revered Buddhist shrines ended up looking more like a street brawl last week, and the legal fallout has now caught up with the other side of the scuffle. Ven. Rajangane Saddharathana was arrested yesterday (November 18) by the Anuradhapura Police over his alleged role in instigating unruly behaviour during the confrontation near the Ruwanweli Maha Seya.

The arrest came after Saddharathana was summoned to the Anuradhapura Police Station for questioning alongside another individual. Crucially, police moved in just a day after the Anuradhapura Chief Magistrate put law enforcement on notice, ordering the Senior Superintendent of Police in charge of the division to appear in court on November 26 and explain why Saddharathana and others accused of sparking the November 12 disturbance had not yet been taken into custody.

The chaos originally erupted last Thursday when Ven. Balangoda Kassapa Thera and a small group of monks and laypersons were staging a hunger strike inside the Anuradhapura Sacred City.

Their protest, carried out despite existing court orders instructing them to vacate the premises, was aimed at opposing the proposed Anuradhapura Sacred City Development Plan and demanding the release of Ven. Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thera.

Things quickly went sideways when Saddharathana arrived at the Satyagraha site with a group of supporters. A heated argument between the two factions boiled over into a physical clash, during which Saddharathana was allegedly struck on the head with a wooden pole. He was promptly admitted to the Anuradhapura Teaching Hospital for treatment before being discharged the following day.

In the immediate aftermath of the melee, police dismantled the temporary protest structure and arrested Balangoda Kassapa Thera along with six others. Those seven suspects remain remanded until November 26 after the Magistrate rejected their bail applications and took the unusual step of ordering psychiatric evaluations and narcotics tests for the group.

With several critics alleging that Saddharathana showed up at the sacred site specifically to provoke a disturbance, investigators are now tightening the net on everyone involved. For a protest billed as a spiritual Satyagraha, the entire episode has turned into a decidedly unholy mess for all parties concerned.

MASSIVE SUPPLY-CHAIN CYBERATTACK AND WAVE OF TECH OUTAGES RATTLE GLOBAL SYSTEMS

A turbulent week for global digital infrastructure has left consumers, corporations, and government agencies grappling with both malicious cyber intrusions and a relentless cascade of technical failures.

On one front, cybersecurity researchers revealed the scale of a sophisticated software supply-chain attack—dubbed "OPTIMJACK" by threat intelligence analysts—that compromised nearly 200 major websites earlier this week. By injecting corrupted JavaScript into tools hosted by Optimizely, a widely used digital experience platform, hackers turned trusted third-party scripts against 178 prominent organizations without directly breaching their internal servers.

The targeted domains included global giants such as the BBC, CNN, HSBC UAE, Air France-KLM, IKEA, Zoom, and Salesforce. During an active window lasting roughly nine hours on Monday, the malicious code skimmed payment card details from checkout forms, swapped copied cryptocurrency wallet addresses—netting the attackers over $7,000 in crypto—and attempted to deploy specialized exploit kits onto visitors' iPhones and iPads. Security researcher Scott Helme first flagged the breach, prompting Optimizely to block the vulnerable path, scrub the injected code, and secure affected accounts by Tuesday. However, security experts warn that affected organizations must still audit their systems and treat any exposed payment data from that window as compromised.



Even as companies worked to contain the Optimizely breach, a separate, non-malicious wave of technical disruptions continued to ripple across critical infrastructure, culminating in a widespread Apple outage on Tuesday.

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MASSIVE SUPPLY...

Thousands of users reported disruptions across Apple Pay, iCloud, the App Store, Apple Music, and AppleCare, with Downdetector logging peak spikes of roughly 2,300 reports for Apple Pay alone. Apple attributed the service interruptions to an internal system update rather than a cyberattack, confirming that affected services were restored.

The Apple glitch is merely the latest entry in an extraordinary string of U.S. technology failures over the past seven days. On November 13, telecommunications instability and legacy equipment strain triggered a nationwide Federal Aviation Administration ground stop. Days later, on Monday, a software issue disrupted United Airlines' flight-planning and crew-facing systems, while Marriott separately resolved an account sign-in failure on Tuesday.

