

WEBINAR REPORT

US Tariffs Impact on Trade Union Action in Sri Lanka

Muragala

Centre for Progressive Politics and Policy, Sri Lanka



JUNE 2026

Date: 13 June 2026

Muragala | Centre for Progressive Politics and Policy (CPPP), Sri Lanka

This report was compiled with the assistance of Ms. Rashmika Guruge (University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka), Research Intern, Muragala | CPPP

Email: contact@muragala.lk | Phone: +94 76 764 2700 | Website: www.muragala.lk

Table of Contents

Abbreviations	4
Background	5
About the Webinar.....	9
Mr. Rusiripala Tennakoon – <i>Former Convener, Bank Employees' Union</i>	9
Mr. Dilakson Suresh – <i>Administrative Coordinator, Free Trade Zones and General Services Employees Union</i>	11
Ms. Lalitha Ranjani Dedduwa Kumara – <i>Chief Organiser, Textile Garment & Clothing Workers Union (TGCWU)</i>	15
Mr. D.B.T. Chathura Samarasinghe – <i>General Secretary, Ceylon Estate Staffs' Union</i>	19
Discussion Session.....	23

Abbreviations

Board of Investment (BOI)

Employees' Provident Fund (EPF)

Employees' Trust Fund (ETF)

Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement (ETCA)

European Union (EU)

Free Trade Agreement (FTA)

Free Trade Zone (FTZ)

Free Trade Zones and General Services Employees Union (FTZ & GSEU)

Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

Joint Apparel Association Forum (JAAF)

National Labour Advisory Council (NLAC)

National People's Power (NPP)

National Trade Union Centre (NTUC)

Overtime (OT)

Research and Development (R&D)

United States (US)

WEBINAR REPORT

US TARIFFS IMPACT ON TRADE UNION ACTION IN SRI LANKA

Background

The unilateral imposition of 20% ‘reciprocal tariffs’ by the US on Sri Lanka, revised downwards from the initially announced 44% in April, was effective from August 2025. US President Donald Trump has argued that imposing tariffs will increase US government tax revenues, encourage consumers to purchase more American-made products, and stimulate domestic investment in the country.¹

The new US tariffs are expected to have a significant impact on the Sri Lankan economy, which is still recovering from the severe economic crisis of 2022 that led to a sovereign debt default and the declaration of national bankruptcy. Since the economic crisis, and the entry into an International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme, subsequent reforms aimed at consolidating macroeconomic stability require substantial structural reforms and fiscal adjustments.

Crises of this nature often deepen existing inequalities and what is often left unaddressed is how these developments affect workers, those who labour daily to sustain the economy. One outcome is that the upper strata of society are better positioned to secure and expand their stability. However, these economic stabilisation measures have been straining the wellbeing and livelihoods of vulnerable sections of society, as poverty levels remain high, at around 25% of the population following repeated shocks to the economy since 2022.

The fallouts from the US–Israel ‘war of choice’ on Iran since February 2026, such as reduced tourism numbers, foreign remittances and fuel costs, along with reports of the government opening several lines of credit for vehicle imports despite low levels of foreign exchange reserves, has already shown signs of further straining the economy, with the rupee rapidly depreciating in May 2025.² Food, fuel and electricity prices are expected to remain elevated, continuing to exert pressure on household budgets.

The enforcement of the US tariffs threatens to reduce export earnings, and increase unemployment in key sectors like apparel and manufacturing. The US is Sri Lanka’s largest single export destination, valued at approximately US\$2.8 billion, especially for apparel, rubber-

¹ Clarke, J. (2025, February 3). *What are tariffs, how do they work and why is Trump using them?* BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn93e12ryppo>.

² Daily Mirror. (2025, May 26). *Sri Lanka opens US\$ 450mn worth of LCs for vehicles; imports so far at US\$ 200mn.* <https://www.dailymirror.lk/print/business-news/Sri-Lanka-opens-US-450mn-worth-of-LCs-for-vehicles-imports-so-far-at-US-200mn/273-309772>.

based products, coconut and agricultural goods.³ It is also Sri Lanka's largest apparel export destination, contributing over 25% of total apparel exports. The apparel industry faces significant challenges going forward, such as order cancellations and declining profit margins. Industry leaders argue that these tariffs undermine Sri Lanka's competitiveness in the US market, where low-cost producers such as Vietnam, Bangladesh, and Cambodia have preferential trade access through bilateral or regional agreements.⁴

These developments are expected to negatively impact workers through increased unemployment and deteriorating working conditions. In the aftermath of the tariff announcement, reports have emerged of garment factories withholding employee bonuses and dismissing workers in violation of labour regulations.⁵

The NPP government has responded through trade negotiations with the US to reduce tariffs and explore a potential Free Trade Agreement. President Anura Kumara Dissanayake appointed a committee to study the tariff impact and dispatched delegations to Washington in April and May 2025 for discussions with US officials.⁶ The government formed a working group to assess the effects on the apparel sector, with support from the Joint Apparel Association Forum (JAAF) and related industry bodies. The President also announced plans to introduce incentives to encourage export diversification and value-added production. During election campaigns last year, the NPP pledged to focus on local industrial and manufacturing, including investing in R&D capacity.⁷ Major challenges on these fronts remain, in terms of logistics bottlenecks and structural barriers to trade and investment such as the existing tax regime and broader trade facilitation that hinder competitiveness.

Trade union response to US tariffs in Sri Lanka

Trade unions within a broad coalition called the 'Social Movement for Alternative Solutions to the Global Tax Crisis' in Sri Lanka have called on the government to intervene and protect workers' rights, ensure compliance with termination laws, mandate employer–union consultation during crises, and establish a Social Protection Fund for displaced workers. This coalition has

³ Sri Lanka Export Development Board. (2025). *Sri Lanka's export performance exceeded US\$ 17.2 billion in 2025*. Sri Lanka Business. <https://www.srilankabusiness.com/news/sri-lankas-export-performance-exceeded-us-17.2-billion-in-2025.html>.

