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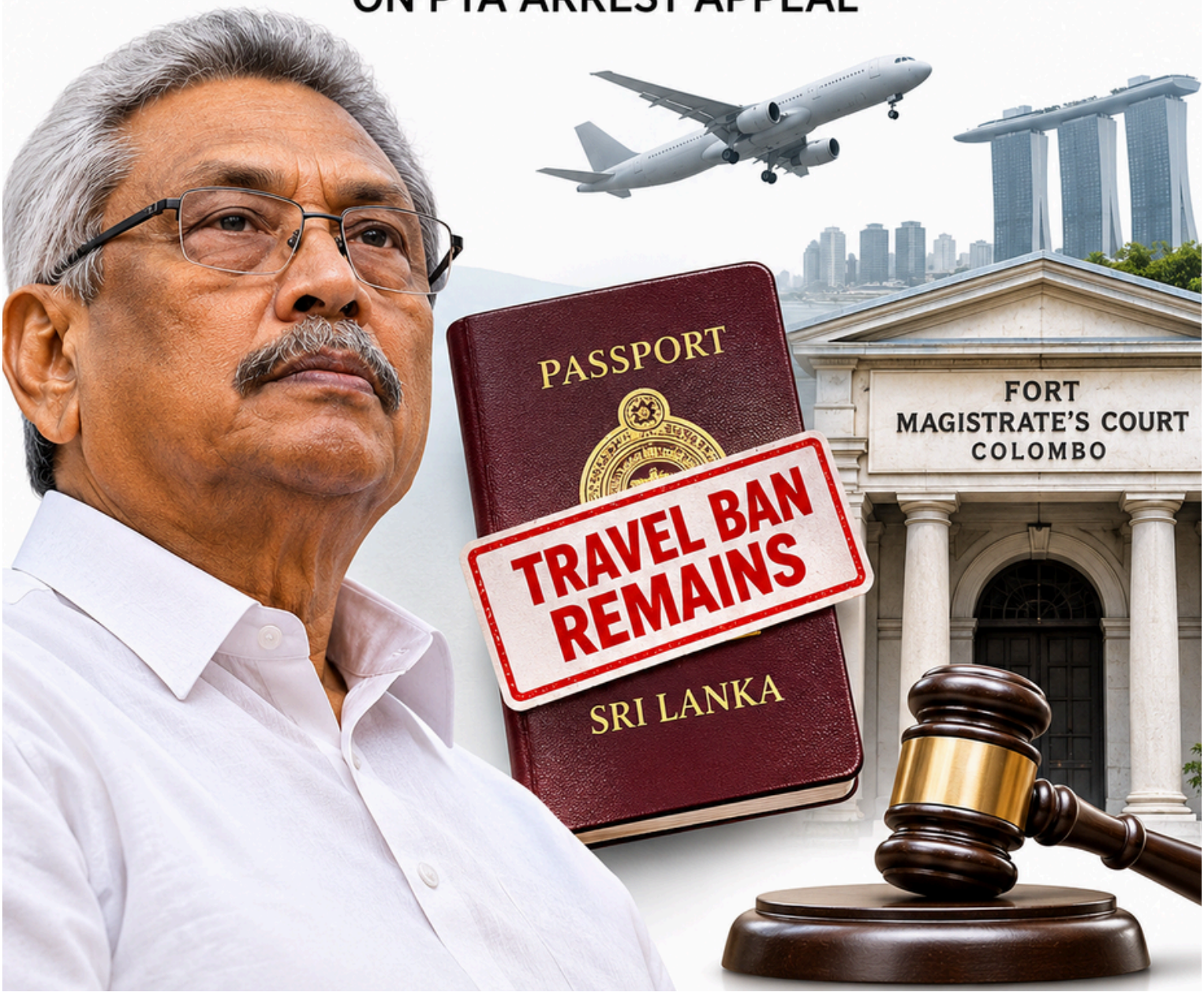
NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

GOTABAYA RAJAPAKSA: SINGAPORE TRIP BLOCKED

FORT MAGISTRATE REFUSES TO LIFT TRAVEL BAN AS SUPREME COURT SETS MARCH 2027 HEARING ON PTA ARREST APPEAL



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FORT MAGISTRATE BLOCKS SINGAPORE TRIP WHILE SUPREME COURT SETS MARCH 2027 DATE FOR GOTABAYA RAJAPAKSA

A former President who once wielded unchecked emergency powers spent yesterday, November 25, walking out of two Colombo courtrooms with neither the passport freedom to board a flight to Singapore nor the judicial shield he sought against arrest under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. At the Colombo Fort Magistrate's Court, Magistrate PasanAmarasena refused Gotabaya Rajapaksa's request to temporarily lift the overseas travel ban imposed on him on June 3, 2026, in connection with the 2019 Easter Sunday terror attacks investigation. Hours apart at Hulftsdorp, a three-judge Supreme Court bench headed by Justice Mahinda Samayawardhena declined to grant an interim stay blocking his arrest under the PTA, fixing his appeal for support on March 5, 2027.

Rajapaksa appeared personally before the Fort Magistrate's Court yesterday seeking permission to travel to Singapore for follow-up medical examinations and treatment at Mount Elizabeth Hospital following previous heart surgery. That request followed an earlier October motion in which his counsel sought roughly 14 days abroad.

While rejecting the bid to suspend the restriction, Magistrate Amarasena directed the Criminal Investigation Department to urgently clarify Rajapaksa's legal standing and inform the judiciary whether he will be formally named as a suspect. During earlier hearings, Additional Solicitor General Dileepa Peiris noted that inquiries involving the former Head of State had reached an advanced stage, though he had not yet been named a suspect in the case alongside three accused, including former State Intelligence Service Director Major General Suresh Sallay, over allegations of concealing information and misleading investigators.

Across town at the Supreme Court, Rajapaksa's parallel effort to secure pre-emptive legal insulation also remained unresolved. Represented by President's Counsel Romesh de Silva, the former President is appealing an October 1, 2026 decision by a two-judge Court of Appeal bench comprising Justice Rohantha Abeysuriya and Justice Sarath Dissanayake.

That bench dismissed his writ petition against Inspector General of Police Priyantha Weerasooriya and CID officers without issuing notice, ruling that his fear of PTA arrest was premature and that issuing a broad prohibition would obstruct lawful police inquiries.

