

## Defence industrial zone makes sense now

The decision to establish a Defence Industrial Zone on 850 acres in Mirsarai is a welcome and sensible step, and one that reflects a growing maturity in the country's industrial thinking. By reallocating land that had lain unused since the shelving of the Indian Economic Zone, the government has turned a stalled chapter into an opportunity with long-term national value. More than a symbolic gesture, the move acknowledges that defence manufacturing can no longer remain at the margins of Bangladesh's development agenda.

For too long, the country has relied almost entirely on overseas suppliers for everything from uniforms and ammunition to more sophisticated equipment, often facing delays and uncertainty in the process. A dedicated zone, built around partnerships, technology transfer and phased private investment, offers a practical route towards reducing that dependence.

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The stated intention not to replicate the old, closed model of state-run factories is encouraging. Instead, an ecosystem approach – linking foreign expertise, local firms and skilled labour – has the potential to strengthen supply security while building technical capacity that can spill over into the wider economy.

The global context also matters. Defence manufacturing is no longer the exclusive preserve of a handful of advanced economies. Demand is expanding across regions, particularly for drones, electronics, maintenance services and other specialised products that do not require massive platforms or prohibitive capital outlays. Bangladesh's own domestic demand can provide a stable starting base, but the real prize lies in exports. With competitive labour costs, a track record in complex manufacturing and growing investor interest, the country has a genuine chance to carve out space in selected segments of the international market – if policies remain consistent and investor confidence is protected.

This initiative should also prompt a broader conversation about industrial zoning beyond traditional sectors. Alongside defence, Bangladesh would do well to plan designated zones for areas such as medical devices, renewable energy equipment, aerospace components, ship repair, advanced agro-processing and digital hardware assembly. Repurposing idle state factories, easing restrictions on urban economic zones and aligning incentives with skills development could unlock growth without further straining scarce land resources. If handled with care and foresight, the Mirsarai defence zone may come to be seen as a turning point – one that signalled Bangladesh's readiness to think strategically about its industrial future.

## Self-killing setting off alarms for society

News of suicides emerging every day from different parts of the country, including the capital, is ringing alarm bell for our society as it, according to statistics from police reports and research organisation, has taken a form of silent epidemic. The statement is not an exaggeration at all, given that on average, more than 40 people commit suicide a day. Indeed, the statistics is a stark reflection of the collective failure of society and the state.

Media reports reveal that self-killing is rarely the result of a single cause. Family strife, marital crisis, financial uncertainty, social pressure, mental complications and depression often combine to make individuals feel isolated, helpless and lost, resulting in intense psychological suffering and thus leading to such irreversible choices. And here indeed lies the responsibility of society and state.

The sad part is that most of these individuals did not seek mental health support in time, because stress and depression are

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still widely viewed as signs of weakness in our society, which limits many people from sharing their pain even with close family members, let alone seeking professional help. However, there is no denying that that a significant number of suicides could have been prevented through timely, evidence-based treatment and counseling. And the problem is deeply intertwined with the state structure and social reality, with economic insecurity, employment pressure, fragile relationships and a lack of social empathy steadily eroding people's mental resilience. When individuals do not receive adequate support from society or the state during times of crisis, many begin to see death as their only escape.

Suicide prevention, therefore, requires integrated and humane measures such as nurturing a culture of tolerance and open discussion within families as well as strengthening mental health awareness in educational institutions and workplaces. At the same time, easily accessible counselling services, community-level support centres and rapid intervention systems in times of emergency must be established. Most of all, it is important to create a mindset that views suicide not as a crime or a matter of shame, but as a public health problem.

We must remember that suicide is neither a solution nor just the end of an individual's life. It is the end of countless possibilities. So, keeping a person alive means saving not just a life, but a family, a future. If the state, society and each of us were a little more compassionate, listened a little more and stood by a little more, perhaps it would be possible to stop this silent death march.

## Namal Rajapaksa in Odisha: Optics, Signals and the Politics of Rehabilitation



Sulochana  
Ramiah Mohan

**N**amal Rajapaksa is currently in Odisha, India. He is the son of former Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa, a leader who ruled the island nation with a strong grip on power for nearly a decade and whose legacy continues to shape, and haunt, Sri Lankan politics. Namal Rajapaksa is not the Leader of the Opposition as it was said at the remarks in Odisha.

Mahinda Rajapaksa served as president from 2005 to 2015 and remains one of the most polarising figures in Sri Lanka's modern history. His tenure is inseparable from the military defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009, which ended nearly three decades of civil war. That victory earned him reverence among sections of the Sinhala majority while simultaneously attracting sustained international criticism over alleged human rights violations and the shrinking of democratic space.

