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NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

WHEN TANKERS SLOW AND LOCAL FIELDS FADE: WHAT 2026 EXPOSED ABOUT GAS SUPPLY ACROSS ASIA.



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Here at home, cooking gas shortages and steep prices have already turned an everyday household chore into a daily test of patience. Across South and Southeast Asia in 2026, however, that same stress has played out on a massive scale. Shrinking local gas fields, thin storage tanks, and shipping trouble around the Strait of Hormuz have exposed how easily a disruption thousands of kilometers away can stall power plants, factories, and stoves across the region.

Start with Pakistan, where leaning almost entirely on one supplier turned into one of Asia's harshest liquefied natural gas shocks of 2026. Having bought 98% of its imported LNG from Qatar in 2025, and 99% combined from Qatar and the UAE, Pakistan had almost no backup when Middle East shipping ran into trouble during the conflict that broke out in February and March. Shipments dropped from as many as 12 cargoes in January to just 2 in March. Over the first 10 months of the year, LNG imports fell by 56%, or about 4.5 billion cubic meters, while deliveries between March and September dropped by more than 70% compared with the same period a year earlier. Because imported gas normally generates over 21% of Pakistan's electricity, gas's share of power production fell by roughly 25% between March and September. Power plants had to burn about 35% more coal to keep the lights on, while fertilizer factories between March and August struggled with scarce, expensive gas. When a country keeps virtually no spare gas stored for emergencies, global shipping hiccups quickly turn into power cuts and higher farming costs.

Bangladesh has been hit from two directions at once: older local gas fields are pumping less, while demand for expensive imported gas keeps climbing. Local gas production dropped by 28% between FY2018–19 and FY2024–25. At the same time, imported LNG jumped 143% to make up nearly 29% of supply, leaving Bangladesh short by roughly 1,200 to 1,400 million cubic feet of gas on a typical day against total demand of 3,800 to 4,000 million cubic feet. Then on July 21, 2026, a fire aboard the floating gas terminal ship at Moheshkhaliknocked out roughly 450 million cubic feet of daily imported gas, cutting national pipeline supply by more than 17%. Along with lower Qatari deliveries and global spot gas prices climbing into the $15.88 to $16.98 per million British thermal unit range, state utility Petrobangla's subsidy bill to cover high import costs surged to BDT 16,600 crore. Electricity shortages passed 3,000 megawatts on peak days, gas pressure for vehicles dropped close to zero at 0 to 1 psi, ceramic kilns struggled with 0 to 3 psi instead of the 15 psi they need, and garment output ran near 40% of normal in late August as over 900 of roughly 1,800 textile mills shut at the peak.

India has a far bigger economy and refining system, yet its numbers show why sheer size does not make a country immune to gas shocks. India buys roughly half of its natural gas from abroad, with import dependence at 52.8% in October, and relies on the Strait of Hormuz for half of its household cooking LPG cylinders. When shipping disruptions hit during the 2026 Middle East conflict, LPG imports fell by more than half over the first 2 months of the crisis. To protect kitchens, New Delhi ordered refineries to push out more LPG and prioritize household cylinders. By October, India's monthly oil and gas import bill jumped 60% to $16 billion, while LPG imports and domestic usage both saw steep drops. Even with busy refineries and reserve stocks, the squeeze showed how fast trouble at sea can tighten everyday cooking fuel.

For the Maldives, keeping gas on hand is a delicate island-shipping challenge with almost no margin for error. Depending on imported LPG for homes and resorts, the country felt the squeeze repeatedly in 2026. In mid-March, Maldives Gas cut LPG sales in half for a week to 5 kilograms per 10-kilogram cylinder amid Middle East supply disruptions. In June, it raised refill prices for commercial and resort 45-kilogram cylinders by 25%. In early November, refill limits returned briefly, capping 10-kilogram cylinders at 7 kilograms, 22-kilogram cylinders at 14 kilograms, and 45-kilogram cylinders at 31 kilograms. By November 13, those limits were lifted as deliveries steadied, while work continues to add 1,500 tonnes of gas storage in Male' to eventually hold a 3-month supply cushion.

Across Southeast Asia, the picture shifts from immediate rationing toward long-term transition pains. Thailand, long reliant on gas from the Gulf of Thailand and pipeline imports from Myanmar, has seen those traditional supplies fall by more than 20% since 2010, with Myanmar pipeline flows down an estimated 9.6% in 2025. Thailand now leans more heavily on pricier imported LNG to run power stations and factories, adding pressure to electricity bills while raising debates over expanding gas terminals in Rayong and moving faster on cleaner energy.