For survivors and families of the more than 260 people killed on April 21, 2019, yesterday's twin courtroom developments define what to expect over the next 4 months. Rajapaksa remains legally grounded in Sri Lanka under the June 3 travel restriction, while the absence of any Supreme Court stay leaves CID officers fully empowered to record statements, evaluate evidence, and act under the Criminal Procedure Code or the PTA before March 5, 2027. At the same time, Magistrate Amarasena's directive puts the CID and the Attorney General's Department on notice to move beyond open-ended inquiries and state plainly whether charges will follow.

The dual rulings sharpen unavoidable questions about accountability as the eighth anniversary of the Easter Sunday bombings approaches in April 2027. Why does a former President who built his political career on uncompromising national security powers now seek judicial immunity from the Prevention of Terrorism Act? If investigators already possess evidence at an advanced stage, what is preventing the CID from making a decisive determination on his status as a suspect? Why should Sri Lankan courts entertain pre-emptive shields against arrest when ordinary citizens enjoy no such privilege during active criminal investigations? Most critically, will the next 4 months bring substantive prosecutions before a trial bench, or simply another round of procedural applications? Questions remain.

DID PRESIDENT MAHINDA RAJAPAKSA GIFT THIS TO US, THE PEOPLE?

The wording can give that impression, but the plaque does not establish that Mahinda Rajapaksa paid for the rest bay personally.

"Was gifted by" goes further than "was opened by." It credits Rajapaksa with giving the facility to the public. Be that as it may, the inscription says nothing about whose money paid for the construction.

For NEWSLINE, the fair question will always be: **The plaque credits President Mahinda Rajapaksa with gifting the rest bay. Who paid to build it?**

The construction contract and payment records would be the place to look for the answer.



We have not looked for it because we believe that this is a bit of confusion sowed by the 'lost in translation' syndrome (LITS).

THE ZIMBABWEAN PREACHER REMANDED IN HARARE AND HIS DEEP ROOTS IN COLOMBO

On Tuesday, November 24, Zimbabwean televangelist Uebert Angel appeared before the Harare Magistrates' Court following his arrest on Sunday, November 22, at the Harare Hippodrome. Prosecutors charged the Spirit Embassy founder with aggravated indecent assault involving a 40-year-old woman, telling the court the offence carries a potential sentence of 15 to 20 years upon conviction.

The state opposed bail, citing dual passports, overseas financial assets, and reports of threatening calls and messages sent to the complainant, and the court remanded him in custody ahead of a Wednesday, November 25 ruling. While those charges remain unproven in court, the arrest puts renewed focus on Angel's background and his documented links to Sri Lanka.

Born Uebert Mudzanire, Angel built an international televangelist empire before stepping directly into state power. In March 2021, Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa appointed him Presidential Envoy and Ambassador-at-Large to Europe and the Americas, ostensibly to attract foreign investment.

Two years later, in March 2023, Al Jazeera's investigative series Gold Mafia broadcast undercover recordings in which Angel offered to use his diplomatic immunity and official status to move up to US$1.2 billion in cash through Zimbabwe's gold sector as part of an alleged money-laundering scheme. Angel denied wrongdoing at the time, yet the broadcasts raised serious questions about how a self-styled prophet acquired diplomatic privileges in the first place.

For Sri Lankan readers, Angel is no distant foreign curiosity. He has visited Sri Lanka repeatedly, met senior political figures in Colombo, including a widely photographed 2023 prayer meeting with



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former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, who later distanced himself from the pair, and forged both spiritual and family bonds with controversial Sri Lankan pastor Jerome Fernando. Fernando has publicly hailed Angel as his spiritual father and mentor, crediting the Zimbabwean preacher with guiding his ministry.

The connection runs deeper than the pulpit: Fernando confirmed to a certain Sri Lankan news outlet that his daughter became engaged to Angel's son, binding the two families together directly.



That relationship raises pointed questions that Sri Lankan authorities and the public have yet to see answered. How did a foreign envoy implicated on international television in alleged billion-dollar gold smuggling and money-laundering discussions move so freely through Colombo's political and religious circles?

Were financial transfers, cross-border donations, or diplomatic courtesies ever extended between Spirit Embassy's network and local ministries? And when a self-proclaimed mentor faces grave criminal charges in Harare while holding dual passports and international bank accounts, what due diligence do Sri Lankan regulators apply to foreign religious figures operating on the island?

There is no evidence linking Jerome Fernando to the criminal allegations now before the Harare court, and the judicial process in Zimbabwe must take its course. Even so, when pulpit influence, diplomatic passports, and cross-border money intersect in Colombo, asking hard questions about oversight and accountability is warranted.





ROADSIDE DOORING AND HEAVY VEHICLE BLIND SPOTS TURN FATAL ON THE KALMUNAI AKKARAIPATTU ROAD

A 23-year-old resident of Kalmunai died on Tuesday, November 24, after a parked lorry driver opened his cab door directly into the path of a passing bicycle on the Kalmunai Akkaraipattu Main Road. According to Kalmunai Police, the impact threw the bicycle off balance into the carriageway, where an oncoming bus travelling towards Kalmunai struck the riders. Both the cyclist and the 23-year-old pillion passenger suffered critical injuries and were rushed to the Kalmunai Base Hospital, where the passenger succumbed to his injuries.



This fatal chain reaction highlights a recurring hazard on Sri Lankan highways where heavy vehicles, narrow road shoulders, and vulnerable road users share the same unmarked tarmac.

Across the island, police traffic divisions regularly record fatal "dooring" collisions alongside crashes caused by lorries parked without warning triangles, buses overtaking in tight corridors, and commercial trucks operating with worn tyres or defective mirrors. In recent years, similar tragedies along the A4 highway, the Kandy Colombo road, and the Southern Expressway access routes have repeatedly exposed how a single careless movement by a heavy vehicle operator leaves cyclists and motorcyclists with zero margin for survival.

Under Sri Lanka's Motor Traffic Act, opening a vehicle door so as to endanger any person on a road is already a punishable offence, while parking regulations restrict heavy vehicles from obstructing active lanes. Yet enforcement remains largely reactive, arriving only after an ambulance leaves the scene. Heavy commercial vehicles routinely park along busy main roads to load goods or rest, forcing cyclists to swerve blindly into fast-moving bus lanes.