⁴ Jayasinghe, U. (2025, July 10). *Sri Lanka's apparel industry counts on cutting US tariff to compete with rivals*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/en/sri-lankas-apparel-industry-alarmed-by-us-tariff-30-hopes-cut-2025-07-10/>.

⁵ *Sri Lanka: NEXT shuts down its only unionised garment factory - by WhatsApp*. (2025). LabourStart. https://www.labourstartcampaigns.net/show_campaign.cgi?c=5696

⁶ Daily Mirror. (2025, May 23). *Sri Lankan delegation to engage in tariff talks in Washington*. <https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking-news/Sri-Lankan-delegation-to-engage-in-tariff-talks-in-Washington/108-309658>.

⁷ Jathika Jana Balawegaya. (2024). *Thriving nation, a beautiful life* (1st ed., p. 91). https://muragala.lk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/NPP_manifesto_English_2024.pdf.

also called for inclusion in parliamentary mechanisms, including enabling union representatives to advise on the labour impacts of trade policies.

In Sri Lanka, employees have also been pressing for labour law reforms, arguing that the country's labour laws deter foreign investment and hamper economic competitiveness. Labour law reforms proposed in 2023 had sought to amalgamate 48 labour laws into a single framework.⁸ The current NPP government has announced that it is preparing to draft four new bills to replace existing legislation covering trade unions, labour relations, occupational safety, and termination of employment, following the review of 14 laws.⁹ These attempts at labour law reforms have raised concerns among workers' groups that internationally-recognised labour standards would be eventually diluted. In contrast, in Bangladesh, the government ratified three major International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions in October 2025 on workplace safety and harassment, signalling a stronger commitment to enhancing worker protections and aligning labour legislation with international standards.¹⁰

These developments are expected to negatively impact workers through increased unemployment and deteriorating working conditions. The apparel industry in Sri Lanka employs a majority female workforce who are expected to be disproportionately affected by recent trade disruptions. Increased export costs following new US tariffs are expected to lead to factory downsizing, wage freezes, and reduced foreign investment. After the tariff announcement, a garment factory, Vogue Tex, declared in April 2025 that it could not pay New Year bonuses.¹¹ In May, NEXT Manufacturing PLC in the Katunayake Free Trade Zone closed its only unionised factory in Sri Lanka, dismissing 1,416 workers via WhatsApp shortly after reporting over £1 billion in profit.¹² The closure violated the Collective Bargaining Agreement with the Free Trade Zones and General Services Employees Union (FTZ & GSEU) and breached labour regulations, as the company failed to consult the union or obtain Labour Commissioner approval.¹³

⁸ IndustriALL Global Union. (n.d.). *Sri Lanka unions protest government's debt restructuring and labour law changes*. <https://www.industriall-union.org/sri-lanka-unions-protest-governments-debt-restructuring-and-labour-law-changes/>.

⁹ Shaheid, F. (2025, October 19). *Labour law reform: 14 labour acts under review*. The Morning. <https://www.themorning.lk/articles/WPAO1UmdCgr4zza3bdGr>.

¹⁰ International Labour Organization. (2025, December 4). *A new era for decent work: Bangladesh aligns with international standards on occupational safety and workplace dignity*. <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/new-era-decent-work-bangladesh-aligns-international-standards-occupational>.

¹¹ World Socialist Web Site. (2025, April 16). *Thousands of Vogue Tex garment workers in Sri Lanka protest over bonuses*. <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2025/04/16/qjdt-a16.html>.

¹² Redsri Lanka (2025). *Sudden Closure of Next Manufacturing Pvt Ltd in Katunayake Free Trade Zone Leaves 1,461 Workers Jobless*. <https://redsri Lanka.org/2025/05/20/breaking-sudden-closure-of-next-manufacturing-pvt-ltd-in-katunayake-free-trade-zone-leaves-1461-workers-jobless/>.

¹³ Specifically, the act contravenes the Termination of Employment of Workmen (Special Provisions) Act No. 45 of 1971, which requires prior approval for large-scale layoffs. (2025, September 10). *NEXT escalates union activity in Sri Lanka following closure of own factory*. <https://cleanclothes.org/news/2025/next-escalates-union-activity-in-sri-lanka-following-closure-of-own-factory>.

On 13 September 2025, hundreds of Sri Lankan apparel workers took to the streets in Colombo to protest benefit cuts following the US's imposition of a 20 per cent tariff on Sri Lankan exports. The Free Trade Zones & General Services Employees Union reported that Star Garments, which operates 11 factories in the Katunayake Free Trade Zone, has cancelled annual benefits such as uniforms, excursions, sports festivals, and year-end receptions.¹⁴ Union leaders warn that the tariff will raise export costs, risk shrinking orders, and threaten up to 16,000 jobs in the apparel sector. While the government has argued that the tariff merely aligns Sri Lanka with competitors like Bangladesh and Vietnam, unions say employers are using it as a pretext to erode worker entitlements.

In addition, trade unions have increasingly expressed concerns over “silent displacement”, where workers, particularly women in apparel factories, may be gradually replaced by semi-automated production systems without adequate compensation or transition support. Trade unions further argue that tariff pressures are being used as a pretext for factory closures, while the underlying restructuring is actually aimed at accelerating automation and labour replacement strategies.

In June 2026, it was announced that a new US import tariff regime has placed Sri Lanka among around 60 economies subject to an additional 12.5% tariff on exports to the US, particularly targeting goods linked to alleged failures to prevent imports produced with forced labour.¹⁵ This additional tariff is likely to place further pressure on Sri Lanka's export sector and weaken the competitiveness of Sri Lankan goods in the US market.