Power during the Rajapaksa era was heavily centralised, with family members occupying key positions across government and security institutions. Political loyalty was rewarded; dissent was marginalised. This order fractured dramatically in 2015 when Mahinda Rajapaksa's own cabinet minister, Maithripala Sirisena, defected and contested the presidency with backing from the opposition led by Ranil Wickremesinghe. Sirisena's victory ended Mahinda Rajapaksa's decade-long rule and opened a prolonged period of instability.

That instability reached its peak in 2018 during the constitutional crisis, when President Sirisena abruptly dismissed Wickremesinghe and appointed Mahinda Rajapaksa as Prime Minister. The move was challenged in court, and the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional, forcing Mahinda Rajapaksa to step down after 51 days. What followed was political theatre: shifting alliances, bitter recriminations and an erosion of public trust in all major actors.

In subsequent years, Mahinda Rajapaksa repeatedly alleged foreign interference, particularly by Indian intelligence agencies, in his 2015 electoral defeat. While he maintained cordiality towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he accused



Indian "bureaucrats" of manipulating Sri Lankan politics. These claims were widely reported despite not being substantiated. New Delhi consistently denied any such role, even as regional analysts debated India's strategic anxieties regarding China's expanding footprint in Sri Lanka.

Fast forward to the present. Against this backdrop of decline, disgrace and diminishing legitimacy, Namal Rajapaksa has emerged as the principal political inheritor of the family brand. Despite facing multiple legal cases relating to corruption and alleged money laundering, he has remained politically visible, projecting resilience and confidence. He retains a loyal support base, a well-organised social media machinery, and a network of overseas backers who continue to mobilise narratives favourable to the Rajapaksa family.

The Rajapaksa project today appears less about immediate electoral power and more about long-term political rehabilitation. Families that have been decisively rejected by the public often re-enter relevance through strategic repositioning, memory management and international validation. South Asia offers precedents, from dynastic revivals in India and Bangladesh to political comebacks in the Philippines. The Rajapaksa family are no strangers to this playbook.

It is within this context that Namal Rajapaksa's visit to India, particularly to Odisha, demands closer scrutiny. He was accorded a warm reception and invited to address India's 77th Republic Day celebrations at the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) in Bhubaneswar. Speaking as the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) National Organiser and a Member of Parliament, Namal emphasised responsible leadership, regional solidarity and youth-driven change.

"Leadership is not a position; it is a responsibility," he told students and academics, framing leadership as a process of influencing others to achieve shared goals. He thanked India for its assistance during Sri Lanka's 2022 economic crisis and support following Cyclone Sitang, expressing gratitude to Prime Minister Modi and the Indian people. He also mirrored the necessity of regional cooperation, arguing that South Asian solidarity is not rhetorical but essential to rebuilding resilient societies. He invoked shared history and culture, ranging from the Ram-Ravana narrative to cricket, as enduring bonds between the two nations.

The question many Sri Lankans are asking is not what Namal Rajapaksa said, but why he was chosen, of all people, for this platform. In Sri Lanka, the news of his "royal welcome" has travelled fast. Social media is rife with memes and sarcasm, but beneath the humour lies discomfort. Is this a private visit, as some suggest, or does it signal something more? India's approach to its neighbours has often been described as layered and ambiguous: official policy on the one hand and informal engagements on the other. Mixed signals are not new, but they become troubling when they appear to legitimise actors rejected by popular movements.

Sri Lanka's 2022 uprising was not merely about economic collapse; it was a moral rejection of dynastic rule, impunity and elite entitlement. The Rajapaksa family were not eased out but were driven out. Any external gesture that appears to rehabilitate that brand risks misreading the depth of public anger that still simmers beneath the surface. India, more than most, understands the volatility of Sri Lankan politics and the costs of backing the wrong horse. If there is indeed a belief in some

quarters that "Rajapaksa 2.0" offers stability or strategic convenience, it is a dangerous miscalculation. A Sri Lanka that relapses into family-centric politics will not be stable; it will be brittle, resentful and unpredictable.

For now, the game continues. Old rivals stand together when expedient, former enemies exchange roles, and political U-turns have become routine. Namal Rajapaksa's visit to Odisha fits neatly into this circular theatre of power. Whether it proves to be a mere footnote or a deliberate turning point will depend not on foreign receptions or ceremonial platforms, but on whether Sri Lanka's electorate allows its recent history to be repackaged and sold back to them.