Other jurisdictions have tackled this exact sequence of failure through both driver habits and vehicle design. In the Netherlands, learner drivers are tested on the "Dutch Reach," requiring them to open the car or cab door with their far hand so their torso naturally turns toward approaching traffic before the door swings out. Across the United Kingdom, the updated Highway Code formally codified the Dutch Reach alongside a strict hierarchy of road users that places greater legal responsibility on heavy vehicle drivers to protect cyclists and pedestrians. Meanwhile, European Union safety regulations mandate blind-spot detection sensors, side underrun protection bars, and wide-angle proximity mirrors on lorries and buses so drivers cannot miss two-wheelers riding alongside their cabs.

Sri Lanka does not need to reinvent road engineering to prevent deaths like Tuesday's tragedy in Kalmunai. Authorities should have enforced dedicated loading bays off main arterial roads, mandatory reflective side-underrun guards on all registered lorries, and strict roadside parking bans along narrow stretches of the A4 highway years ago. Introducing basic blind-spot mirror standards during annual vehicle fitness inspections, embedding the far-hand door check into heavy vehicle licensing tests, and equipping traffic police with clear authority to impound improperly parked commercial vehicles would immediately cut preventable fatalities. Until heavy vehicle safety is treated as a frontline licensing and enforcement priority rather than an afterthought, ordinary cyclists will continue paying the price on Sri Lanka's main roads.

JOHNSTON FERNANDO FINED RS. 130,000 AND HANDED SUSPENDED SENTENCE OVER UNREGISTERED BMW

Former Highways Minister Johnston Fernando walked out of the Colombo Fort Magistrate's Court yesterday, November 25, with a Rs. 130,000 fine, a 5-year suspended prison sentence, and a criminal record after pleading guilty to three offences under the Motor Traffic Act.

Magistrate Pasan Amarasena also ordered the permanent confiscation of the unregistered luxury BMW at the centre of the case, bringing a quiet legal close to a two-year investigation into how a senior cabinet member came to possess an illegally assembled car.

Fernando was a minister who opened Sri Lanka's expressways and oversaw the very road network governed by transport regulations. Yet when Criminal Investigation Department officers traced a luxury sedan linked to him in October 2024, they uncovered a vehicle that existed entirely outside the rules enforced on ordinary motorists.

Imported in parts, assembled locally without the written approval of the Commissioner General of Motor Traffic, and fitted with registration plates belonging to another vehicle, the car bypassed both customs duties and statutory registration.

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That inquiry led to Fernando's arrest by the CID on October 23, 2024, a week in remand custody, and release on 5 sureties of Rs. 5 million each. After months of court dates, the political rhetoric gave way earlier this month to three straightforward guilty pleas.

Magistrate Amarasena spelled out the penalties. On the charge of possessing an unregistered vehicle, Fernando was fined Rs. 5,000, carrying 1 month of simple imprisonment in default. For operating a vehicle assembled without official clearance, the court imposed a Rs. 100,000 fine, 6 months in default, and rigorous imprisonment suspended for 5 years. Displaying another vehicle's number plate drew a further Rs. 25,000 fine, carrying 3 months in default, alongside the state forfeiture of the vehicle.

Any average driver in Colombo or Kurunegala stopped with borrowed plates or an unapproved chassis modification knows how swiftly traffic police impound the vehicle and file charges. Seeing a former cabinet minister answer to the exact same statute challenges the familiar assumption that Sri Lanka operates with two separate rulebooks, one for the powerful and another for everyone else.

The Fort Magistrate's Court file on the assembled BMW is now closed, leaving the car in state custody and a conviction on Fernando's record. His broader courtroom calendar remains active, however, with separate prosecutions over alleged Lanka Sathosa financial irregularities still pending before the courts.

UNIVERSITY EXAMS HALTED AS PUBLIC SECTOR STRIKES RETURN OVER THE 2027 BUDGET

Sri Lanka's brief season of industrial peace ended at the gates of its state universities yesterday, November 25, as non-academic staff walked off the job for the second time in 7 days and forced the postponement of scheduled exams and lectures. Organized by the University Trade Union Joint Committee, the one-day token strike directly challenges the government's 2027 Budget and signals a wider return to coordinated public-sector unrest.

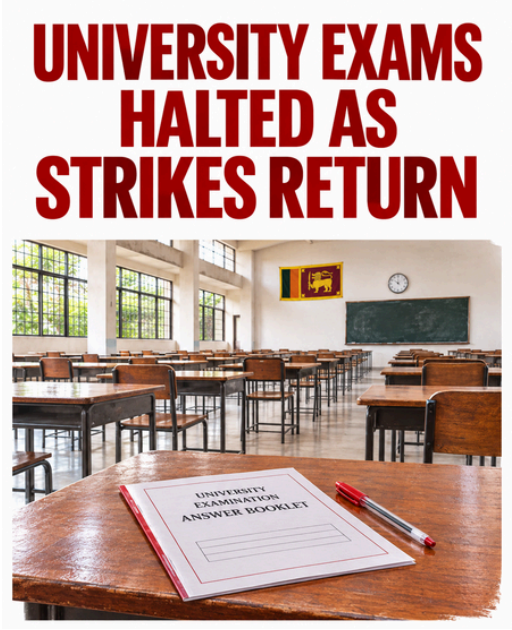
At the centre of the dispute is a demand to restore basic salaries, overtime rates, and allowances that union leaders say were reduced under the 2025 Budget. Co-Chairman Dhammika S. Priyantha confirmed that protests took place outside state universities nationwide while representatives of 9 major unions convened in Colombo. Co-Chairman Mangala Dabarera stressed that employees are seeking the reinstatement of earnings they received prior to the 2025 reductions, accusing the administration of failing to honour earlier agreements or hold substantive talks since presenting its maiden fiscal plan.

For much of the past year, Sri Lanka's public sector experienced a rare stretch of industrial calm after the government took office on promises of economic stabilization and administrative reform.

That truce has fractured sharply since the 2027 Budget reached Parliament.

Over the past week, labour unrest has spread well beyond university gates into hospitals, schools, and local government offices. On Monday, November 23, a coalition of education, health, and development sector unions staged a "National Day of Protest" against the fiscal proposals.

The Government Medical Officers' Association launched a two-hour islandwide trade union action on Monday morning over unaddressed grievances in the health sector, while nursing unions warned of escalating steps.



Now, an even wider confrontation is set for Monday, November 30, just 24 hours before Parliament takes up the Education Ministry's budgetary vote on December 1.

The Teachers' and Principals' Trade Union Alliance, led by figures including Ceylon Teachers' Union General Secretary Joseph Stalin, has announced a coordinated one-day sick leave campaign expected to involve nearly 250,000 teachers and principals across 10,110 state schools.