Across the banking and enterprise sectors, a latent software defect in Microsoft's networking gateways caused a multi-day disruption starting November 12 alongside an outage at HR software provider Workday, followed on Monday by an on-premises software bug at JPMorgan Chase that delayed transaction processing and created ripple effects across Bank of America, Wells Fargo, and Capital One. Even national security networks have not been spared, with the National Security Agency experiencing an internal communications outage on Tuesday linked to routine software patching.

Despite the suspicious timing of back-to-back disruptions across aviation, finance, big tech, and defense, U.S. officials have pushed back against speculation of a coordinated cyber assault. Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated that there is zero evidence linking the recent cascade of outages, while Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin pointed toward aging infrastructure and isolated technical glitches as the likely culprits. Together, the incidents highlight a dual vulnerability in modern digital reliance, showing that while third-party software integrations create prime targets for opportunistic hackers, routine internal updates and aging hardware remain just as capable of bringing everyday commerce and travel to a standstill.

PACK YOUR BAGS, NOT YOUR PAPERWORK: THAILAND CLEARS MUTUAL 30-DAY VISA-FREE DEAL WITH SRI LANKA

Spontaneous weekend getaways to Bangkok and Phuket are about to get significantly easier for Sri Lankan travellers, as Thailand's Cabinet officially signed off on a bilateral visa-exemption agreement between the two nations on Tuesday (November 17).

Announced by Thai Deputy Government Spokesperson Ploythalay Laksameesaengjan, the endorsed draft paves the way for ordinary passport holders from both Sri Lanka and Thailand to enter, transit through, or leave each other's borders without applying for a visa beforehand. Under the agreement, travellers will be granted up to 30 days per visit, capped at a combined maximum of 90 days within any 180-day window.

While Thailand had already opened its doors to Sri Lankans under a broader unilateral visa-free scheme covering 93 countries, this formal bilateral treaty locks those perks into place on a reciprocal basis. It follows closely on the heels of Colombo's own Cabinet approval of the mutual arrangement back in October, signalling a steady warming of ties between the two Indian Ocean neighbours. Over the past few months, officials in both capitals have been busy expanding cooperation across trade, labour mobility, and tourism following Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath's official visit to Bangkok in September.



For everyday travellers, the practical takeaway is straightforward: short holidays, temple pilgrimages, shopping sprees, and brief transit layovers will soon require little more than a valid ordinary passport and a boarding pass.

That said, the 30-day pass is strictly for short-term visits. Anyone planning to settle in for a longer stint, enrol in a university, take up employment, or engage in specialized activities requiring prior state clearance will still need to secure the proper visa before boarding their flight.

Before you start refreshing flight deals for next week, there is a brief diplomatic countdown to keep in mind.

The Thai Cabinet has authorized its Foreign Ministry to issue full signing credentials and finalize any minor technical wording, provided it sticks to the core terms. Once the ink is dry and both governments formally notify each other through diplomatic channels that their domestic legal checks are complete, the visa-free regime will officially kick in 60 days later.

As with most international travel pacts, the agreement includes standard safety valves.

Either government reserves the right to temporarily suspend the arrangement in whole or in part over public health, national security, or public order concerns, provided it gives the other side at least 30 days' written notice. Walking away from the treaty altogether requires a 90-day diplomatic notice period.

Highlighting the deep Buddhist heritage and cultural ties binding Colombo and Bangkok, Ploythalay noted that cutting border red tape will naturally boost people-to-people exchanges and give cultural and religious tourism a healthy lift. For Sri Lankans eyeing Thai street food or Thai visitors looking to explore the Cultural Triangle, the countdown to hassle-free boarding has officially begun.

BIRTHDAY POST MEETS HIGH COURT BLOW: NAMAL'S LEGAL TROUBLES DEEPEN AS BAIL IS SUSPENDED

Birthday wishes usually involve family dinners and shared cake, but Sri Lanka PodujanaPeramuna parliamentarian Namal Rajapaksa had to settle for social media this week, sending a public tribute to his father, former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, straight from behind bars. As if spending his father's 81st birthday in custody were not bleak enough, the Colombo High Court dealt the younger Rajapaksa a fresh legal blow yesterday (November 18) by issuing an interim order suspending his bail in the controversial Krrish transaction case.

The High Court ruling, delivered by Judge Lal Ranasinghe Bandara, follows a revision petition filed by the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC). Investigators moved swiftly to challenge the Colombo Chief Magistrate's Court's November 3 decision to grant Rajapaksa bail, effectively slamming the brakes on any immediate hopes of a quick exit while the substantive revision proceedings unfold.