The Philippines faces a similar slowdown as output from its Malampaya gas field declines. Natural gas supplies about 22% of the country's electricity, and LNG import terminals are expanding toward 10.72 million tonnes per year. Even so, the Philippines remains heavily exposed to global price swings and depends on the Middle East for roughly 91% of its imported LPG. Occasional shipments, such as a 21,000-metric-ton LPG delivery in May, help steady local supply, yet shifts in global gas and coal markets still ripple through power and fertilizer costs.

Vietnam, meanwhile, is trying to balance fast-growing power demand with shifting energy choices. Fossil fuels still provide about 80% of its primary energy, with coal generating around 52% of electricity in the first quarter of 2026 and natural gas around 6%, even as electricity use rose 9.5% in the first half of the year and hit a record 57,189 megawatts in May. As older local gas fields slow down, Vietnam has brought in LNG cargoes through terminals such as Thi Vai while pushing ahead with projects like Block B-O Mon and Son My. Still, slow approvals, funding hurdles for uncontracted LNG power plants, and growing attention to renewable and nuclear power mean its gas expansion is moving unevenly.

Whe pulling back from all those numbers, it leaves you wondering how much margin for error any of these countries really have. Putting so much faith in a single shipping lane or one main supplier is a risky bet when politics in the Gulf can turn overnight, yet that seems to be how many grids got built. And with storage tanks holding so little compared with what is now imported, you have to ask: what happens next time a tanker gets delayed or a terminal catches fire? Maybe spreading out suppliers, building bigger reserves, and leaning faster into cleaner power are part of the answer, or maybe the trade-offs are harder than they look on paper. Either way, when trouble flares up half a world away, how long can Asian kitchens, factories, and power plants keep absorbing the shock?

AMAZON BETS $7 BILLION MORE ON INDIA'S CLEAN ENERGY SURGE AS AI AND DATA POWER DEMAND SOARS

Corporate climate pledges often sound impressive in glossy sustainability reports, yet real conviction shows up on the balance sheet. On Tuesday, November 17, global technology and e-commerce giant Amazon put serious capital behind its green ambitions, announcing plans to invest an additional $7 billion in renewable energy projects across India by 2030.

Layered on top of $4 billion already contracted in the country, the commitment lifts Amazon's total clean energy pipeline in India to $11 billion, underscoring how central South Asia's largest economy has become to powering the next generation of digital infrastructure.

Alongside the headline capital pledge, Amazon unveiled 4 new utility-scale power purchase agreements adding 934 megawatts of wind and solar capacity across 3 Indian states. In Karnataka, the company is backing a 234-megawatt wind farm, its largest contracted wind project in Asia to date, alongside a 200-megawatt hybrid wind and solar installation.

Central and western India round out the expansion with a 300-megawatt solar plant in Madhya Pradesh and a 200-megawatt solar project in Rajasthan. Once these 4 projects come online, Amazon's active Indian portfolio of 57 projects, comprising 14 large-scale wind and solar farms and 43 on-site facility installations, will exceed 2 gigawatts. That is enough clean electricity to power more than 3.5 million Indian households every year.

Why is an e-commerce and cloud computing powerhouse pouring billions into Indian wind turbines and solar panels right now? Follow the electricity demand. Rapid expansion in cloud services, logistics networks, and energy-hungry artificial intelligence data centers requires vast, reliable supplies of low-carbon power.

That reality explains why Amazon simultaneously announced a new global target to cut the carbon intensity of electricity powering its operations by 65% by 2030 compared with 2019 levels, keeping it on

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AMAZON BETS $7 ...

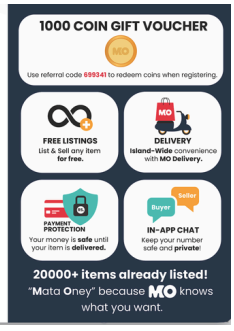
track toward its broader pledge of net-zero carbon emissions by 2040. Chief Sustainability Officer Kara Hurst noted that scaling clean power in India not only supports Amazon's operational needs but directly advances India's national goal of reaching net-zero emissions by 2070.