Their demands include the release of unpaid salary increments, a Rs. 25,000 monthly bridging allowance, updated difficult-service allowances, and an allocation of 6 percent of GDP for education.

Workers' Struggle Centre collectives across public institutions have also pledged sector-wide stoppages for the same day.

The government faces a narrow fiscal corridor as the International Monetary Fund prepares to consider Sri Lanka's seventh programme review on December 2. Ministers maintain that fiscal discipline remains essential to sustain recovery and keep inflation contained, leaving little room for unbudgeted wage concessions.

Yet for university undergraduates facing delayed graduation timelines, parents bracing for school closures next Monday, and patients waiting outside state clinics, the return of familiar picket lines signals that Sri Lanka's brief period of labour peace has come to an end.

TWO-HOUR QUEUES FOR A 35 DOLLAR TICKET AS SIGIRIYA'S CROWD MANAGEMENT HITS A BOTTLENECK

Paying 35 US dollars to stand motionless on an iron staircase for two hours is rarely the cultural immersion travelers book flights to Sri Lanka to experience. Yet that was the verdict delivered by travel YouTuber "Roman_onboard" in a recent video documenting his visit to Sigiriya Rock Fortress, where gridlock on the ascent forced him and his partner to turn back halfway. Calling the bottleneck "failed management of an object," he urged the Ministry of Tourism to introduce timed, hourly entry slots so visitors can actually reach the summit without spending half their morning in a human traffic jam.

The numbers explain why the Lion Rock's narrow staircases are groaning. Official Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority data shows Sigiriya and its museum drew 1,086,918 visitors in 2025, comprising 582,687 foreign tourists and 504,231 domestic visitors. Put simply, nearly one in every four international arrivals to Sri Lanka last year climbed the rock. While the SLTDA releases site-level figures annually, Central Cultural Fund Director General Dr. Nilan Cooray noted in May 2026 that Sigiriya averages around 2,500 foreign visitors per day, generating close to Rs. 25 million in daily revenue.



When 2,500 foreign guests plus thousands of local visitors funnel toward the Lion's Paw terrace between 7:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. to beat the tropical heat, physics takes over. A fifth-century palace complex designed for royal exclusivity was never engineered to process rush-hour commuter volumes on single-file metal walkways.

For the Central Cultural Fund, which manages the UNESCO World Heritage site, overcrowding is hardly a newly discovered phenomenon. Over the years, CCF officials and SLTDA visitor management reports have repeatedly acknowledged that Sigiriya

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operates beyond its comfortable carrying capacity during peak morning windows and holiday periods. While Dr. Cooray and CCF teams have earned credit for archaeological conservation, including recent work decoding the ancient hydraulic fountain system and restoring brickwork worn down by heavy footfall, crowd-flow technology has lagged behind. Existing online ticketing portals still sell open-ended day passes rather than capped time slots, and the 2027 Budget presented earlier this month earmarked funds for a unified attraction e-ticketing platform without setting a firm launch date.

Global heritage sites solved this problem years ago. Places from Peru's Machu Picchu to Rome's Colosseum enforce strict hourly entry quotas, staggered access windows, and dynamic pricing that nudges budget-conscious visitors toward quieter afternoon hours.

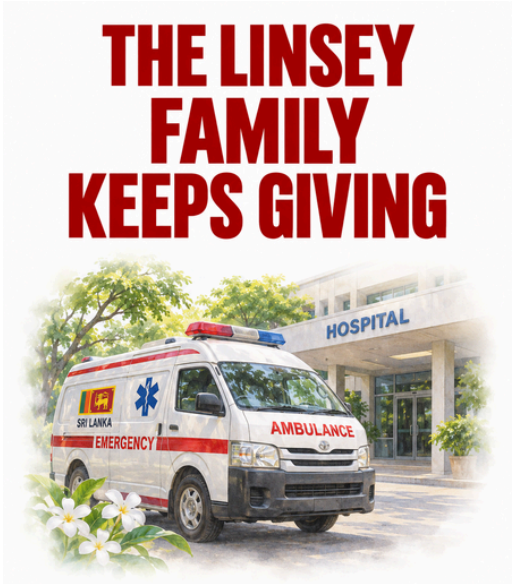
If Sigiriya already collects roughly Rs. 25 million a day from foreign tickets alone, why are visitors still queuing like commuters at Fort Railway Station? Why has the Central Cultural Fund not converted its existing digital portal into a capped, timed-entry reservation system, or offered discounted afternoon tickets to spread foot traffic across the day? Until authorities pair premium ticket prices with basic crowd engineering, Sri Lanka's crown jewel risks turning paying guests around before they ever see the view.

SEVEN YEARS AFTER THE EASTER BOMB BLAST, BRITISH LINSEY FAMILY QUIETLY CONTINUES TO DELIVER LIFE SAVING INFRA-STRUCTURE TO SRI LANKA

Even as the legal battles surrounding the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings remain locked in courtroom procedural delays, one British family scarred by that morning has spent the past seven years quietly building life-saving infrastructure across Sri Lanka. At its annual charity ball held recently at The Peninsula Hotel in London, the Amelie and Daniel Linsey Foundation announced that a newly procured emergency ambulance is already en route to Sri Lanka for the 1990 Suwa Seriya service, while fundraising is underway for a second unit dedicated specifically to Jaffna.

Foundation director David Linsey established the charity in memory of his younger siblings, 15-year-old Amelie and 19-year-old Daniel, who were killed on April 21, 2019, in the suicide bombing at Colombo's Shangri-La Hotel. The teenagers had been on the final day of a family holiday with their father, Matthew Linsey, who survived the blast and carried his critically injured children through a chaotic hospital transfer in Colombo. Studying at the University of Oxford at the time, David resolved to ensure that his siblings' names would remain tied to the recovery of Sri Lankan trauma care rather than solely to the violence that claimed their lives.

For a pre-hospital emergency network like 1990 Suwa Seriya, which operates islandwide without charge and maintains an average response time of roughly 15 minutes, expanding fleet capacity in northern districts such as Jaffna directly strengthens emergency survival rates where hospital distances remain wide.



The ambulance initiative builds on a sustained record of targeted medical and community assistance since 2019. Within eight months of the attacks, David Linsey had raised £350,000 for Sri Lanka's healthcare sector, funding the delivery of 100 patient transfer trolley beds across nine state hospitals alongside essential trauma equipment including ventilators. Beyond hospital hardware, the foundation's work in Sri Lanka funds educational scholarships for children who lost breadwinning parents in the Easter bombings, trauma counselling, and vocational training for affected families.

