

# CLAWS Newsletter



The Perimeter Watch: Sri Lanka & Maldives | Volume 1 | No 4

by Diksha Jain

## **WEATHER WARNINGS**

### **Sri Lanka**

#### **Lightning advisory: Red alert issued to 14 districts**

*(News Wire, March 27, 2025)*

On March 27, 2025, the Meteorology Department issued a Red Alert for severe lightning along with thunderstorms for the following regions:

- Sabaragamuwa Province
- Uva Province
- Western Province
- Southern Province
- Kurunegala District
- Kandy District
- Nuwara-Eliya District
- Ampara District

The advisory was issued from 1:30 pm (local time) to 11 pm (local time).

### **Maldives**

#### **Heat Alert issued by the MET**

*(Maldives Meteorology, March 16, 2025)*

On March 16, 2025, the Maldives Meteorological Service (MET) issued a heat alert due to rising temperatures, high humidity, weaker winds, and strong solar radiation, particularly from mid-March through April, with peak temperatures occurring between 1 pm and 2 pm (local time). As April is the warmest month in the Maldives, stagnant, moist air and clear skies are further intensifying heat conditions, increasing the risk of dehydration and heat-related illnesses.

## **EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**

### **Sri Lanka**

#### **Sri Lankans Rescued from Myanmar Cybercrime Centers To Return Home**

*(News First, March 18, 2025)*

On March 18, 2025, 14 Sri Lankans who had been trafficked and forcibly employed in cybercrime centers in Myawaddy, Myanmar, were repatriated to Sri Lanka. This rescue was

successfully facilitated through a coordinated effort by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment, and Tourism, along with Sri Lankan Embassies in Myanmar and Thailand, and with the support of the Governments of Myanmar and Thailand.

The operation followed sustained diplomatic efforts, including telephone conversations between Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment, and Tourism Minister Vijitha Herath and Myanmar's Deputy Prime Minister and Union Minister of Foreign Affairs, U Than Swe, on February 3, 2024, and Thailand's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Maris Sangiampongsa, on February 13, 2025. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) provided international air passage and internal transportation, while other non-governmental organisations in Myanmar assisted with welfare support.

### **‘Where were they during LTTE terror?’: Ex-Navy Chief slams UK sanctions**

*([Adaderana](#), March 28, 2025)*

Admiral of the Fleet Wasantha Karannagoda, former Sri Lankan Navy Commander, has responded to the UK government's sanctions against him and several others, dismissing the allegations of widespread human rights violations during Sri Lanka's military operations against the LTTE.

Karannagoda stated that the sanctions lack transparency as they are not based on any formal investigation or legal proceedings. He accused foreign entities of applying selective international pressure, targeting key figures in Sri Lanka's military victory while ignoring atrocities committed by the LTTE.

### **20 Lankan prisoners repatriated from Kuwait Central Jail**

*([The Island Online](#), March 27, 2025)*

On March 26, 2025, 20 Sri Lankan prisoners held in Kuwait's Central Jail were repatriated to Colombo under the Kuwait-Sri Lanka Prisoner Exchange Agreement. The inmates arrived at Bandaranaike International Airport on a special Kuwaiti Air Force flight. The agreement, signed in 2007, has facilitated the return of 52 Sri Lankan prisoners, with 32 inmates repatriated earlier in 2024. This latest transfer marks another milestone in the ongoing exchange program between the two nations.

Reports indicate that no Kuwaiti prisoners are currently in Sri Lanka for exchange under the agreement. The returnees had been convicted of drug use, trafficking, and smuggling in Kuwait, where they were prosecuted and sentenced. Upon arrival, Sri Lanka's Prison Department took custody of the prisoners, who were then transferred to Welikada Magazine Prison in Colombo for further legal proceedings.

### **97 Indian fishermen currently in custody of Sri Lanka: Jaishankar**

*([Adaderana](#), March 27, 2025)*

Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar informed the Rajya Sabha that 97 Indian fishermen are currently in Sri Lankan custody, with 83 serving sentences, three awaiting trial, and 11 apprehended on Thursday. During the question hour, Jaishankar stated that India is engaging with Sri Lanka to adopt a humanitarian approach while exploring long-term solutions, such as installing transponders on fishing boats, to prevent further incidents.

He attributed the root of the issue to decisions made in 1974 and 1976, which continue to impact India-Sri Lanka maritime relations. He further noted that many of those serving sentences are repeat offenders or boat owners, complicating the resolution process. Jaishankar emphasised that the current administration has inherited this challenge and remains committed to addressing it through diplomatic dialogue and practical measures.