¹⁴ UnionAID. (2025, September 24). *Sri Lankan garment workers protest as US tariffs used to cut benefits - UnionAID*. <https://unionaid.org.nz/sri-lankan-garment-workers-protest-as-us-tariffs-used-to-cut-benefits/>.

¹⁵ UFLPA is a US federal law that establishes a rebuttable presumption that all goods, materials, or merchandise produced wholly or in part in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) or by entities on the UFLPA Entity List are made with forced labor and are prohibited from entry into the US. EconomyNext. (2026). *Sri Lanka among 60 countries subject to new U.S. import tax*. <https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-among-60-countries-subject-to-new-u-s-import-tax-274382/>.

About the Webinar

This Muragala | Centre for Progressive Politics and Policy (CPPP) webinar explored the impact of the 20% United States (US) tariffs on Sri Lanka from the perspective of trade unions and considers what these developments mean for workers' rights under the National People's Party (NPP) government. The webinar also examined the key challenges facing trade union action in response to the US tariffs, situated within broader struggles for collective action and solidarity across South Asia and the Global South. The following questions were central to the discussion:

- i. What have been the power relations among key domestic stakeholders related to the tariffs such as workers and trade unions, industry stakeholders, and political and policy actors, both local and foreign?
- ii. What do these developments mean for workers' rights under the NPP government?
- iii. What are the key challenges facing trade unionism in response to the US tariffs, situated against broader struggles for collective action and solidarity from South Asia and the Global South?

Speakers representing the following trade unions presented their perspectives, followed by a discussion session.

1. Mr. Rusiripala Tennakoon – Former Convener, Ceylon Bank Employees' Union
2. Mr. Dilakson Suresh – Administrative Coordinator, Free Trade Zones and General Services Employees Union
3. Ms. Lalitha Ranjani Dedduwa Kumara – Chief Organiser, Textile Garment & Clothing Workers Union (TGCWU)
4. Mr. D.B.T. Chathura Samarasinghe – General Secretary, Ceylon Estate Staffs' Union

The webinar was moderated by Mr. Harindra B. Dassanayake, Senior Researcher at Muragala | Centre for Progressive Politics and Policy (CPPP).

1. Mr. Rusiripala Tennakoon - Former Convener, Ceylon Bank Employees' Union

In response to questions on the evolution of trade union movements, the current challenges facing organising of labour, the impact of crises on collective action, and the ways in which such situations shape organisational unity and politicisation within the labour movement, the speaker noted that while he is no longer an active participant in the trade union movement, the present moment represents a major crisis for working-class movements globally. Situating Sri Lanka within this broader international context, he reflected on how the labour movement has entered an era marked by deep and unexpected challenges, and indicated his remarks would focus on understanding these developments through the Sri Lankan experience.

He explained that, over recent decades, the trade union movement in Sri Lanka has faced multiple, evolving challenges, some emerging from within the movement and others shaped by external forces. Referring to different sectors such as plantation workers, industrial labour, and white-collar trade unions including those in the banking sector, he noted that these movements were confronted with unexpected ways. One of the most significant developments was the increasing reliance on temporary and non-permanent forms of employment, which weakened the emergence of a strong, consolidated labour force. This undermined the bargaining power, organisational strength, and collective solidarity that had characterised the organised working class till then. This is an often overlooked aspect when talking about reasons for the weakening of trade unions in Sri Lanka. He also pointed to the growing politicisation of trade unions, observing that divisions stemming from political party affiliations had become a major challenge for the trade union movement in Sri Lanka.

In the 1990s, an effort was made to establish an independent national trade union centre in Sri Lanka. A number of powerful trade unions were brought together for this initiative, including unions from both state and non-state sectors. Significant support was also received from estate workers' organisations and estate officers' associations.

However, that movement was not successful during several attempts to advance it, due to threats directed against it as well as various internal challenges that emerged at the time. So the absence of a national centre which is capable of providing strong leadership and representation to trade unions remains. Consequently, the trade union movement remains fragmented and divided. This lack of unity is now being felt more acutely than ever.

Regarding the new US tariffs, there is growing concern within the trade union movement. When unexpected threats of this nature emerge, the working class enters a state of uncertainty. Workers question the stability of their jobs and whether the benefits and protections they currently have can be maintained in the future and improved. There are also fears about whether the institutions and industries in which they are employed will continue to operate in the country or relocate elsewhere. Sri Lanka is heavily dependent on the US for export earnings. Together, these account for nearly 60 percent of exports to the US. As a result of the tariffs situation, the country faces a crisis situation.

How can the situation be resolved? This situation emerged due to an external factor; it was not a decision taken by the Sri Lankan government. So the issue becomes, with whom should this problem be negotiated? There are three parties involved: the government, the working class, and the US government. In this equation, whom do the workers confront or negotiate with? This has become one of the most serious challenges confronting the labour movement today. If trade unions had been united within a strong central body, there would have been a far greater opportunity to represent workers collectively and have their concerns represented from a position of strength.

From the perspective of the government, there were various measures that could have been considered in response to a crisis of this nature. However, when viewed through the eyes of the working class, the national budget does not appear to have given sufficient attention to the challenges now confronting workers as a result of the tariffs. This is a pending disaster in front of us. So, significant attention should have been focused on it. That has not happened.

The point being made is that governments can take internal measures to lessen the negative impact of such external crises. For example, India allocated a budget to help mitigate the difficulties faced by exporters to the US. This was not done through direct cash handouts to individuals. Rather, support was channelled through banks, financial institutions, and mechanisms connected to industries importing raw materials, with the aim of providing relief and stability to affected sectors. As a government, this is not the kind of issue that can simply be confronted through direct confrontation, street protests, or slogan shouting. It requires policy responses, institutional intervention and practical economic measures to reduce the burden on industries and workers.

With whom is the working class clashing? Today, the people in this garment industry in the Free Trade Zone are alone. The people in the rubber industry in other sectors are alone. Those of us who were organised regarding the white-collar workers are on another side. But every person feels this impact equally, be it economically, socially, and in other ways.