In the aftermath of April 2019, Matthew Linsey recalled how ordinary Sri Lankans rushed to help him carry his son down hotel stairwells and stood beside him in hospital corridors despite the terror unfolding around them. Seven years on, while Sri Lankan institutions still debate accountability in appellate chambers, the Linsey family's response offers a quiet measure of what genuine solidarity looks like in practice.

COULD FREE SMART METERS FIX SRI LANKA'S OUTAGE AND ROOFTOP SOLAR GRID HEADACHES?

Sri Lanka's Ministry of Energy has announced plans to provide free smart meters to 300,000 electricity consumers using more than 180 units per month in 2027, backed by a 12 million US dollar grant from the Asian Development Bank.

Alongside the Ceylon Electricity Board rollout, all customers serviced by the Lanka Electricity Company who consume over 120 units monthly will also receive smart meters. Simultaneously, authorities intend to construct four regional electricity distribution control centres in Kuliyapitiya, Peradeniya, Battaramulla, and Dehiwala to manage outages, balance demand, and integrate rooftop solar power into the national grid.

The initiative is meant to target Sri Lanka's long-standing grid vulnerabilities. Following nationwide blackouts and recurring voltage instability caused by surging rooftop solar generation, real-time monitoring has shifted from a luxury to an operational necessity. Conventional electromechanical meters only record cumulative consumption once a month when a human meter reader visits a property. Smart meters, by contrast, transmit two-way consumption data at short intervals, detect localized power failures automatically, and enable Time-of-Use tariffs that encourage households to shift heavy appliance usage away from peak evening hours.

In practical terms, however, hardware installation is only half the equation. While LECO has already deployed smart metering infrastructure across large parts of its coastal network, scaling 300,000 units across CEB service areas within a single calendar year requires tight procurement timelines, reliable cellular or radio-frequency communication networks, and seamless backend billing integration. At roughly 40 US dollars per meter under a 12 million US dollar grant, the budget leaves thin margins for backend software upgrades, field installation logistics, and consumer mobile applications.



Even more critical is how the four new distribution control centres in Kuliyapitiya, Peradeniya, Battaramulla, and Dehiwala will function alongside existing load dispatch systems. Automated grid control only prevents blackouts if distribution transformers, feeder lines, and rooftop solar inverters can communicate in real time.

Before the first meter is bolted to a household wall in 2027, energy officials owe the public clear answers. Will these smart meters come paired with mandatory Time-of-Use pricing that penalizes evening electricity consumption, or will domestic tariff structures remain unchanged? What happens to the thousands of field meter readers once automated readings replace manual visits?
How will consumer usage data be protected against unauthorized access or billing glitches? Most importantly, after years of stalled grid digitization pledges, does the Ministry have a binding quarterly rollout schedule to ensure the 12 million US dollar grant delivers measurable reliability rather than another half-finished pilot project?

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SECRET UK DEAL TO RESETTLE SRI LANKAN CONVICTED SEX OFFENDER IN ESWATINI ENDS IN SUICIDE

A covert arrangement between the United Kingdom and the southern African kingdom of Eswatini to permanently relocate a 35-year-old Sri Lankan refugee with sexual assault convictions has been exposed following his suicide just months after his arrival. Kishanth Peramalya, a Tamil refugee who had been detained on the British Indian Ocean Territory island of Diego Garcia, was transferred to Eswatini under a draft three-year financial pact that British ministers never disclosed to the UK Parliament or the local Swazi public.

Peramalya had arrived on Diego Garcia in 2021 among a group of Tamil asylum seekers and was granted refugee status after fleeing Sri Lanka, yet British authorities refused to resettle him in the UK alongside his relatives because of his criminal record. Unable to return him to Sri Lanka due to international non-refoulement protections, London negotiated an undisclosed agreement with Eswatini to host him permanently while Britain covered his living costs for up to 3 years.



According to relatives, Peramalya had zero personal or linguistic ties to Eswatini and deteriorated rapidly in isolation after being relocated there. His sister said he telephoned her 4 times a day, describing severe loneliness and an inability to cope in an unfamiliar country. Despite weekly and later daily psychiatric consultations, alongside an attendant hired to prepare his meals, Peramalya took his own life on September 13, 2026.

The revelation has triggered sharp criticism across southern Africa, where Eswatini had already entered a separate 2025 arrangement with President Donald Trump's administration to accept up to 160 US deportees in exchange for 5.1 million US dollars. Melusi Simelane of the Southern African Litigation Centre, which is challenging the American transfer agreement in court, warned that wealthy Western governments are offloading complex human rights and mental health burdens onto fragile public infrastructure. "Our healthcare system is crumbling, not to mention our mental healthcare, so it is a big ask to bring people into our society who need a lot of support," Simelane said, adding that Africa is becoming a dumping ground for the world's unresolved problems.

Women's rights advocates in Eswatini also condemned the secrecy surrounding the transfer of a convicted sex offender into their communities without public warning. Zakithi Sibandze of the Eswatini Rural Women's Assembly questioned why British officials deemed it acceptable to place a high-risk offender in a developing African nation while excluding him from British soil. Earlier this year, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants Gehad Madi urged governments to publish all third-country migration pacts and subject them to parliamentary scrutiny to uphold the rule of law.

Neither London nor Mbabane answered detailed questions regarding the terms of Peramalya's transfer. A British government spokesperson stated only that protecting the UK public remains the administration's first priority, including ensuring high-harm foreign criminals cannot enter Britain.

Yet the death of a Sri Lankan national in an undisclosed southern African outpost leavespressing questions unanswered. On what legal basis did British ministers commit public funds to a bilateral resettlement deal withheld from parliamentary oversight? What safeguarding checks were carried out before placing a vulnerable, mentally ill detainee in complete social isolation? Above all, how many more third-country relocation arrangements are operating behind closed doors without accountability to either host communities or legislatures?

The case exposes an acute moral deadlock that modern asylum systems struggle to resolve. Britain had a legitimate duty to protect its own citizens from an individual convicted of 4 counts of sexual assault, while remaining bound by international law against returning a recognized torture survivor to Sri Lanka. Yet solving that dilemma by quietly paying a resource-strapped foreign nation to absorb the risk, without informing its citizens or safeguarding a severely mentally ill detainee, merely exported both the danger and the human cost onto communities with far fewer protections.