For New Delhi, the timing could scarcely be better. India is racing toward an ambitious target of 500 gigawatts of non-fossil fuel electricity capacity by 2030, a transition requiring massive private and foreign capital. Welcoming the announcement, Union Minister for New and Renewable Energy Pralhad Joshi said sustained corporate investments of this scale reinforce India's energy security while demonstrating growing international confidence in the domestic clean energy ecosystem.

Still, announcing a $7 billion pipeline is only the starting gun. Turning contracted megawatts into grid-connected power across multiple states will test land acquisition, transmission infrastructure, and regulatory execution over the next 4 years. Yet as global tech giants increasingly discover, winning the future of cloud computing and artificial intelligence starts with securing clean electrons on the ground, and Amazon has clearly decided that India's sun and wind are essential to that race.





REPORTING SICK ON BUDGET EVE: WHY TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS ARE WALKING OUT ON NOVEMBER 30

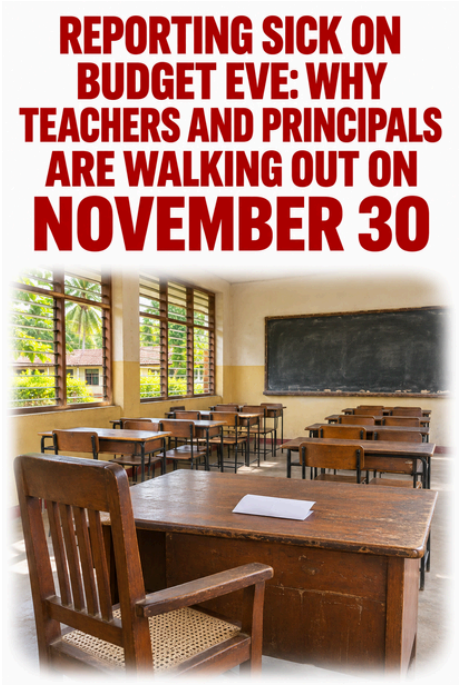
Few illnesses spread with quite the synchronized precision of a trade union sick note. On Monday, November 30, tens of thousands of teachers and principals across the island are scheduled to wake up simultaneously indisposed, launching a one-day strike designed to empty state classrooms just 24 hours before Parliament debates the Education Ministry's allocations under the 2027 Budget. Announced by the Ceylon Teachers' Union and allied educators' groups after talks in Colombo, the timing is hardly coincidental. By choosing the day immediately preceding the December 1 parliamentary committee debate, union leaders are sending an unmistakable message to Diyawanna Oya: fix our pay anomalies before the Third Reading vote on December 14, or prepare for a turbulent new school year.

The confrontation raises an immediate question for parents and taxpayers watching from the sidelines. Why are educators walking out right after the government allocated Rs. 110 billion in the 2027 Budget to complete the final phase of its 3-stage public sector salary increase? From the government's perspective, the numbers tell a story of steady generosity. Speaking in Parliament on Saturday, November 21, Labour Deputy Minister Mahinda Jayasinghe pointed out that teaching service salaries have climbed up to Rs. 98,000, principals' pay has risen alongside them, and Teacher Advisory Service increments were boosted by Rs. 2,500, while promising that remaining public sector salary anomalies will be rectified in 2027.

Yet talk to the educators preparing to stay home on November 30, and a very different arithmetic emerges. First, unions argue that headline salary figures ignore the structural distortions left unresolved since the Subodhani Committee recommendations years ago. Even a parliamentary subcommittee meeting earlier this week on November 17 acknowledged persistent anomalies when teachers are promoted into the Principal Service, alongside unresolved disputes over service minutes, transport allowances, transfer policies, and basic residential facilities in rural schools. Second, real purchasing power has been quietly chewed up by rising living costs. With October inflation already hitting 8.3% and the Central Bank warning it could reach 9% in December amid global oil price pressures, educators say previous pay adjustments feel lighter every time they visit a market.

There is also a deeper political subtext that makes this standoff particularly awkward for the administration. For years, the Ceylon Teachers' Union and its leadership stood on the front lines alongside current government figures, including Labour Deputy Minister Mahinda Jayasinghe himself, leading massive street protests against previous regimes over education funding and teacher pay. Now, former allies sit on opposite sides of the bargaining table. The unions accuse the 2027 Budget of bypassing their core demands, while ministers urge state workers to submit proposals to the Salaries Commission rather than disrupt public services.