I am not going to state statistics separately about how it affects the country's economy. But a massive impact is leveled against our GDP and economic growth because of this matter. If so, at a time when the need to maintain economic growth speed is pressing, I present the question to the audience whether special attention should be shown or not when such a threat is pending. This is serious, as if the economy is not stabilised, the country will return to the economic abyss it fell to in 2022, even despite the laws and reforms brought into place since, regarding public finance management.

2. Mr. Dilakson Suresh – Administrative Coordinator, Free Trade Zones and General Services Employees Union

I will begin by focusing on recent developments in Sri Lanka before moving on to the regional and global context. After April 9th announcements on US tariffs, some key words emerged between the government and employers. Terms such as the 'role of business,' 'investor confidence,' and the need to improve the 'ease of doing business' became central to these discussions. 'Global competitiveness' was also frequently emphasised, particularly in relation to regional and international engagement. Also, concepts such as 'cash flow' were widely invoked. This type of terminology became increasingly prominent within trade unions and civil society organisations as well.

Using these words, they distanced us. And as these terms became increasingly mainstream, the victims were concepts such as ‘decent work’, ‘access to skills’, ‘access to technology’, and ‘freedom of association’. The impact of the tariffs should be viewed in relation to how these developments exacerbate poverty levels against a backdrop of declining real wages over the past decade and the significant contraction of employment opportunities, particularly for unskilled and semi-skilled workers entering the labour market, with employment levels reportedly decreasing by 20%.

Following the introduction of the US tariffs, trade unions attempted to engage employers and employer representative organisations in discussions on how to address the economic implications from multiple perspectives. However, we were questioned about trade unions' involvement in discussions on the tariffs, with some asking what tariffs had to do with unions. In reality, the ultimate burden would fall on workers, and therefore trade unions could not be excluded from the discussion. This exchange reflected the broader local context in which labour concerns were often sidelined in conversations surrounding the tariffs.

At the global level, in relation to the narrative of global competitiveness, one of the major challenges created by the tariff is that comparable tariff rates were imposed on countries within the region that compete with Sri Lanka across key industries. For example, Bangladesh received a 20% tariff, Cambodia 19%, Indonesia 20%, and similar rates were applied to Vietnam and other regional economies. In this way, a tariff structure emerged that intensified competition among countries for brands and investors.

For example, in the case of Bangladesh, the country is moving towards a major agreement with the US, and there are indications that it has begun increasing its imports from the US. At the same time, Chinese investment and influence in Bangladesh appear to have expanded. It has been reported that initial Chinese investments of around 30 million in Bangladesh were made recently. In this context, economic shifts are also being reflected at the policy level, where such changes are not economic and at the same time, highly political terms.

In relation to India, any discussion on tariffs affecting Sri Lanka should also take into account its most important regional neighbour. It has been noted that India is subject to a tariff level of around 50%. In assessing the implications of this, attention is also drawn to ongoing discussions around the Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement (ETCA).¹⁶ According to information received, there are concerns that the agreement may proceed without a clearly defined timeline or end point, creating uncertainty about the terms and conditions that could

¹⁶ Economic and Free Trade Agreement (ETCA) is a proposed bilateral agreement between India and Sri Lanka from 2025. The last round of talks on the proposed agreement took place in mid-2024. This agreement aims to expand cooperation between the two countries beyond goods trade into trade in services, technology transfer, investment facilitation, and economic collaboration in key sectors.

ultimately be imposed on workers. Moreover, there is a serious lack of transparency surrounding the entire process.

We also hear discussions on how greater use of the Chinese yuan could be considered in trade, rather than reliance on the US dollar. Already, because of this tariff, the strength of the dollar has decreased. A demand is being created for the Yuan to some extent. So I think there is now an implicit pressure on Sri Lanka to use the yuan as part of a broader move away from dollar dependency. At the same time, there is increasing investment interest in infrastructure and manufacturing. Several companies have recently come to Colombo for discussions. So there are many opportunities for impacts like this to arise for us, and they have arisen after this tariff.

Our main export market is the European Union, which has also been affected by this tariff. We have GSP+ with them, and it has been sustained and retained for us until 2027.¹⁷ But what activities is our government undertaking in this regard? In relation to human rights, they have now asked for a compliance mechanism. How do we implement our ILO Conventions for this? There has still been no discussion on what the enabling legislation is. Currently, discussions are taking place on C190, but what about C155 and C183¹⁸ - how are we going to implement them? How are these going to be put into practice? As trade unions, we should discuss how we approach this.

The government has outlined plans to diversify markets towards India, East Asia, and Australia following the tariff changes, with a strong emphasis on improving productivity. However, there is concern that Sri Lanka's lower productivity compared to countries like Bangladesh and India is being linked to existing labour protections, particularly job security laws such as the Termination of Employment of Workmen Act. This raises questions about whether these discussions are being used to justify future labour law reforms.

When the narrative that 'productivity is key' is framed in this way, there is concern that factories could be closed, with workers being retrenched on the basis of high costs. In the Free Trade Zones, neither the BOI nor other authorities have provided a clear response on how such situations should be addressed. Similarly, the major strike at Vogue Tex was triggered when it

¹⁷ GSP+ (Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus) is the EU's special incentive arrangement for Sustainable Development and Good Governance, offered to vulnerable developing countries that have ratified 27 international conventions covering human rights, labour rights, environmental protection, and good governance. It grants preferential tariff access to EU markets. Independent Lanka. (2026, February 13). *Europe's trade warning to Sri Lanka carries a familiar message: Reform or risk losing GSP+ privilege.* <https://www.independent.lk/europes-trade-warning-to-sri-lanka-carries-a-familiar-message-reform-or-risk-losing-gsp-privilege/>.