NEW YORK JURY CONVICTS HUAWEI ON TEN CRIMINAL COUNTS AS BEIJING CONDEMNS US SUPPRESSION

Eight years after federal prosecutors first unsealed charges against China's largest telecommunications equipment maker, a federal jury in Brooklyn has found Huawei Technologies and three of its subsidiaries guilty on 10 criminal counts, including bank fraud, wire fraud, conspiracy to steal trade secrets, money laundering, and violating US sanctions on Iran. Delivered on Tuesday, November 24, following an 11-week trial before US District Judge Ann M. Donnelly, the verdict stops short of finding Huawei guilty of operating as a criminal enterprise under federal racketeering laws, yet exposes the Shenzhen-based giant to billions of dollars in criminal fines, asset forfeiture, and restitution when sentencing takes place on September 14, 2027.

The prosecution, originating in 2018 alongside the Canadian detention of Huawei Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou, centred on two tracks. First, prosecutors proved that Huawei misled global financial institutions, including HSBC, into believing it had severed ties with its Iranian affiliate Skycom in 2011, allowing the company to move money and access US dollar clearing services despite American sanctions. Second, jurors accepted evidence that Huawei systematically targeted American competitors over two decades. Trial evidence ranged from engineers lifting proprietary source code from Cisco routers to an employee removing a component of T-Mobile's touchscreen-testing robot, known as "Tappy," inside a backpack after signing a non-disclosure agreement.



US Attorney General Todd Blanche declared that "no person or company is above the law," arguing that Huawei built its American operations through dishonesty and intellectual property theft. Huawei's defence team, led by attorney Brian Heberlig, countered that prosecutors stitched together isolated commercial disputes into an overarching conspiracy and insisted global banks were fully aware of the firm's Iranian business.

While welcoming its acquittal on the racketeering charge, Huawei dismissed the remaining convictions as "without legal or factual merit" and confirmed it will appeal.

In Beijing, the official reaction was swift and uncompromising. China's Foreign Ministry accused Washington of abusing its judicial system and national security apparatus to suppress legitimate Chinese high-tech enterprises, echoing its broader condemnation of sweeping US semiconductor export controls introduced earlier this month against third-country data centres.

Foreign Ministry officials maintained that Washington is practising economic coercion and long-arm jurisdiction designed to cripple China's technological rise, vowing that Beijing will take "necessary measures" to safeguard the rights and interests of its companies.

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Yet the Brooklyn verdict settles only one chapter of a much wider industrial contest. Despite years of indictments, chip embargoes, and diplomatic pressure from Washington, Huawei has rebuilt its domestic supply chain and returned to profitability across Asian, Middle Eastern, and African telecommunications networks. With sentencing delayed until September 2027 and appeals certain to follow, the real question is whether American courtroom penalties can meaningfully slow China's technological expansion, or whether they simply accelerate the division of the global digital economy into two competing spheres.

EU TEXTILE STRATEGY TARGETS FIVE MILLION TONNES OF DISCARDED CLOTHING BY 2030

Days after the United Nations COP31 climate summit in Antalya collapsed without a global agreement, marking the worst diplomatic breakdown in international climate talks since Copenhagen in 2009, the European Commission has signalled that Brussels intends to keep pushing its own industrial green rules regardless of multilateral paralysis. Reaffirming its 2030 vision for the fashion and textile sector, the Commission revealed that European Union citizens discard approximately 5 million tonnes of clothing every year, equivalent to roughly 12 kilograms per person, while less than 1 percent of garment material is recycled into new clothing.

The timing is pointed. Environmentalists and developing nations have spent the past week condemning wealthy economies over stalled climate ambition and inadequate adaptation finance at COP31, where fossil fuel interests blocked consensus and left European delegates facing sharp criticism over unmet funding pledges.

Against that backdrop of global climate backlash, Brussels is doubling down on domestic market regulation, where European consumption of textiles ranks as the fourth highest driver of environmental and climate damage after food, housing, and mobility.

Under its six core priorities for 2030, the Commission aims to enforce stricter durability and repairability standards, mandate transparent material disclosures through Digital Product Passports, expand second hand and recycling infrastructure, curb microplastic shedding from synthetic fibres, ban the destruction of unsold or returned stock, and halt the dumping of European textile waste onto developing countries.

While yesterday's statement sets out broad regulatory direction rather than immediate import bans, the binding legal architecture, anchored in the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation and Extended Producer Responsibility schemes, is already moving into force.

For Sri Lanka's apparel sector, which ships roughly 1.4 billion euros worth of garments annually to the European Union and is preparing to reapply for GSP+ tariff preferences ahead of the 2028 transition deadline, the message from Brussels carries direct commercial consequences.

Meeting European standards by 2030 will require Sri Lankan exporters to overhaul fabric sourcing, verify supply chain traceability down to raw yarn, integrate certified recycled fibres, and eliminate hazardous chemical treatments.

Yet across manufacturing hubs in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Vietnam, suppliers face an uncomfortable reality. Major Western fashion labels demand compliance with costly green audits, low carbon production, and traceable recycled inputs while continuing to squeeze unit prices and shorten order lead times. Without direct technical financing from European brands and buyers, smaller factories risk being priced out of Europe's green transition while multinational retailers claim the sustainability credit.



Sri Lanka has already begun developing a net zero roadmap for its textile and apparel industry with European Union support, positioning its ethical manufacturing reputation as a competitive edge. Still, as Brussels enforces circular fashion rules at home while global climate finance falters abroad, supplier nations are left asking a pointed question: will European consumers and fashion giants share the financial cost of cleaner production, or simply pass the compliance bill down the supply chain to Asian factory floors?

DECADES OF STRUGGLE YIELD A MERE 36% GARMENT WAGE HIKE IN BANGLADESH

Even as European regulators tighten sustainability rules on clothing imports, garment factories across South Asia are dealing with intense wage pressure and labour unrest on the shop floor. In Dhaka early on Wednesday, November 25, Bangladesh's government appointed wage board approved a 36% rise in the monthly minimum wage for entry level garment workers to 17,000 taka, or about US$139, following nearly 12 hours of talks and weeks of street protests.

For millions of workers who have spent decades campaigning for living pay in an industry that drives more than 80% of Bangladesh's export earnings, the outcome feels like a meagre return on years of sacrifice.

Minimum wages in the sector have moved slowly and unevenly across generations, rising from 627 taka in 1986 to 930 taka in 1994, 1,662.50 taka in 2006 after a 12 year gap, 3,000 taka in 2010, 5,300 taka in 2013, 8,000 taka in 2018, and 12,500 taka in 2023. Each revision arrived only after prolonged agitation, factory shutdowns, or industrial tragedies, while inflation steadily eroded purchasing power between reviews.