Which brings us to the question nobody in either camp seems eager to answer: who actually pays the price when classrooms shut down on a Monday morning? Over 4 million schoolchildren across 10,000 state schools have already endured years of pandemic closures, economic crisis disruptions, and examination delays. When teachers and principals call in sick to pressure Parliament ahead of Tuesday's Education Ministry debate, MPs will still collect their sitting allowances and union officials will still hold press conferences, while ordinary parents scramble for childcare and students lose another irreplaceable day of learning.



To be sure, teachers and principals have every right to demand fair pay, coherent promotion rules, and honest dialogue before the 2027 Budget is locked into law on December 14. Equally, the government cannot treat every salary anomaly as an endless study-committee exercise while inflation ticks upward. Between now and November 30, both sides have a full week to prove that serious negotiation works better than a mass sick note.

100 CAMERAS, 35 KILOMETERS, AND ONE DEADLY ESCAPE: HOW THE POLICE TRACKED DOWN THE NAWALA HIT-AND-RUN SUSPECT

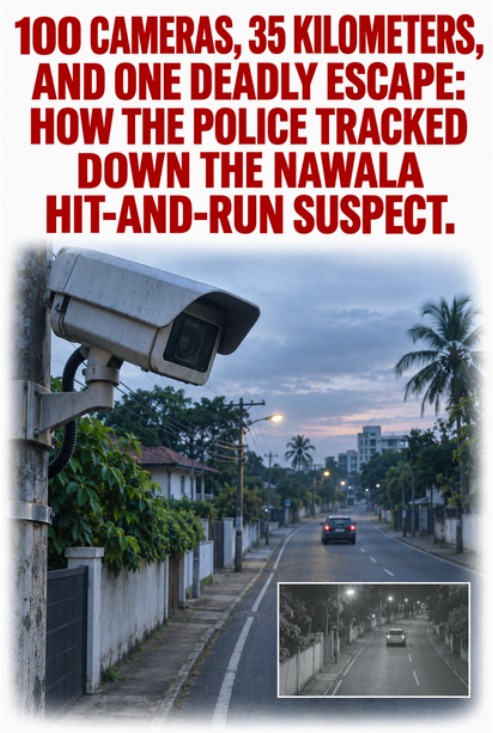
Fleeing the scene of a fatal crash often hinges on a simple gamble: that in the chaos of suburban traffic, a driver can vanish before anyone catches a license plate. On November 10, that gamble cost an 80-year-old pedestrian his life near the pedestrian crossing at Weli Park Junction along the busy Nawala-Nugegoda Road. Four days later, however, painstaking detective work by the Mirihana Police proved that modern

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
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100 CAMERAS...

surveillance networks leave far fewer blind spots than hit-and-run offenders imagine.

The chain of events began on November 10 along one of Colombo's most heavily traversed suburban arteries. According to police investigators, the elderly pedestrian was crossing near Weli Park Junction when a car struck him with severe force and sped away without stopping to render aid. Emergency responders rushed the critically injured 80-year-old to the Colombo South Teaching Hospital in Kalubowila, where he was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit. Despite medical efforts to save him, the victim later succumbed to his injuries.



With no driver at the scene and an elderly citizen dead after using a marked crossing zone, officers from the Mirihana Police launched an intensive digital manhunt. Rather than relying solely on eyewitness fragments, investigators reconstructed the suspect vehicle's escape route frame by frame, reviewing footage from more than 100 CCTV cameras mounted along roads stretching roughly 35 kilometers from Nawala all the way into the Kalutara District town of Horana.

That methodical electronic trail paid off on November 14. Tracking the vehicle's movements from camera to camera, police officers traced the car to a private residence in Munagama, Horana, where they located and seized a black Toyota Aqua believed to have been involved in the fatal collision.

Subsequent inquiries in the area quickly narrowed the search from the vehicle to the person behind the wheel, leading to the arrest of the suspected driver in the Royal Garden neighborhood of Horana.

What followed during standard post-arrest forensic procedures added an even more troubling dimension to the case. Police produced the suspect before the Judicial Medical Officer at Kalubowila Hospital for a comprehensive medical examination. According to police reports, the medical assessment revealed that the suspect had consumed crystal methamphetamine, the synthetic stimulant widely known on Sri Lankan streets as Ice.

On November 15, Mirihana Police produced the suspect before the Gangodawila Magistrate's Court, where he was ordered remanded into custody until November 27 as investigators continue compiling forensic, vehicular, and witness evidence for prosecution.