Before the High Court's intervention, Rajapaksa had marked his father's milestone with a sentimental social media post. Lamenting that prison walls kept him from delivering birthday hugs in person, he wrote that the bond between father and son transcends distance and noted that his children would visit their grandfather on his behalf. Leaning heavily on familiar political theatrics, the younger Rajapaksa praised his father's wartime leadership and drew a direct parallel between Mahinda's past political battles and his own current predicament, portraying himself as a leader enduring hardship while fighting for the truth.

Yet for a public that spent years watching the Rajapaksa family treat state coffers like a private piggy bank, the emotional father-son narrative rings hollow. Namal's inability to attend the family gathering is entirely of his own making, rooted in a mounting pile of corruption and financial crime probes that have finally caught up with him.

Far from being a political martyr, Rajapaksa is currently entangled in serious criminal investigations, including the notorious Krrish deal involving Rs. 70 million allegedly misappropriated under the guise of promoting rugby in Sri Lanka, alongside separate multi-million rupee bribery and money-laundering allegations tied to murky aircraft transactions at SriLankan Airlines.

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BIRTHDAY POST ...

For years, the family portfolio was defined by opaque mega-projects, unchecked borrowing, and an arrogant impunity that left ordinary citizens holding the bag when the economy ultimately collapsed. Now, with the High Court suspending his bail relief and investigators untangling years of alleged illicit asset accumulation, the dynastic posturing feels less like political persecution and more like long-overdue accountability.



While Namal laments lost liberty in his birthday posts, the public is left remembering the billions lost during the height of their rule, and watching the legal net tighten even further.

CHECK-OUT TIME FOR DOUBLE TAXATION: TOURISM MINISTER DEFENDS SCRAPPING OF TOURISM LEVY

Running a boutique hotel or a fledgling cafe in Sri Lanka has rarely been a walk on the beach, especially when navigating a maze of overlapping taxes. Speaking at the 61st anniversary celebrations of The Hotels Association of Sri Lanka (THASL) on Tuesday (November 17), Minister of Tourism Vijitha Herath assured hospitality operators that the government's move to abolish the Tourism Development Levy (TDL) under the 2027 Budget is squarely aimed at taking the financial weight off smaller players. First announced during the 2027 Budget presentation last week, the removal of the turnover-based levy is scheduled to take effect from April 1, 2027.

Addressing a room full of hoteliers, diplomats, and industry stakeholders, alongside Deputy Minister of Tourism Prof. Ruwan Ranasinghe, Herath pointed out that hospitality businesses had long been trapped under a system of double taxation. Dropping the levy, he explained, will give much-needed breathing room to small and medium-scale hotels, newly opened restaurants, and ancillary tourism outfits trying to keep their margins intact.

The decision comes at an interesting crossroads for the industry. While smaller operators welcome any reduction in administrative and tax friction, major hoteliers within THASL have expressed mixed feelings over the past few days. Because the TDL directly funded destination marketing and sector development through state tourism bodies, with collections projected to hit between Rs. 4.5 billion and Rs. 5 billion this year, some industry veterans have raised questions about how global promotion campaigns will be bankrolled once the levy disappears. Under the new budget framework, the Treasury is set to step in and fund tourism promotion directly upon request until a permanent alternative financing mechanism is put in place.

Acknowledging that Sri Lanka's hospitality sector has weathered more than its fair share of internal and external shocks, Herath emphasized that the government is banking on a long-term strategic plan to cement tourism as a leading pillar of the national economy. He framed the partnership in clear terms: the private sector brings the investment, energy, and day-to-day operational muscle needed to sustain growth, while the state's job is to clear away red tape and maintain a predictable legal and regulatory environment.

Reaffirming the administration's readiness to back the sector, which also includes broader 2027 Budget incentives such as a 200 percent capital allowance for major tourism investments, Herath stressed that active collaboration across all stakeholders remains the real secret to keeping Sri Lanka's welcome mat rolled out for the world.

GOTABAYA'S FORMER AIDE SUGEESHWARA BANDARA WALKS OUT ON BAIL AFTER FIVE MONTHS BEHIND BARS

Holding down two jobs in a struggling economy usually means working late shifts at a second gig, not quietly collecting two hefty state paycheques under the same roof. After spending five months in remand custody, former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's ex-Private Secretary, Sugeeshwara Bandara, was finally granted bail by the Colombo Fort Magistrate's Court yesterday (November 18).