At 36%, this latest adjustment is the smallest percentage increase in more than a decade, falling well short of hikes of 56% in 2023, 51% in 2018, and 77% in 2013. The six memberwage board voted 4 to 2 around 2am on Wednesday to fix the entry level Grade 4 pay at 17,000 taka, with two members backing the workers' revised demand of 18,000 taka, according to workers' representative Babul Akhter. Under the four grade structure taking effect on December 1, monthly pay rises from 12,500 taka to 17,000 taka for Grade 4, 19,200 taka for Grade 3, 20,000 taka for Grade 2, and 21,500 taka for Grade 1, with revised pay packets starting in January.



Workers had opened negotiations seeking 32,000 taka before scaling back to 18,000 taka, while factory owners started at 15,000 taka before moving to 17,000 taka. In an industry employing more than 4 million people, mostly women, and supplying retailers such as H&M, Zara, Walmart, Target, and Gap, weeks of protests shut factories and blocked highways. The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association said 397 factories could not operate on Tuesday while another 84 stayed closed under no work, no pay rules, and estimated roughly US428 million in lost production across 18 days of disruption alongside about US254 million in orders shifted to rival countries.

Factory owners warn higher wages squeeze margins and hurt competitiveness, while unions say modest increments leave families struggling with food, rent, and transport costs. After decades of pushing, reaching US$139 a month shows how hard won and incremental progress remains on Bangladesh's garment assembly lines.

Across South Asia and wider Asia, the gap between statutory minimums and basic living costs tells a familiar story of compressed pay and intense production pressure.

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

DECADES OF STRUGGLE...

In Sri Lanka, where roughly 360,000 apparel workers power a vital export industry, a statutory minimum monthly wage of LKR 30,000 in 2026 still leaves many households stretching to cover food, rent, and transport after years of economic upheaval and inflation. Across India and Pakistan, fragmented wage floors and piece rate targets frequently force operators onto long overtime shifts just to close monthly deficits.

Farther east in Southeast Asia, wage floors often sit higher in nominal dollar terms, yet workers still face steep living costs and tight margins. Cambodia sets its 2026 garment and footwear minimum wage at US210 a month, rising to US212 from January 2027, while Vietnam's top regional minimum reaches VND 5.31 million a month in 2026, or roughly US$207, before moving to VND 5.7 million in January 2027. Even in those hubs, independent living wage estimates point to a wide shortfall between basic base pay and what a family needs to live without chronic debt or excessive overtime.

What links Dhaka, Colombo, Phnom Penh, and Ho Chi Minh City is the structure of global fast fashion itself. Buyers demand low unit prices, rapid turnarounds, and new sustainability compliance, leaving local manufacturers caught between rising domestic costs and fierce regional price competition. For millions of garment workers across Asia, every incremental pay rise arrives only after prolonged strain, while real living wages remain out of reach.

KERALA COURT FREES SRI LANKAN ACCUSED ON BAIL AFTER PARDON IN LTTE REVIVAL PROBE

On Tuesday, November 24, the Kerala High Court granted bail to Sri Lankan national Muhammed Asmin, an accused in a transnational case involving alleged efforts to fund and revive the banned Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

What makes the ruling notable is Asmin's shifting legal status inside the prosecution. A special National Investigation Agency court had already granted him a pardon to turn state approver and assist the case against other accused. A High Court bench of Justices Raja Vijayaraghavan V and K. V. Jayakumar ruled that keeping him behind bars could no longer be justified, citing the time he had already spent in custody, his pardon as an approver, bail granted to co-accused in connected cases, and a statutory distinction over pardon rules under Indian criminal procedure.

According to the NIA, the case grew out of an investigation into a cross-border syndicate linking networks across Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and India, uncovered after authorities intercepted consignments that included over 300 kilograms of heroin, AK 56 assault rifles, and 1,000 rounds of live ammunition. Investigators alleged that the plot sought to finance a revival of the LTTE, militarily defeated in Sri Lanka in 2009 and proscribed in both countries, through narcotics trafficking, arms procurement, hawala transfers, and converting illicit proceeds into cryptocurrency.

To protect the prosecution and prevent flight, the High Court attached strict conditions to Asmin's release. He must post a bond of INR 100,000 with two sureties of the same amount, surrender his passport, stay inside Ernakulam district unless permitted otherwise by the special court, report weekly to the NIA, and avoid contacting co-accused, intimidating witnesses, or speaking to the media. At the same time, the bench ordered Kerala's Home Department to place him under the state witness protection scheme, recognizing the danger faced by a turncoat witness testifying against organized syndicates.



Crucially, the court left his immigration status open. Judges stated that bail gives Asmin no right to remain in India and does not stop immigration authorities from taking action over his stay. For Sri Lankan and Indian security agencies alike, the order underscores a delicate trade off: trading custody of an accused trafficker and financier for testimony that could dismantle wider narcotics and militant funding chains across the Palk Strait.

TWO MEN CHARGED OVER BURGLARY AT PRINCE WILLIAM AND CATHERINE'S NORFOLK HOME

British police have named and charged two men over a suspected break-in at Anmer Hall, the country residence of the Prince and Princess of Wales on the royal Sandringham estate in Norfolk. Norfolk Constabulary confirmed on Wednesday, November 25, that Mirgen Doku, 34, of Courtfield Gardens in west London, and Arilen Ndoci, 32, of no fixed address, have each been charged with entering a dwelling with intent to steal and trespassing on a protected site.

Both suspects, identified in British media reports as Albanian nationals, were remanded in custody ahead of an appearance at Norwich Magistrates' Court. The charges stem from an incident shortly before 6pm GMT on Monday, November 23, when officers were alerted to suspicious activity at the secluded 10-bedroom Georgian mansion in eastern England.

Police mounted a major search operation across the private Sandringham estate before arresting the pair within the grounds. Specialist units, including police dogs, drones, and air support from the National Police Air Service, were deployed to sweep the surrounding area.

Flight-tracking records indicated that a police aircraft departed Nottingham East Midlands Airport at 6:25pm and circled the vicinity of Sandringham for nearly three hours as ground teams secured the perimeter.

Authorities confirmed that no members of the royal family were at Anmer Hall at the time of the intrusion. Prince William and Princess Catherine primarily reside on the Windsor estate west of London and use the Norfolk property during school holidays and short breaks.