¹⁸ C190 – Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019: The first international treaty to recognise the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence. Sri Lanka ratified C190 in April 2026, becoming one of the first countries in Asia to do so. C155 – Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981: Requires member states to establish a national policy on workplace safety and health, placing obligations on both governments and employers to ensure safe working conditions and protect workers' rights to report hazards. Sri Lanka has not yet ratified this Convention. C183 – Maternity Protection Convention, 2000: Sets minimum standards for working mothers including maternity leave, cash benefits, health protection, and prohibition of dismissal during pregnancy. Sri Lanka has not ratified this Convention, and current national legislation falls short of its requirements.

was stated that bonuses could not be paid due to the tariff. In another case, a factory in the Katunayake zone under Star Garments reported that uniforms and bonuses could not be provided, leading to a strike. We intervened in that situation as well, and discussions are still ongoing.

So, in this way, the five-day working week, which should be made mandatory, is being questioned. In the arguments being presented, the tariff is being used as a pretext, and policy positions influenced by employers are being brought forward, suggesting that Saturday work must be reintroduced and that a five-day week should be replaced with a full working week without conditions.

In 2026, this government doubled its 2025 export promotion budget.¹⁹ They have set a target of increasing the contribution to GDP to around 25% by 2030.²⁰ At the same time, due to tariff impacts and pressures at the lower level, labour migration and informalisation have increased. For example, more casual workers are being absorbed into the informal sector.²¹

While national export targets are set at the national level, it is unclear how they will be achieved in an environment characterised by labour migration and the absence of decent work conditions at the lower levels of production. This raises questions about the underlying production logic. At the same time, despite commitments to a green economy and sustainable products, tariff pressures may push producers towards cheaper, less ethical, and less sustainable goods, effectively rushing production in ways that undermine sustainability.

Next, there is a risk of job losses and factory closures, as already seen in previous instances. Women, who form the majority of workers in trade zones, are likely to be disproportionately affected by these developments. We have also heard of instances where some employers are failing to pay EPF, and using the tariff situation as justification.²² By using the pretext of the US tariffs, we see how employers and policymakers are trying to change the 'world of work' without taking these things into account.

I think, as trade unions, it is important to formalise our movement, mobilisation, and coordination. That is why we formed the Social Movement for Alternative Solutions to Global Tariff Crisis, bringing together 41 organisations. This platform is aimed at addressing how we

¹⁹ Onlanka News. (2026, April 23). *Chaturanga outlines government measures to boost Sri Lanka's export sector*. <https://www.onlanka.com/news/chaturanga-outlines-government-measures-to-boost-sri-lankas-export-sector.html>.

²⁰ Daily News. (2025, July 4). *Plans to increase export revenue to 25% of total GDP by 2030*. <https://dailynews.lk/2025/07/04/business/808921/plans-to-increase-export-revenue-to-25-of-total-gdp-by-2030/>.

²¹ International Labour Organization. (n.d.). *Country profiles: Sri Lanka*. <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/country-profiles/lka/>.

²² Shaheid, F. (2025, June 1). *Labour issues: Over 22,000 companies in EPF default*. The Morning. <https://www.themorning.lk/articles/MHFyq5GVB69CKZuhMX7q>.

respond to global tariffs and emerging crisis situations, incorporating both labour and other economic perspectives.

Next, we should focus on employment security, particularly job protection and wages. Another key area is skill development, including upskilling and retraining, which trade unions are still not adequately addressing. In the face of new technologies and emerging threats, unions need to consider how best to respond and support workers through these transitions.

For this purpose, the trade union movement should provide education and a reliable flow of information to workers and union leaders. This includes knowledge-sharing on economic issues and free trade agreements, many of which are currently being prepared and negotiated. Trade unions should be present at these negotiation tables, ensuring their voice is included and strengthening their role in the bargaining process.

We also need to consider how to use EU GSP+ as a form of leverage. A key issue is the upcoming labour law reforms and how trade unions can influence policy in this process. Even in crisis situations like this, the focus should be on protecting workers and safeguarding our policies and fundamental principles. Therefore, these are the areas we need to prioritise going forward.

3. Ms. Lalitha Ranjani Dedduwa Kumara – Chief Organiser, Textile Garment & Clothing Workers Union (TGCWU)

Looking back, with the introduction of the open economic policy in 1978, Free Trade Zones (FTZs) were established, particularly in Katunayake, Biyagama, and Koggala. Most of these workers are women who have come from very difficult and remote areas, seeking employment at very low wages. Their primary motivation has been the basic necessity of securing a job. Until around the year 2000, these zones functioned in conditions that could be described as ‘slave-like,’ where workers’ professional and human rights were largely absent and existing labour laws were not properly enforced.

Despite this, we were able to work collectively and as an individual trade union. We are the first women’s trade union in Sri Lanka working for the rights of female workers. After 2000, we managed to break through the constraints of these ‘slave zones,’ particularly in the Katunayake and Biyagama Free Trade Zones, and organise workers within factories to some extent. We established unions in several workplaces, worked with them, and even secured collective agreements in some cases.

However, the main problem is that unlike the state sector, the service periods of these migrant workers in the private sector are very short-term, as they work for a while and return to their villages. This is a major obstacle to maintaining a continuous trade union movement. But today, that situation has changed. We have changed it significantly. Female workers are now much

more aware; they know about their labour rights. They have reached a point where they can talk about their problems within the workplace.

But in such instances, we face various crises. If we look back, first came the COVID disaster. Next came the economic crisis. No matter what happens, the laws of this country and the current state of the right to unionise still prevent these workers, who are trapped in factories, from bringing their 'labour voice' forward as a collective cry.

While we talk about trade unions, what is the actual space available to us to unionize and maintain them? How much support is there from the employer? What kind of stance do the existing governments take? And to what extent are labour rights protected within this?