Colombo Fort Magistrate Pasan Amarasena ordered Bandara's release on cash bail of Rs. 500,000 alongside two personal surety bonds of Rs. 10 million each. To ensure the New People's Front (Nawa Janatha Peramuna) leader does not decide to take an unscheduled holiday abroad while investigators wrap up their paperwork, the court also slapped him with an overseas travel ban.

Bandara's extended stay at state expense began on June 18, when officers from the Central Crime Investigation Bureau (CCIB) arrested him in Kollupitiya over allegations of double-dipping into the public purse. Investigators allege that during Gotabaya Rajapaksa's presidency, Bandara simultaneously drew salaries and allowances for two separate positions under the Presidential Expenditure Head. According to earlier court disclosures, he allegedly pocketed over Rs. 6 million as the President's Private Secretary while also collecting roughly Rs. 4.2 million as Director General of Special Projects.

As if collecting dual state salaries were not bold enough, Bandara is also facing far weightier accusations of criminally misappropriating and misusing more than Rs. 220 million while serving as Director General of Special Projects. The financial probe has cast a wide net across the former administration's inner circle, even prompting his former boss, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, to provide a statement to investigators earlier this month regarding the financial dealings.

While Bandara's legal team secured his release yesterday, his court calendar is far from clear. The CCIB's investigation into how public funds flowed through the Presidential Secretariat during one of Sri Lanka's worst economic tailspins remains active, leaving the former presidential aide out on bail, though firmly grounded on the island for the foreseeable future.

JUSTICE MUST BE SEEN TO BE DONE: THE SHASHI WEERAWANSA VERDICT AND THE LONG REACH OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Let us be entirely clear about one fundamental principle of governance. In any civilized democracy worth its salt, the rule of law must apply equally to the powerful, the connected, and the political elite as it does to the ordinary citizen.

Yesterday, Sri Lanka's Supreme Court delivered a judgment that serves as a sobering reminder of this reality. A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice Preethi Padman Surasena dismissed the final appeal filed by Shashi Weerawansa, wife of former Minister Wimal Weerawansa, cementing her two-year prison sentence for the fraudulent acquisition of a diplomatic passport.

Because she was present in open court when the gavel came down, the apex court ordered her immediate transfer to remand custody before being packed off to the Magistrate's Court to begin serving her time.

This brings down the curtain on a farcical, decade-long legal saga that began way back in February 2015 when the Criminal Investigation Department first started poking around her travel documents.

What followed was a masterclass in administrative evasion. Investigators uncovered a tangled trail of falsified records submitted through the Department of Immigration and Emigration's VIP one-day service, built upon a remarkably fluid timeline of personal identity.

To jog the public memory, the passport used standard paperwork listing her birth year as 1967. The questionable diplomatic variant magically claimed she was born in 1971. Meanwhile, her own children's birth certificates apparently pointed toward 1977.

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One wonders how a person manages to age backward and forward depending on which government counter they happen to be standing at. Prosecutors demonstrated that she deliberately utilized a forged birth certificate and an irregular National Identity Card bearing altered personal details to secure privileges meant for state dignitaries.

For years, the political class operated under the assumption that a combination of delaying tactics, high-priced legal maneuvering, and sheer arrogance would allow them to outlast the system. The Colombo Magistrate's Court convicted her back in May 2022, handing down a two-year term and a paltry fine. Rather than accepting accountability, her camp dragged the matter through the High Court, buying another four years of breathing room until that appeal was tossed out in June.
Now, the road has finally run out. There are no more courts left to climb, no more technicalities to exploit, and no more excuses.

This judgment is not merely about a fraudulent passport or conflicting birthdates. It strikes at the heart of the culture of impunity that brought this country to its knees. For decades, those holding high political office treated state institutions as their personal fiefdoms, assuming thatrules applied exclusively to the peasantry while the elite bypassed queues, laws, and basic decency.

As the country attempts to crawl out of the wreckage left behind by systemic corruption and mismanagement, the sight of powerful figures finally facing the legal consequences of their actions is both welcome and long overdue. The Supreme Court has done its duty. It is now up to the wider judicial apparatus to ensure that the unravelling of high-level malfeasance continues unabated.