### **Sri Lanka and Thailand Deepen Bilateral Ties at the 6th Round of Political Consultations in Bangkok**

*([Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment and Tourism](#), March 27, 2025)*

On March 25, 2025, Sri Lanka and Thailand successfully concluded the 6th Round of Bilateral Political Consultations in Bangkok, co-chaired by Ms. Aruni Ranaraja, Sri Lanka's Foreign Secretary, and Ms. Eksiri Pintaruchi, Thailand's Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs. The discussions covered political, economic, defence, cultural, and tourism cooperation, with both sides reviewing recent national developments. Sri Lanka highlighted key initiatives, including the "Clean Sri Lanka" program, digital infrastructure advancements, and economic reforms.

Economic discussions focused on investment opportunities, trade expansion, and the progress of the Sri Lanka- Thailand Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Key sectors for cooperation include infrastructure, agro-industry, fisheries, tourism, ICT, and financial services. Regional and global collaboration was another focal point, with both nations reaffirming commitments to

IORA, BIMSTEC, ASEAN, RCEP, and ACD. Sri Lanka commended Thailand's leadership in hosting the upcoming BIMSTEC Summit and Young GEN Forum in April 2025.

### **Sri Lanka seeks ASEAN's Sectoral Dialogue Partnership as an external party**

*(News Wire, March 26, 2025)*

The Sri Lankan Cabinet has approved a proposal to submit a new work plan with a clear timeline to secure the status of Sectoral Dialogue Partner (SDP) with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). While Sri Lanka maintains diplomatic relations with all ASEAN member states, the government recognises the strategic importance of deepening ties with the bloc to enhance economic and diplomatic cooperation.

ASEAN, which primarily consists of Southeast Asian nations, does not permit non-regional countries to become full members. However, it grants external nations a Sectoral Dialogue Partnership based on their ability to contribute to ASEAN's objectives. Sri Lanka initially submitted a Letter of Intent and a proposal to the ASEAN Secretariat in 2019, but no further progress was made. The Cabinet's decision to reinstate this process underscores Sri Lanka's renewed focus on engaging with ASEAN as a key economic and strategic partner. The government aims to align with ASEAN's framework and enhance trade, investment, and regional security collaboration.

### **High Commission of Sri Lanka and Colombo Port City host investment promotion activities in Malaysia**

*(Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment and Tourism, March 24, 2025)*

In partnership with Colombo Port City, the Sri Lankan High Commission in Kuala Lumpur conducted investment promotion activities in February and March 2025 to attract Malaysian investors and strengthen economic ties. Acting High Commissioner M.I. Mohamed Rizvi introduced Colombo Port City to Malaysia's Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry (MITI) and met with Deputy Minister Chin Tong Liew to discuss investment opportunities and address Sri Lanka's trade imbalance with Malaysia.

The High Commission also hosted Business-to-Business (B2B) sessions with the Malaysia-Sri Lanka Business Council (MSLBC) and engaged the Malaysian-Ceylonese business community. Additionally, discussions with the Kuala Lumpur & Selangor Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KLSICCI) focused on boosting investor confidence and



strengthening trade partnerships. These efforts reinforce Sri Lanka's commitment to expanding economic collaboration and positioning Colombo Port City as a key investment hub.

### **Sri Lanka and Australia to hold 05th Round of Senior Officials Talks and 03rd Strategic Maritime Dialogue in Canberra**

*(Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment and Tourism, March 24, 2025)*

On March 25-26, 2025, Sri Lanka and Australia convened the 5th Round of Senior Officials Talks and 3rd Strategic Maritime Dialogue at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in Canberra. The discussions reviewed bilateral, regional, and multilateral ties, focusing on political engagement, economic cooperation, maritime security, defence, education, tourism, and people-to-people exchanges. Both sides also exchanged views on key regional and global developments of mutual interest.

### **Ambassador of the Czech Republic meets Sri Lankan PM to strengthen bilateral relations**

*(The Island Online, March 28, 2025)*

On March 25, the Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Sri Lanka, Ms. Dr. Eliska Zigova, met with Sri Lankan Prime Minister Dr. Harini Amarasuriya at Temple Trees to strengthen bilateral ties. They discussed enhancing diplomatic and economic cooperation, including a potential Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on science and education to foster academic partnerships and research collaboration.