For road safety advocates and ordinary commuters alike, the Nawala tragedy highlights two stark realities on Sri Lanka's highways. First, pedestrian crossings remain dangerously perilous for vulnerable citizens, particularly elderly residents navigating fast-moving suburban corridors, when impaired drivers treat traffic rules as optional. Second, the intersection of synthetic narcotics and motor vehicles poses a lethal threat that routine traffic stops alone rarely catch until after a life has been lost.

At the same time, the Mirihana Police investigation offers a rare note of institutional reassurance. By stitching together over 100 private and public camera feeds across two districts within 4 days, officers demonstrated that hitting the accelerator after a crash no longer guarantees anonymity.

FAKE LITRO TANKS AND KITCHEN LEFTOVERS: THREE REMANDED OVER YELLOW-TO-BLUE GAS CYLINDER SCAM

Desperate times rarely inspire criminal genius, yet every now and then a local scam surfaces with enough culinary creativity to make even seasoned police investigators pause. On Sunday, November 22, three suspects, including a father and son, were ordered remanded until December 20 by the Minuwangoda Magistrate's Court after Kotadeniyawa Police uncovered a brazen racket in which empty yellow Laugfs gas cylinders were repainted blue and disguised with kitchen leftovers to pass as genuine Litro tanks.

According to preliminary police investigations, the operation was orchestrated by a local gas dealer who found himself stuck with empty yellow cylinders that customers either could not refill or could not afford. Rather than leaving them idle, the main suspect allegedly sprayed the yellow tanks in Litro's signature blue. Realizing that a freshly painted, spotless cylinder arriving at a retail counter might raise immediate suspicion among observant distributors, the group added an ingenious layer of camouflage. Investigators found that the suspects smeared food waste and kitchen residue, specifically remnants of hopper mixture and chilli gravy, across the newly painted metal surfaces so the tanks would look battered, seasoned, and genuinely used in household kitchens.

Once the faux-weathered disguise was complete, the father-and-son duo allegedly transported the repainted cylinders in their three-wheeler to unsuspecting Litro gas outlets in the area. By handing over the disguised empty cylinders at retail counters, they were able to exchange them for genuine, gas-filled blue Litro cylinders. Police said the main suspect then resold those legitimately filled Litro cylinders on the black market for as much as Rs. 20,000 apiece, turning a tidy illegal profit off each swap.

Acting on a tip-off, officers from the Kotadeniyawa Police raided the suspects' operations and seized 40 empty yellow cylinders that had already been repainted blue, along with 3 genuine gas-filled Litro cylinders allegedly acquired through the fraudulent exchanges. Beyond simple commercial fraud, police note that tampering with pressurized liquefied petroleum gas cylinders and bypassing brand-specific safety inspections creates serious hazards for unsuspecting households and filling plants alike. Further inquiries are underway to determine how many repainted tanks entered circulation before the raid shut the operation down.



Ultimately, while the hopper-batter camouflage reads like dark comedy, the racket is a predictable symptom of Sri Lanka's ongoing cooking gas distortion. With Laugfs Gas trapped in months of severe supply shortages linked to breached Board of Investment export rules at its Hambantota terminal, and its retail cylinder price still sitting roughly Rs. 1,600 higher than Litro's even after a partial rollback to Rs. 5,995, thousands of consumers have been desperate to abandon yellow tanks for blue ones. Until the market is normalized and cylinder interoperability or fair supply is properly resolved, price gaps and empty racks will continue tempting opportunists with a paintbrush and a pot of gravy.

OFF-CAMPUS CLASH LANDS 21 UNDERGRADUATES IN CUSTODY AFTER JAFFNA HOSTEL VIOLENCE

Higher education in Sri Lanka rarely suffers from a shortage of turbulence, yet even by the familiar standards of campus unrest, a late-night brawl between two batches of business undergraduates raises uncomfortable questions about student discipline outside university gates. On November 19, a violent clash erupted between second-year and third-year students of the University of Jaffna's Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce at a private student hostel in the Kopay police division, leaving 3 undergraduates injured and landing 21 others behind bars.

Police investigators say the confrontation began as a heated argument between the two senior batches

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
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OFF-CAMPUS CLASH...

inside the privately operated lodging house where they reside. It escalated rapidly into physical violence. Emergency responders admitted the 3 injured students to the Jaffna Teaching Hospital for treatment. Meanwhile, officers from the Kopay Police intervened to restore order and secure the premises.