I would like to say that when this tariff issue arose, trade unions and NGOs in Sri Lanka joined together and discussed a very systematic programme. We asked how workers' jobs and interests can be protected within this tariff system? Many of these workers do not even have a living wage. An 8-hour workday is a rarity for them. The next issue they face is having to meet impossible production targets, produced primarily for foreign markets. Employees have become very cunning in this regard; orders that should take a year are rushed through in six months.

Regarding the tariff issue, whether you take the Koggala FTZ, our other zones, or the institutions in the Kalutara district where we work extensively, the jobs of many workers, especially female workers, working for major buyers like GAP are being put at risk. Their transport facilities have been cut. Next, their overtime (OT) has been stopped. No-pay holidays are given to workers without due notice.

Furthermore, the privileges they enjoyed, specifically health-related benefits and recreational trips, which added some quality to their lives, are being taken away today. But these things are not recorded in statistics anywhere. These complaints go nowhere. No one talks about them. Even the government says this will not affect us much, that it's not a big problem. But roughly speaking, the majority of workers face job insecurity.

When we try to talk about this insecurity, the answer the worker gets from the institution is: 'Stay if you want, otherwise leave. We don't have orders now; we have big problems.' So, to maintain their daily lives, workers who have served for 10-15 years try to move to another factory. Why? Because they have no trust in the employer, no trust in the job and no trust in their entitlements. When trust is lost in everything, they stop thinking about or expecting anything from the country's labour laws. To rebuild their lives or their families, they instinctively move elsewhere. This effectively relieves employers of liabilities such as compensation payments. In this sense, it becomes a low-cost way of avoiding responsibility for honouring labour obligations.

In the Koggala FTZ, at a very high-level garment manufacturing plant where we have union members, several female workers from the Akuressa area said their transport was suddenly cut

without any notice. When they questioned it, they were told: 'We only provide transport to the point we can; you have to come from there.' When a worker is hired, they are given an appointment letter with terms and conditions. If they are utilised for the production process under those conditions, then if their job is removed, or if a given privilege is cut due to the recent tariffs or any other reason, these things must be discussed collectively. Workers must be notified and compensation should be paid fairly according to the existing industrial dispute and termination laws of the country.

Now, if through these labour law reforms, if the labour protections workers have - specifically the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF), the Employees' Trust Fund (ETF), the Maternity Benefits Ordinance, and the Termination of Employment of Workmen Act - are lost, what happens to these workers? Their biggest problem is the lack of bargaining power. They are not unionised and are not *allowed* to be unionised.

Why are they not allowed? We say trade unions must be recognised and that there is a right under ILO Convention 87 to organise, and a right to bargain under Convention 98. These FTZs and factories have a history of nearly 50 years. But in that history, no government has provided the opportunity to continuously carry out a trade union movement. Why? Because the voice of those workers is at the very bottom. If they join a union, what are they told? 'Please leave the union.' Even today, that situation persists. So, workers don't unionize. They don't bargain. They don't talk about their problems. They only look to protect their jobs to survive. Now, protecting the job itself has become the issue. The biggest thing said these days is: 'We don't have orders; we don't know if they will come in the future. Therefore, work under the conditions we dictate, or leave.'

The next issue concerns wages. The national minimum wage was increased from Rs. 27,000 to Rs. 30,000 from January 2026.²³ However, this amount must also cover essential living costs such as hostel rent, water, and electricity bills. This raises serious concerns about how workers are expected to manage household expenses as well as the education of their children, particularly those living around the main Export Processing Zones.

This time, regarding the national budget, we had the opportunity to represent the National Labour Advisory Council (NLAC). Through the NLAC, we submitted a set of trade union proposals to the state budget. We called for non-discriminatory changes, particularly in view of the growing number of Tamil workers in these areas. They face language barriers and difficulties in enrolling their children in schools, especially pre-schools. In response, we requested the establishment of at least two schools in the Gampaha district to support access to primary education.

²³ Samarawickrama, C. P. (2026, January 20). *Private sector minimum wage hiked to Rs. 30,000 from Jan 2026*. Daily Mirror. <https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking-news/Private-sector-minimum-wage-hiked-to-Rs-30-000-from-Jan-2026/108-330806>.

Due to all these factors, workers who migrated from villages to cities are now being forced to return to their villages without jobs, often empty-handed and with their children's education disrupted. We therefore urge the government, employers, and institutions such as the Board of Investment (BOI) not to downplay these issues. Instead, they should collect accurate data, address workers' grievances, and provide appropriate solutions. If institutions cannot be sustained, then under existing labour law and the Termination of Employment of Workmen Act, workers should at least receive fair compensation as specified for different service periods (1-5 years, 5-10 years, and 10-15 years). Workers should not be discarded or devalued after their labour has been utilised.

These are citizens of this country, and any government comes to power through the votes of the public. Therefore, there is a shared responsibility to protect the fundamental rights of all citizens. The recent case of a woman worker at the Brandix plant who lost her life has been widely discussed in society.²⁴ Regardless of what is said by trade unions or NGOs, such a loss cannot be reversed. Therefore, within a dignified workplace, there must be systems in place to ensure that women can work under safe conditions, including maintaining proper health and safety standards and adhering to reasonable working hours, such as an 8-hour shift.

My final proposal is that trade union recognition and the right to organise must be fully respected, particularly in the private garment sector. In addition, workers' existing rights and entitlements should not be rolled back or suppressed under the justification of tariff-related pressures. If these protections are weakened, workers' living conditions will deteriorate further into poverty. Now it has reached a point where workers are being repressed to the extent that they are forced out of work or discouraged from remaining in factories if they become involved in trade union organising.

It is not enough to simply talk; within the recognition of trade unions, our bargaining power must be strengthened so that we have a real basis to secure these rights. I want to give one final example. Around 2005, we formed a trade union in the Koggala Free Trade Zone and signed a collective bargaining agreement with the employers' association. In that agreement, we clearly included provisions on job security, how wages and wage anomalies would be addressed, and specific protections and benefits for pregnant women that went beyond the provisions of the law. Ultimately, it focused on ensuring dignified employment.