Ambassador Zigova praised Sri Lanka's commitment to democratic governance, while Prime Minister Amarasuriya highlighted the "Clean Sri Lanka Programme" and encouraged Czech tourism to the country. The meeting was attended by senior officials from both sides, including Pradeep Saputhanthri, Secretary to the Prime Minister, and P.R.S.S. Gunaratna, Director General of the Europe & North America Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## **Maldives**

### **India, Maldives Agree to Conduct Bilateral Trade in Local Currencies**

*(The Impressive Ties, March 19, 2025)*

India and the Maldives have agreed to settle bilateral trade transactions in Indian Rupees (INR) and Maldivian Rufiyaa (MVR), supplementing the existing Asian Clearing Union (ACU) mechanism to ease trade settlements and reduce reliance on third-party currencies like the US Dollar. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) issued a circular confirming the initiative, following

a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with the Maldives Monetary Authority (MMA) in November last year. With India being the Maldives' largest trade partner and bilateral trade exceeding USD 548 million, this move is expected to benefit the Maldivian economy by reducing exchange rate fluctuations, lowering transaction costs, and enhancing liquidity for businesses engaged in trade with India.

### **Shujaaiyah Hospital in Gaza restored with Maldivians and HDC support**

*([Maldives Voice](#), March 23, 2025)*

The Shujaaiyah Hospital in northern Gaza has been renovated and reopened through the collaborative efforts of Maldivians and employees of the Housing Development Corporation (HDC). Severely damaged during the ongoing Israeli genocide on Gaza since October 7, the hospital was among several healthcare facilities left inoperable, crippling the region's healthcare system. Its restoration, supported by HDC, the International Aid Campaign (IAC), and Maldivian contributions, marks a crucial step in reinstating medical services for the local population.

### **Maldives Grants China Permission to Install “Devices” in Indian Ocean**

*([Resonant News](#), March 23, 2025)*

The Maldivian government, under President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu, is negotiating with China to deploy Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) in the Indian Ocean, a move that has sparked strategic concerns. These devices, designed to monitor fish movements and collect oceanographic data, could have broader implications for regional security and resource management.

The discussions come at a time when the Maldivian fishing sector is struggling. Yet, the Ministry of Fisheries and Ocean Resources has provided minimal details, stating that the negotiations aim to enhance cooperation with China. Reports suggest that Chinese officials have engaged with the Ministry of Tourism and Environment and the meteorological agency to gain approval through the Meteorology Department. Despite growing speculation, the Maldivian government has not disclosed the full scope or objectives of the project, leaving key questions about its long-term impact unanswered.

## **ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

### **Sri Lanka**

#### **Sri Lanka's Export Performance grows in February 2025**

*(News Wire, March 26, 2025)*

Sri Lanka's total exports, including merchandise and services, reached USD 1,382.53 million in February 2025. This represents a notable 4.62% growth year-on-year compared to February 2024. According to the Export Development Board (EDB), exports also recorded a month-on-month increase of 2.58% when compared to January 2025.

Based on provisional data from Sri Lanka Customs and estimated figures for gems and jewellery, as well as petroleum products, the value of merchandise exports for February 2025 was USD 1,056.39 million. In contrast, services exports for February 2025 were estimated at USD 326.14 million, reflecting a significant increase of 24.37% over the same period in 2024. Moreover, the cumulative total exports, including both merchandise and services, were estimated at USD 2,730.33 million for the period from January to February 2025. This marks a commendable growth of 6.65% compared to the same period in 2024.

### **Maldives**

#### **Maldives Records MVR 1.3 Billion Fiscal Surplus as Government Strengthens Financial Management**

*(Maaldif, March 27, 2025)*

According to data from the Ministry of Finance and Planning, the Government of the Maldives recorded a fiscal surplus of MVR 1.3 billion from January 1 to March 13, 2025. During this period, government revenue totalled MVR 7.8 billion, a 5.4% increase from the MVR 7.4 billion collected in the same period last year. Tax revenues accounted for MVR 6.3 billion, with Goods and Services Tax (GST) contributing MVR 3.44 billion. Tourism GST alone generated MVR 2.43 billion, highlighting the sector's resilience. Non-tax revenues stood at MVR 1.5 billion, with grants adding MVR 43.9 million.

Meanwhile, expenditures decreased by 16% compared to last year, totalling MVR 6.5 billion—down from MVR 7.8 billion in 2024. Recurrent expenses accounted for MVR 6.1 billion, while capital expenditure dropped sharply to MVR 428.8 million from MVR 1.6 billion last year, reflecting strong fiscal control.



## About the Author

Diksha Jain is a dedicated scholar in Defence and Strategic Studies, with a strong academic foundation in International Relations. She completed her master's degree in Defence and Strategic Studies, focusing on areas such as maritime security and the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean Region. Prior to this, she earned her bachelor's degree in International Relations, where she developed a comprehensive understanding of global politics and regional dynamics.

As a Research Assistant at the Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), Diksha explores critical issues related to defence strategy and maritime security. Her work focuses on the Indian Ocean Region, examining its geopolitical challenges and their implications for regional stability.



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