After initial inquiries, Kopay Police arrested 21 students suspected of direct involvement in the clash. Police Media Spokesperson ASP F.U. Wootler confirmed that two special police teams have been appointed to investigate the incident. Prosecutors brought the arrested suspects before the Jaffna Magistrate's Court, which ordered all 21 students remanded into custody until November 26. Investigators indicated that further arrests are expected as police record statements from victims, witnesses, and hostel operators.



In response, University of Jaffna Vice Chancellor Senior Professor ThirunavukarasuVelnampy announced a formal internal inquiry running parallel to the criminal investigation. Notably, Senior Professor Velnampy is a longtime academic leader within the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce itself. That background adds institutional weight to the administration's swift intervention. Although the clash took place at an off-campus private hostel rather than inside university lecture halls, the Vice Chancellor made clear that geographic boundaries will not shield students from accountability.

He stressed that the university will extend its full cooperation to the Kopay Police while examining the underlying triggers behind the hostility. For years, Sri Lankan state universities have struggled to monitor sprawling networks of private boarding houses. Chronic on-campus accommodation shortages force thousands of undergraduates to live off-campus with minimal supervision. Incidents like the Kopay clash expose how quickly batch rivalries or seniority tensions can spill into residential neighborhoods after lecture hours.

The 21 remanded students now await their next court appearance on November 26 while their injured peers recover in hospital. The university's internal panel faces a straightforward test. Condemning off-campus violence is easy. Enforcing meaningful disciplinary sanctions and addressing why senior undergraduates settled an argument with blades instead of dialogue will determine whether this remains an isolated disgrace or a recurring campus headache.

E-WASTE PLANT SUSPENDED AS SRI LANKA CONFRONTS ITS GROWING ELECTRONIC GARBAGE CRISIS

When discarded circuit boards, lithium batteries, and plastic casings catch fire, the smoke rising into the sky is never ordinary soot. On November 16, a blaze erupted at an electronic waste processing facility in Wewagedara, Divulapitiya, sending plumes of potentially hazardous smoke across the surrounding area and prompting immediate regulatory intervention. Environment Minister Dr. Dhammika Patabendi confirmed this week that the facility's Environmental Protection Licence has been temporarily suspended as a precautionary measure while authorities assess the ecological fallout.

Investigators and environmental regulators acted swiftly after the November 16 fire raised alarms over severe air pollution and toxic runoff. The Central Environmental Authority issued a strict set of technical directives aimed at containing smoke emissions, securing damaged electronic waste stockpiles, and preventing heavy metals from leaching into nearby soil and groundwater. Until inspectors verify that environmental risks are fully neutralized and safety protocols are restored, the Divulapitiya plant's operating licence remains frozen.



Yet the Wewagedara fire points to a far larger, chronic headache for Sri Lanka: how the island manages its rapidly expanding mountain of discarded electronics. Industry assessments estimate that Sri Lanka generates roughly 120,000 metric tonnes of electronic waste annually, spanning obsolete mobile phones, computers, televisions, batteries, and household appliances. While the Central Environmental Authority has licensed a limited network of formal e-waste collectors and recyclers across the country, the vast majority of discarded electronics still vanishes into informal scrap yards.

That gap carries steep environmental and public health consequences. Electronic waste contains a cocktail of toxic substances, including lead, mercury, cadmium, brominated flame retardants, and polychlorinated biphenyls. When e-waste burns in accidental fires like the Divulapitiya blaze, or gets torched deliberately by unregulated scrap dealers stripping copper wiring, those compounds release carcinogenic dioxins and furans directly into residential airsheds. Once settled, heavy metals contaminate wells and agricultural land for decades.

Sri Lanka has already seen how costly industrial storage failures become when hazardous materials are poorly managed. Previous warehouse fires in industrial zones around Colombo and the Western Province have repeatedly forced emergency evacuations, overwhelmed municipal fire brigades lacking specialized chemical suppression gear, and left neighboringcommunities breathing acrid fumes for days. In the case of e-waste facilities, dense stacks of lithium-ion batteries and flammable polymers create intense thermal hazards if fire suppression systems, ventilation, and storage segregation fall short of regulatory standards.

Suspending the Wewagedara facility's licence is a necessary first step, yet reactive shutdowns after a fire breaks out will not solve a national waste bottleneck. Why do formal recycling plants struggle with high-risk stockpiling while informal operators continue burning cables in backyards without oversight? Until the Environment Ministry and the Central Environmental Authority enforce rigorous fire-safety audits across every licensed e-waste facility, expand safe collection channels, and penalize illegal dumping, incidents like Divulapitiya will remain an accident waiting for a spark.