²⁴ In November 2025, Ms. Paramasivam Pushpalatha, a long-time sewing machine operator at Brandix in Avissawella, reportedly fell seriously ill during her shift but was allegedly denied timely permission by supervisors to seek medical treatment, and later died after being admitted to hospital, triggering allegations of managerial negligence and prompting a Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka inquiry into workplace safety practices. Gajanayake, S. (2025, November 14). *Sri Lanka: Death of Brandix employee raises concerns over workplace neglect and employee rights*. Right to Life Human Rights Centre. <https://right2lifelanka.org/paramasivam-pushpalatha-death-investigation-sri-lanka/>.

The constitutionally guaranteed right to organise is therefore essential, and trade unions must be recognised. Space must be provided for collective bargaining and meaningful dialogue. This is important because the maximum profits are already being extracted, while only a very small share is returned to labour. Although we are currently engaging with buyers through our networks, we still do not see sufficient justice being achieved.

4. Mr. D.B.T. Chathura Samarasinghe – General Secretary, Ceylon Estate Staffs' Union

In the 1990s, the plantation sector contributed significantly to building a more unified labour movement, particularly during a period of reforms within the sector. In contrast, the present situation is quite different. With export levels now declining, it is important to ask how this is being discussed and what the current state of the labour movement is.

I would also like to add some reflections on the state of the country when this tariff risk emerged. Sri Lanka was already facing consecutive crises, having only just begun to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and a severe economic collapse. In that context, this tariff pressure arrives as another major shock.

However, it is worth questioning whether the initial 40% tariff shock was taken with the seriousness it required by different stakeholders in society. From the government side as well, it appeared that the response lacked the necessary weight and urgency. The approach was largely closed rather than open, with limited engagement with society, particularly trade unions and people's organisations. This lack of transparency and dialogue remains a key concern.

Similarly, it can be observed that the affected groups - the public, trade unions, and working people - did not fully grasp the seriousness and risks of this tariff shock. In response, we formed a movement involving trade unions and civil society organisations, bringing together around more than 30 organisations. However, even within this space, only a few of the major trade unions in Sri Lanka actively engaged with the issue, indicating a broader failure within the labour movement to respond with sufficient urgency.

As a result, those who took the initiative to organise and seek alternatives during the tariff crisis were mainly civil society and trade union organisations representing the affected sectors. When the tariff was announced in April, the gravity of the threat was underplayed in a way that appeared almost like collusion between the government, the opposition, the corporate sector, and even some trade unions. In the early stages, although we attempted to build organised responses within society, even the media provided limited coverage. Overall, there was a lack of attention and urgency, and the issue did not receive the weight it required. This failure to recognise the seriousness of the situation contributed to a weakening of the response and led to the movement gradually losing momentum.

As a society, the potential scale of this crisis, including the risk of economic collapse and a wider social breakdown, was not fully taken with the seriousness it required. Due to some level of government intervention, the situation has been reduced to around 20% today, providing some breathing space and partial control. However, this cannot yet be considered a complete or final resolution.

At this point, I would also like to mention Mr Rusiripala Tennakoon, who is here in this discussion today and was a former leader of the Ceylon Bank Employees' Union. His name is well known within the trade union movement in this country. The Ceylon Bank Employees' Union, which he represented, has historically maintained a close relationship with the Estate Staffs' Union, which we represent. While both unions have operated independently, this historical connection continues to inform our engagement and solidarity today as well.

The effort under his leadership, made two or three decades ago to build a centralised trade union movement in Sri Lanka, which is capable of acting collectively and responding to challenges together, has unfortunately not been realised even today. Our understanding is that after the centralised trade union coordination structure that emerged in 1980 was dismantled following severe state repression under the J. R. Jayewardene administration in the aftermath of the 1980 general strike, the trade union movement has not been able to rebuild itself to that earlier level of unity and organisational strength.

Several major factors contributed to this. In particular, after 1980, workers in the national workforce began taking different paths to secure their professional rights, as the previously strong and centralised power of the trade union movement gradually weakened and fragmented. As a result, much of the working class began aligning with political parties of their choice, joining party-affiliated unions under the belief that electoral victories and trusted political leaders would secure improvements in their livelihoods and workers' rights. However, even after four to five decades, many of those expectations remain unfulfilled.

At the same time, there is also a history of collective victories achieved by the trade union movement both before and after 1980. Any benefits enjoyed by working people today are largely the result of struggles and gains secured through broader collective action within the trade union movement. Unfortunately, even today, the task of building a common centre of unity within the movement continues to be repeatedly postponed.

I would like to return to the tariff issue. In the face of this tariff shock, two key foreign-exchange earning sectors in Sri Lanka - garments and export crops - are becoming highly vulnerable. As mentioned earlier, this situation was not initially taken with the required seriousness, and there was a real risk of a major economic collapse. Had the 40% tariff scenario materialised, it could have triggered a significant breakdown, particularly in the garment industry and the plantation sector we represent. Although the rate has since been reduced to some extent, which has helped to mitigate the immediate impact, the risk has not fully disappeared.

This is a substantial portion of the economy. Sri Lanka's foreign reserves are currently around 7 billion US dollars, while export earnings from rubber-related products alone amount to approximately 2.8 to 3 billion US dollars annually.²⁵ The garment sector similarly contributes a significant share of national export income. If these sectors are threatened, or if investors are discouraged and operations become unsustainable in Sri Lanka, the primary victims will be the large working-class populations employed in these industries. In such a scenario, a significant portion of the country's population would face serious economic insecurity and hardship.

The situation in the rubber finished goods industry is particularly concerning. Historically, our organisation has been centred around the main plantation companies, operating across 23 regional plantation companies and five state plantation companies. However, we have not been able to adequately include the rubber finished goods manufacturing sector, which remains largely outside our traditional scope.