Anmer Hall, which sits roughly two miles east of King Charles's private residence at Sandringham House, was gifted to the couple by the late Queen Elizabeth II following their wedding in 2011.



Kensington Palace declined to comment on the incident, maintaining its standard policy of not discussing security arrangements for senior royals.

A spokesperson for Prime Minister Andy Burnham, whom Prince William visited at 10 Downing Street on Tuesday as news of the arrests emerged, also referred inquiries to police and the prince's office.

The breach adds to renewed scrutiny over perimeter security across British royal estates, which combine vast rural acreage with designated protected-site status under UK counter-terrorism and serious crime legislation.

While swift detection prevented injury or confrontation, the deployment of air surveillance and specialist response units underscores how closely royal properties are monitored even when unoccupied.

Court proceedings in Norwich will now examine how the two suspects entered the protected grounds and what led to the Monday evening intrusion.

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HORMUZ | IRAN SAYS TWO TANKERS STRUCK MINES AS SHIPPING TALKS STALL

Iran's Revolutionary Guards Navy said two oil tankers struck mines and caught fire in the Strait of Hormuz on Wednesday, as Tehran warned commercial vessels against passing through the waterway without coordinating with Iranian forces. The Guards said the ships had taken a route Iran had not authorised. The account was carried by Iranian state media. The vessels' identities, the condition of their crews and the extent of the damage were not independently confirmed in the initial reporting.



The reported incidents came as Tehran continued to tie the restoration of normal shipping to a broader agreement with Washington. Iran has called for the lifting of the US naval blockade of Iranian ports and an end to the war on all fronts. According to Reuters, Tehran conveyed through Qatari mediators that it could reopen the strait within 48 hours if Washington met its conditions.

The offer leaves commercial operators waiting for both a political agreement and reliable guidance on when voyages can resume

For Sri Lanka, the immediate question is what the uncertainty does to the cost and timing of fuel purchases. An international benchmark captures only part of the bill. Freight, insurance and the availability of ships can all affect the delivered price. A supplier's quotation is therefore only as useful as the delivery window and shipping terms attached to it.

The Ceylon Petroleum Corporation and the Energy Ministry could publish a short weekly update giving aggregate fuel stocks in days of consumption, the status of scheduled deliveries and any material change in landed costs.

That would let businesses plan against actual supply conditions. It would also give the public a way to judge whether any price adjustment reflects changes in the cost of bringing fuel to Sri Lanka.

SAUDI ARABIA | RIYADH IDENTIFIES US$1 TRILLION IN INFRASTRUCTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Saudi Arabia has identified roughly US$1 trillion in potential infrastructure investment over the next eight to ten years, Economy and Planning Minister Faisal Alibrahim told the kingdom's Budget 2027 Forum in Riyadh on Wednesday. He said the figure came from a two-year study and that discussions with interested investors were under way. The estimate describes the scale of the opportunities Saudi Arabia has identified. Financing and approvals will determine which projects proceed.

Alibrahim pointed to the National Infrastructure Fund as one way to attract private capital. He said the fund had committed 10.5 billion Saudi riyals to projects valued at 60 billion riyals. The finance ministry used the forum to discuss the kingdom's fiscal plans, logistics capacity and investment priorities under Vision 2030.

For Sri Lankan firms, the practical question is where they can compete. Engineering consultancies, construction specialists, logistics companies and technical training providers need to know which projects are entering procurement, which require a Saudi partner and what qualifications are expected. Smaller businesses may find a route into a project through subcontracting or specialist services once a main contractor has been appointed.

Sri Lanka's commercial representatives in Riyadh could turn the announcement into a quarterly tender brief. Each entry could identify the project owner, procurement stage, contractor registration requirements and deadlines. That would give firms a way to assess opportunities before they spend money on travel or representation. It would also help training providers see which technical skills are likely to be in demand.

OMAN | MUTTRAH CABLE CAR OPENS OVER MUSCAT'S HISTORIC WATERFRONT

Oman has formally opened the Muttrah Teleferik cable car, bringing the Muscat tourism project into full operation after a soft opening earlier this month. Developed by Sabeen Investment in cooperation with Muscat Municipality, the route links the waterfront area with a summit station and continues to Hay Al Ward Station within Al Riyam Park, near Muscat Gate. The roughly three-kilometre journey gives visitors a view of the harbour and hills around one of the capital's oldest districts.

The project gives visitors another way to explore a part of Muscat where the Corniche, the souq and Muttrah Fort can already fill an afternoon. How the stations connect to those places will shape the economic benefit. A visitor who can easily walk from a station to the souq is more likely to stop at a shop or café. A visitor who arrives by coach, rides the cable car and leaves from the same forecourt may spend little in the surrounding district.

Muscat Municipality could publish a simple visitor map linking the stations to walking routes, taxi and bus points, and the main heritage sites. The operator could supplement it with clear information on step-free access, peak waiting times and what passengers should do if weather interrupts the service.

A useful measure after the first season would be how many passengers also visit other parts of Muttrah. A short visitor survey and feedback from nearby traders could show where the additional footfall goes. That would help the municipality decide where to improve crossings, signage and pedestrian access.

TAMIL NADU | ₹58,214 CRORE IN NEW DEALS PUTS THE FOCUS ON FACTORY OPENINGS

Tamil Nadu signed 78 investment agreements covering proposed projects worth ₹58,214 crore at the second VETTRI Investment and Conversion Conclave on Wednesday. The state government estimates the proposals could support 65,786 jobs. Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay also laid foundation stones for 15 projects worth ₹7,925 crore and inaugurated six completed projects valued at ₹1,430 crore.

The three groups give a clearer picture of what happened at the conclave. The new agreements record investment intentions. The foundation stones mark an intermediate stage, where land, utilities and construction schedules become decisive. The six completed projects give the government something it can check now, including whether operations are starting and whether recruitment matches expectations.

Among the new proposals is a ₹1,000 crore investment by Royal Enfield in its first electric motorcycle manufacturing facility. A project of that kind matters beyond the factory gate. If it proceeds, its purchasing decisions will help determine which component makers and service businesses benefit. For workers, the useful information will be where recruitment happens, what qualifications are required and when hiring begins.

Tamil Nadu could make its investment record easier to assess by publishing a quarterly register showing the district, approvals, capital spent, start of production and actual hiring for each major project. Sri Lanka could apply the same standard to its own investment announcements. Investors and communities would then have a way to compare commitments with factories, exports and jobs.