DNA PROVED PATERNITY, APPEAL CUT THE SENTENCE: INSIDE THE MULLAITIVU PRIEST RAPE RULING

When a war-displaced teenager is sent to stay with a respected temple priest so she can study for her Advanced Levels, trust is supposed to be the bedrock of the arrangement. In Mullaitivu back in November 2011, that trust was shattered, and 15 years later the Court of Appeal has kept the conviction intact while trimming 4 years off the prison term.

Court records in the appeal (CA/HCC/242/2020) show the victim arrived at the home of Nithiyananthan Mohan Raj in Udayar Kattu in August 2011 and left in November 2011. Mohan Raj was a poosari, a traditional Hindu temple priest holding social and spiritual authority in the community. She testified that he sexually assaulted her against her will and threatened her against speaking out.

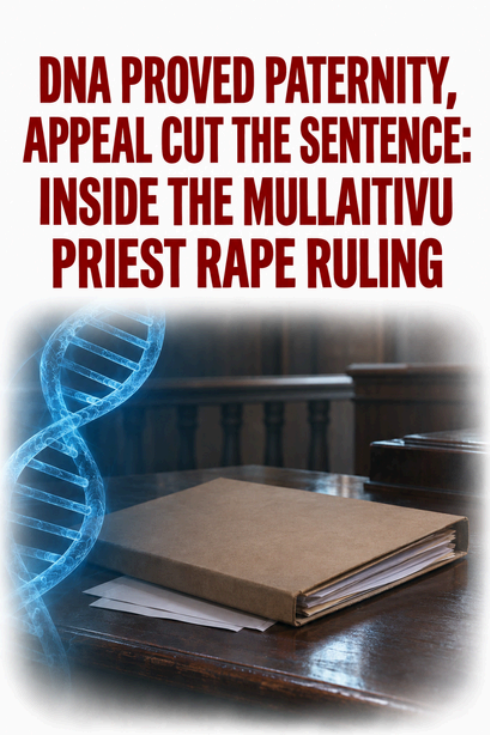
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DNA PROVED PATERNITY...

After leaving his shelter, she returned to a displacement camp and gave up her plans to sit for the GCE Advanced Level examination.

Six months later, health workers spotted that the 17-year-old was pregnant. Medical checks confirmed the pregnancy, and a DNA report proved Mohan Raj was the father of the child. She was later placed at a convent, gave birth, and the baby was given up for adoption.

At the Vavuniya High Court (Case No. HCV/2847/2019), Mohan Raj was convicted of rape under Section 364(1) of the Penal Code and acquitted of a separate attempted rape count for lack of sufficient evidence. The High Court handed down 17 years of rigorous imprisonment, a Rs. 5,000 fine (or 6 months simple imprisonment in default), and Rs. 300,000 in compensation to the victim (or 24 months simple imprisonment in default).



On appeal, Mohan Raj argued the prosecution had not proved its case beyond reasonable doubt and claimed the sexual relationship was consensual. Justices Dr. Sumudu Premachandra and Amal Ranaraja were having none of that defense. The judgment noted that DNA evidence established sexual intercourse, the victim's testimony showed it happened against her will, and her departure from his home backed up her account. Judges also noted that delayed reporting in such cases is understandable given fear and stigma.

Even so, the bench cut the sentence from 17 years to 13 years of rigorous imprisonment, running from the date of conviction, after weighing that Mohan Raj was a first-time offender and the father of 5 children. The Rs. 5,000 fine and Rs. 300,000 compensation stayed untouched.

A 13-year sentence is still a heavy stretch behind bars. Yet when a displaced girl loses her schooling, her safety, and a child to adoption after an assault by a trusted elder, cutting 4 years off the penalty inevitably raises a sharp question: how much weight should family ties carry when a position of authority is used to violate a vulnerable child?

ONE HOUR, ONE FAULTY VALVE, THREE KILOMETRES POLLUTED: THE COLOMBO PORT OIL SPILL

All it took was one faulty drain valve on a single fuel tanker inside the Colombo Port Complex to stain more than 3 kilometres of the Muthuwela coastline with Marine Gas Oil. On Saturday, November 21, at around 9:30 a.m., the Marine Environment Protection Authority received word of a leak from the JCT No. 108 oil tanker, a vessel carrying roughly 1,000 tonnes of fuel at the time. By 10:30 a.m., the Sri Lanka Ports Authority had plugged the source. Yet in that single hour, diesel had already slipped into an urban drainage canal and poured straight out toward Mutwal Fisheries Harbour and the B-Gate anchorage.