Be you ever so high, the law is above you. It is a maxim our political class would do well to memorize.

INTERNATIONAL

XI AND PUTIN PUSH FOR MULTIPOLAR WORLD ORDER DURING APEC SUMMIT TALKS IN SHENZHEN

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit currently unfolding in the southern Chinese tech hub of Shenzhen is not merely another tedious gathering of bureaucrats trading hollow communiques over lukewarm tea. It is a high-stakes arena where superpowers are aggressively redrawing the economic and technological boundaries of the twenty-first century.

When Chinese President Xi Jinping took the podium on the sidelines of the twenty-one-member forum, his message was characteristically direct. Beijing and Moscow, he argued, carry a shared historical duty to lead and advance the trend toward a multipolar world.

To put it frankly, China is positioning itself as the steady, indispensable anchor for the Global South, offering an alternative commercial architecture to a West increasingly bogged down by its own protectionist impulses and domestic turbulence. Xi's broader summit pitch zeroed in on what Beijing does best: seamless regional integration, lowered trade barriers, and a relentless push into digital and artificial intelligence infrastructure.

Yet the theatrical highlight of the opening sessions belonged across the aisle. Vladimir Putin stepped up to the microphone to deliver a blistering obituary for Western hegemony. In the Russian leader's telling, Europe is locked in the middle of a humiliating decline, while the traditional tools of Western economic warfare, sanctions, tariffs, and export controls, have largely run out of steam. Putin argued with a straight face that the punishing wall of Western economic sanctions thrown at Moscow following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine failed to crush the Russian economy, instead accelerating the creation of alternative financial networks and non-Western trade corridors. Whether one views that assessment as genuine economic resilience or masterful Kremlin spin, the underlying reality is undeniable: the architecture of global commerce is fracturing along geopolitical fault lines.

What makes the Shenzhen summit genuinely fascinating is the sheer weight of what these leaders represent. APEC economies account for over half of global gross domestic product and represent roughly 2.7 billion souls. When this bloc sneezes, the rest of the planet catches pneumonia. Beyond the rhetorical jousting between Beijing and Moscow, the subterranean anxiety haunting every corporate executive and trade attaché in the convention hall is the looming uncertainty over trade truces between Washington and Beijing, particularly with U.S. President Donald Trump's presence casting a very long shadow over bilateral negotiations.

As artificial intelligence and supply chain resilience dominate the closed-door discussions, the contrast between the old guard of Western dominance and the rising ambitions of Asian and Eurasian economies has never been sharper. The global economy is no longer operating on a single playbook written in Washington or Brussels. Shenzhen has made it abundantly clear that the future belongs to whoever can code faster, trade smarter, and build alternative rails that bypass traditional Western gatekeepers entirely.

GROUNDED AT KATUNAYAKE: AN ACCIDENTAL SLIDE DEPLOYMENT LEAVES BRITISH AIRWAYS STRANDED

In commercial aviation, timing is everything, and a single slip of the wrist on the tarmac can turn a multi-million-dollar long-haul operation into a very expensive parking exercise. That lesson played out in full view at Bandaranaike International Airport this week, after a British Airways Boeing 777-200ER was abruptly grounded following the accidental deployment of an emergency evacuation slide.

The aircraft in question, bearing registration G-YMMC, was undergoing routine turnaround preparations on the Katunayake apron ahead of its scheduled return leg to the United Kingdom. According to airport reports, a SriLankan Catering high-loader truck was positioned alongside the fuselage when the emergency chute suddenly inflated and deployed. Ground handling and pre-flight preparations were immediately halted as engineers scrambled to assess the situation.

While an inflatable escape slide looks dramatic on the tarmac, its accidental deployment is no minor hiccup. Aviation safety regulations strictly prohibit any commercial airliner from taking to the skies without every single emergency exit and evacuation chute fully armed, inspected, and certified.

Repacking, testing, and re-installing a Boeing 777 slide requires specialized equipment and replacement parts that are rarely sitting around on a spare shelf at a regional outstation, effectively clipping the aircraft's wings on the spot.



Flight tracking data confirms the immediate operational fallout. British Airways flight BA2044, scheduled to depart Colombo at 10:35 a.m. local time on November 17 for London Gatwick, had to be scrapped entirely, leaving G-YMMC parked firmly on the tarmac at Katunayake.