Sri Lankans have already demonstrated the power of mass political awakening, igniting an uprising that reverberated across South Asia. Comparable upheavals followed in the region, most notably in Nepal and Bangladesh, each driven by public fury against entrenched elites and systemic failure. These movements underscored a shared regional reality: legitimacy, once lost, is difficult to restore.

Another cycle of such unrest is something the Sri Lankan state, economically weakened and institutionally fragile, may not be able to withstand. The public, however, has shown that it can. And that, more than any Republic Day speech, remains the real test. For Namal Rajapaksa, genuine acceptance by the people is essential; nothing will matter more to the nation than the will of its citizens, far outweighing any external interference or foreign endorsements.

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## Teacher Harassment: A Civilisation in Crisis



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**A** common saying goes, "A teacher is a second father." And poet Rabindranath Tagore called a teacher "the light that shows the way". Respect for teachers is an old symbol of civilisation. History is full of stories showing how societies esteemed teachers. Emperor Shah Jahan once seated his teacher before him and stood in respect. He knew the truth: power bows to knowledge, and civility bows to wisdom. Today, that memory has faded away. Incidents of harassing teachers are no longer rare in our society.

On 10 January 2026, a law teacher was publicly dragged and physically harassed by student leaders at Chittagong University. They allegedly accused him of being against the popular student protests and labelled him with harsh slurs before taking him to the proctor's office. A video of this went viral. Nine hours later, he was escorted off campus by administrators. This is not a single bad apple story. Since 5 August 2024, many teachers across universities and other educational institutions have reported insults, coercion and pressure to resign. Some have left campus in fear. Others have stayed but with heavy hearts.

Why are these shocking things happening in our society? We know that student politics is a reality in the country. But politics is certainly not a tool for one to trample another's dignity. It is not mob justice, where might is right. Mob culture in education is poisonous. It breeds groupthink, group punishment and group rage. A university is not a court. Students are not judges. Teachers are not saints. They are humans like all of us. If wrong is done, there are laws. There are procedures. There can be a fair investi-

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gation. There can be justice in courts, not street verdicts.

In the case of the Chittagong University teacher, no formal case was lodged before the incident, and local police refused to register one when students asked for it. The administration is still investigating. But students punished the teacher in their own 'trendy style'. It is pertinent to note that while the administration of the university ordered the victim teacher to leave the hall that day, the victim teacher was doing his duty as instructed. If students felt aggrieved at the decision of the administration, they should have protested against the authorities, not turned their wrath on a teacher. It is hard to see how physically harassing the teacher became a language of protest.

Power has changed hands here many times. In the past 54 years, teachers having affinity with defeated political parties were never humiliated like this, not even close to what we have seen in the last one and a half years. Actually, since 5 August 2024, teacher harassment has become a kind of entrenched "culture" here. Yet, no one has been held accountable, faced trial, or been punished.

In developed countries, the picture is very different. There, attacking a teacher is a serious crime. In the United States, if you strike a teacher, you face criminal charges. In many states, if a student attacks an educator, the former's expulsion is inevitable. California's education law clearly states that if a teacher or school staff member is assaulted, the student must be expelled. Across schools and universities in the UK, a "zero tolerance policy" makes violent behaviour towards teachers a punishable offence. Separate teacher protection policies exist in every institution. Even in

India, we find such instances. In a recent case at Delhi University, a student leader was disciplined for laying hands on a professor. The message was clear: insulting a teacher is an insult to the education system itself.

This message is yet to reach our society. But the consequences are grave. Teachers live in fear, hesitant to speak or assess students freely, often compromising fairness. Education loses its freedom. And students, in turn, learn the worst lesson of all: pressure wins. Force rules. Law is optional. Power prevails on principles.

The social impact of this crisis runs even deeper. The culture of respect erodes. Spaces for dialogue shrink. Tolerance diminishes. Aggression in politics rises, and disregard for the law becomes normalised in society.

So, what is the solution? First, clearly define teacher harassment as a criminal offence. Write it into university law. Second, end violence on campus in the name of politics. Third, make administrations swift and strong in response. Delays encourage more harassment. Fourth, adopt teacher protection policies like advanced countries. Make them real, not just words on paper. At the same time, we must teach students empathy, ethics and respect for law. Let them learn that strength without principle is hollow. Finally, society must make a choice: will we honour the teachers, or silently witness their humiliation? One truth must be remembered in this regard: when a teacher who imparts knowledge is dishonoured, the whole society is dishonoured.

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