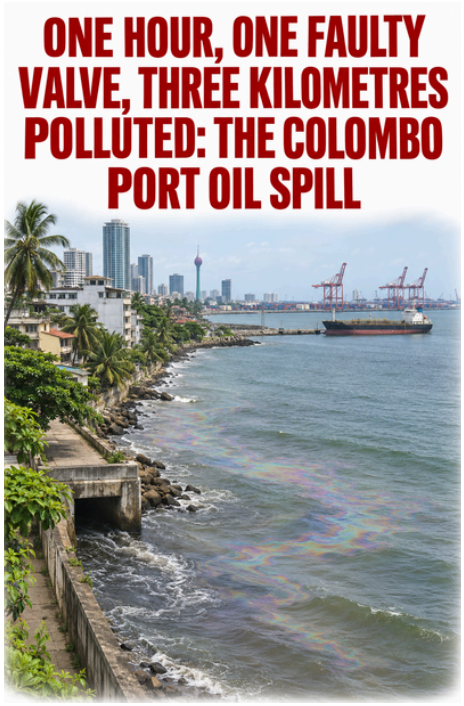
By Sunday, November 22, containment booms were stretched across the canal outlet while SLPA crews and Sri Lanka Coast Guard oil-spill response teams skimmed slicks off the water. Still, the clean-up treats the symptom rather than the question sitting squarely on the dock: how does a full 1,000-tonne tanker inside Sri Lanka's premier port lose fuel through a damaged valve and send it straight into a municipal drain without immediate secondary containment?

In maritime operations, the chain of responsibility is rarely a mystery. First on the hook is the tanker operator and master, who carry direct legal duty under Sri Lanka's Marine Pollution Prevention Act No. 35 of 2008 to maintain seaworthy valves, conduct pre-transfer checks, and prevent any discharge into territorial waters. Next comes terminal and port oversight. Inside a busy bunkering hub like Colombo, drainage networks running alongside oil berths are supposed to be fitted with working oil-water interceptors and isolation sluices precisely so a deck or valve failure never becomes a coastal slick. Finally sits MEPA, the statutory regulator mandated to enforce waste and spill rules and hold polluters financially liable.

Environmentally, Marine Gas Oil behaves differently from thick black crude, though fishermen along Mutwal know better than to call it harmless. Light distillate fuels spread rapidly into thin, iridescent films across surface water and mix into the upper water column. That creates acute toxicity for fish larvae, crabs, benthic organisms, and nearshore reef patches around Colombo's northern coastline, while tainting fishing gear and forcing small-boat operators off the water during peak livelihoods. Even when surface sheens evaporate or get skimmed within days, hydrocarbon residues settle into harbour sediments and canal mud, where low oxygen slows breakdown for months.

As to why incidents like Saturday's keep repeating, it is mostly because routine maintenance gets treated as paperwork until metal fails. Corroded drain valves, unmonitored bilge or tank transfers, clogged port storm drains, and weak deterrents turn minor mechanical lapses into public clean-ups. Earlier in 2026, MEPA Chairman Samantha Gunasekara acknowledged that penalties under the 2008 Marine Pollution Prevention Act had become outdated and needed major revision to match international standards. When fines look cheaper than dry-dock maintenance, corners get cut.

Sri Lanka has paid dearly for underestimating maritime hazards before. In September 2020, the crude carrier MT New Diamond caught fire off Sangamankanda Point carrying 270,000 metric tonnes of crude oil and 1,700 tonnes of diesel, triggering a massive multi-agency scramble to prevent a catastrophic spill.



Just 8 months later, in May 2021, the MV X-Press Pearl burned and sank off Colombo, unleashing billions of plastic nurdles, nitric acid, and bunker fuel across western beaches, devastating over 15,000 fishing families and prompting a $6.48 billion environmental damage claim. Even inside Colombo Port itself, in June 2024, authorities slapped a travel ban on the master of the tanker Ark Prestige over a suspected port oil spill that required protective booms.

Saturday's leak from JCT No. 108 was mercifully stopped in 60 minutes rather than days. Yet 3 kilometres of polluted shoreline and an urban canal choked with Marine Gas Oil should never be dismissed as a minor mishap.