Neither the airline nor airport authorities have officially confirmed whether the catering vehicle triggered the mechanism or if a crew member failed to disarm the door prior to servicing, nor has the full extent of any structural damage been disclosed. Similarly, the exact number of passengers left scrambling to rebook their transatlantic connections remains unconfirmed.

For an airline competing fiercely on lucrative South Asian routes, having a wide-body jet stuck on the ground thousands of miles from its maintenance base is an operational headache nobody needs.

Until engineers clear the aircraft and restore its safety systems, British Airways has an unexpected guest lingering at Katunayake.

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AGAINST THE TIDE: WHY THE INDIAN RUPEE JUST BECAME ASIA'S HOTTEST CURRENCY

In global currency markets, gravity usually wins when the U.S. dollar flexes its muscles. Yet this November, the Indian rupee has quietly ripped up the conventional emerging-market playbook, surging to a seven-month high and claiming the crown as Asia's best-performing currency. While regional peers have spent the month dodging greenback volatility and shifting interest rate expectations, New Delhi's currency has staged its sharpest monthly rally in twenty months.

Trading near the 93.00 to 93.50 mark against the U.S. dollar, the rupee's sudden sprint is not the result of blind luck or central bank conjuring tricks.

Rather, it reflects a potent convergence of capital rotation, cheaper energy, and structural insulation.

The primary engine behind this surge is an unmistakable reversal in foreign portfolio flows. After months of steady selling earlier in the year, global institutional investors have poured nearly $10 billion into Indian equities since October, putting November on track for the strongest monthly foreign inflows in six years.

Much of this capital is arriving via a broader regional rotation.

As international fund managers grow jittery over frothy valuations in artificial intelligence and semiconductor-heavy markets across East Asia, India's domestic-demand-driven equity market has emerged as a liquid, insulated alternative.

At the exact same time, global commodity markets have handed India's balance sheet a massive gift.

Easing crude oil prices have dramatically reduced the dollar appetite of Indian state-run oil refiners, removing one of the most persistent sources of downward pressure on the rupee. For an economy that imports over eighty percent of its crude requirements, cheaper oil translates directly into healthier trade math and firmer currency support.

The contrast across South Asia is striking. While Kathmandu enjoys a free ride thanks to the Nepalese rupee's fixed peg to its Indian counterpart, neighboring currencies have had a far quieter month.

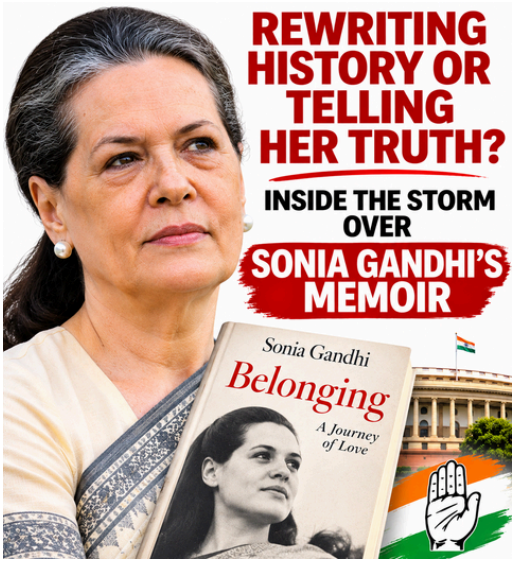
Here at home, the Sri Lankan rupee has hovered steadily around the 328 to 337 range per dollar following mild monthly softening, while the Pakistani rupee and Bangladeshi taka have remained largely range-bound.

Whether the Indian rupee can punch decisively past the 93-per-dollar threshold depends largely on Mint Street. With the Reserve Bank of India holding a substantial short forward-dollar book, policymakers may quietly step in to mop up excess greenbacks and rebuild reserves rather than let the currency appreciate too rapidly.

For now, however, India's currency stands firmly in the driver's seat of Asian foreign exchange.

REWRITING HISTORY OR TELLING HER TRUTH? INSIDE THE STORM OVER SONIA GANDHI'S MEMOIR

When a towering political figure who spent decades guarding her silence suddenly decides to put pen to paper, fireworks are practically guaranteed. That is precisely what unfolded following the November 10 release of Sonia Gandhi's long-awaited memoir, Belonging: A Journey of Love. For years, critics dubbed the former Congress president the ultimate political enigma, a leader who wielded immense power from behind closed doors without ever explaining herself. Now that she has finally chosen to tell her story, the book has sparked a ferocious political and literary brawl across India.



The drama began months before the ink even dried on the first edition. In August, Penguin Random House India abruptly walked away from publishing the domestic edition after Gandhi flatly refused editorial demands to alter passages concerning Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the RSS, and border tensions with China.

While Congress leaders cried foul over political censorship, Penguin insisted the breakdown stemmed from routine legal and editorial scrutiny.

HarperCollins eventually stepped in to bring the book to Indian shelves alongside its global release by Alfred A. Knopf, turning the memoir into an instant bestseller before readers even turned a page.

Inside, the book traces Gandhi's extraordinary arc from an Italian student in England to the matriarch of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, navigating the assassinations of Indira and Rajiv Gandhi, her reluctant entry into frontline politics, and the coalition years of the United Progressive Alliance. Yet rather than settling old debates, the narrative has ignited a fresh firestorm.

Detractors and rival politicians have accused Gandhi of blatantly whitewashing dark chapters of Indian history. Critics point out that the memoir conveniently sidesteps thorny controversies like the Bofors scandal, Ottavio Quattrocchi, and the Emergency, while minimizing Congress accountability during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots and offering contested accounts of the 2002 Godhra train burning. Adding fuel to the fire, independent reviewers have flagged over fifty glaring factual blunders, ranging from misstating the founding year of the RSS and the death of her own trusted aide Ahmed Patel to mixing up general election tallies.

Political memoirs are rarely neutral exercises in history, and Belonging is no exception. Whether viewed as a courageous reclamation of her personal voice or an exercise in selective memory, Sonia Gandhi has ensured that even in her eightieth year, she remains at the very center of India's political storm.

PELTOLA FLIPS ALASKA SENATE SEAT, EXPANDING DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY IN WASHINGTON

To understand why a remote, icy state in the far north has suddenly thrown Washington into turmoil, picture American politics as a relentless tug-of-war between two rival camps. On one side stands President Donald Trump's conservative Republican Party; on the other, the opposition Democrats. Every two years, Americans head to the polls in midterm elections to decide who controls Congress, the powerful lawmaking legislature that either rubber-stamps a president's agenda or brings his policies to a grinding halt.

Yesterday, the final piece of that political puzzle snapped into place in Alaska, America's vast, oil-rich northern frontier. Former congresswoman Mary Peltola, a Democrat and former commercial salmon fisher, pulled off a stunning political upset by unseating two-term Republican incumbent Dan S. Sullivan. With this victory, Peltola becomes the first Democrat to represent the traditionally conservative stronghold in the United States Senate since 2015, and the first Alaska Native ever elected to the chamber.

For anyone accustomed to fiercely loyal party strongholds, the sheer scale of this upset is remarkable. Alaska is solid Republican territory, having backed Donald Trump by double digits across three consecutive presidential elections. Both Trump and Vice President JD Vance personally campaigned to keep the seat in Republican hands, while national party operatives threw millions of dollars into attack ads. Yet Peltola, running on a fiercely independent, local-first platform summed up by her slogan "Fish, Family, Freedom," cut right through partisan loyalties. By capturing an outright majority right out of the gate, she bypassed Alaska's complex ranked-choice preferential counting system altogether.
True to form, the campaign delivered plenty of high-stakes electoral theatre. Republicans cried foul over the presence of a second candidate on the ballot named Daniel J. Sullivan Jr., a retired teacher running as an independent.

Conservative leaders accused Democrats of planting a namesake decoy to confuse voters, prompting the Justice Department to file a lawsuit attempting to block the certification of the results. Yet Peltola's lead was so commanding that even if every single vote cast for the other Sullivan and a third-party Republican had gone to the incumbent, she still would have walked away with the prize.

Beyond American shores, this outcome carries real weight. Peltola's triumph caps off a sweeping Democratic midterm wave that flipped nine Senate seats, the party's biggest haul since 1958, expanding their majority to a formidable 56 seats against 44 for the Republicans. From global trade tariffs to international diplomacy and foreign aid, the White House now faces an emboldened opposition chamber determined to check its every move for the next two years.