These industries are mainly located in areas such as Gampaha and Colombo, rather than the plantation regions we primarily represent. As a result, our engagement with these workplaces is limited, and trade unionisation within these factories is weak or absent. This means that many of these workers are left without a clear understanding of the risks they may face in the future or adequate collective protection. In this sense, while we have strengths within the plantation sector, there remains a serious gap in relation to these adjacent industries, which is an unfortunate situation.

Similarly, during the national budget, we did not see any special attention given to the plantation sector, the garment industry, or other sectors facing serious challenges due to the tariff crisis. Even within the Parliament, the Opposition failed to meaningfully raise these concerns during the budget discussions.

As trade union organisations, while attempting to build a movement to respond to this crisis, we requested a discussion with the President. However, even that basic meeting was not granted. A discussion that had been scheduled through the President's Office was cancelled the day before it was due to take place. We were seeking a direct dialogue with the President on these issues, yet the government did not appear willing to openly engage with these forces or create space for such discussions.

On the other hand, we have also failed to secure broad representation within the wider trade union movement for the large section of the working class that stands to be victimised by these tariffs. There was no significant collective mobilisation in that regard either.

²⁵ Central Bank of Sri Lanka. (2026, January 8). *Gross official reserves surpass USD 6.8 billion by end-2025*. Lanka Business Online. <https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/2026/01/08/sri-lankas-gross-official-reserves-surpasses-usd-6-8-bn-in-dec-2025-highest-level-since-crisis/>.

This is the broader context in which the tariff attack must be understood. In this regard, we have also recently seen renewed discussions around labour law amendments. In fact, labour reform has been a recurring issue in Sri Lanka for the past 15 to 20 years. Historically, many of these reform efforts have largely reflected the interests and priorities of employers. Across different periods, these proposals have appeared in various forms as labour law amendments, driven by longstanding employer demands.

Eventually, these reforms emerged under the previous Wickremesinghe-led government (2022-24), and when they did, we saw the alarming nature of the proposals. The document presented as a ‘labour reform’ was strongly opposed and ultimately rejected by the trade union movement, particularly by the unions represented within the National Labour Advisory Council. I believe that out of the 16 unions represented at the time, 14 openly rejected the document. This was because the proposals did not amount to genuine labour law reform. Rather, they were seen as a programme aimed at dismantling the rights won by working people in this country over decades of struggle. The reforms appeared designed to give employers greater control over workers, allowing them to hire and dismiss employees at will, according to employer needs, while weakening long-standing labour protections and rights enjoyed by workers in Sri Lanka.

The current government, which came to power with the support of working people and includes leaders who once represented workers’ struggles, is now reportedly using, as the basis for its proposed labour law reform, the same deeply problematic document introduced under the previous ‘Ranil-Rajapaksa government’. We learned this through discussions at the National Labour Advisory Council. Trade unions strongly opposed that ‘single labour law’ proposal and maintained that it should be completely discarded.

Now, we see that some proposals are being discussed based on that. However, to this day, we do not actually know what is contained in this reform; we can only properly assess it once the full document is released. As the working class, we have reasonable concerns about its direction, given our prior opposition to the base document. At the same time, it appears that instead of a single labour law, the reform is now being structured into four parts, as stated by the Labour Minister during the budget debate. While the Minister has indicated that changes are being made, it is still unclear whether the most objectionable provisions have been fully removed.

We expect that once the report of the Expert Committee they have appointed is released, we will be able to clearly assess whether the rights of the working people of Sri Lanka are being further strengthened through this labour reform, whether they are being affirmed, or whether it is instead a document designed to serve employer interests by weakening workers’ rights. This is therefore a time when trade unions must remain highly vigilant.

Discussion Session

In terms of efforts by trade unions in Sri Lanka to build stronger regional collectives in response to the tariffs, Mr. Suresh explained that they have been strengthening their presence within global networks and global supply chain advocacy spaces. Once the US tariff issue emerged, they began working closely with global union networks and international labour rights organisations. One of the key platforms involved is the Clean Clothes Campaign, which includes more than 250 labour rights organisations, trade unions, and civil society groups. Through this network, they helped develop forums to address the impact of US tariffs in both South Asia and East Asia, including two separate regional coalitions.

Within this process, they have also been working closely with the Workers Rights Consortium and the Solidarity Center. Through these connections, they were able to meet with representatives of the US Trade Representative's Office during discussions that initially emerged around COVID-related concerns. While the Sri Lankan government was engaged in discussions with the US government and US Labour Department officials, the union representatives were also able to directly present workers' concerns. Although those meetings were largely limited to listening, with little direct response from officials, the concerns of workers were nevertheless communicated. According to Mr. Suresh, they were likely the only union to have directly engaged with those officials in this manner.

He further noted that this process has created an important platform, with Sri Lanka currently taking a leading role in advancing this regional movement. They are now engaging country by country with trade unions to better understand the ground-level implications of tariffs on workers. For example, in Bangladesh, despite the imposition of US tariffs, the country proceeded with the ratification of conventions such as C190, C183, and C155. More broadly, despite ongoing crisis conditions, countries within the region continue to introduce labour protections, while trade unions actively campaign and advocate around these issues.

Alongside this, they have also been developing a broader expert forum linked to the global tariff movement, bringing together researchers, economists, and labour experts from countries such as India and Bangladesh. The objective is to deepen research, strengthen analysis, and support the mobilisation of trade unions around these developments.

As an initial step, they are planning to produce a regional article examining how US tariffs have impacted workers across South Asia. Mr. Suresh pointed out that there are already signs of increased investment flows into India, with companies purchasing and relocating factories there. Reports suggest that between 9 and 25 factories have shifted operations to India. This, he argued, raises important questions about the fate of workers connected to those factories and ownership structures across the region. The forum is therefore attempting to better understand these developments and their impacts on the ground.

Following this, they are planning a South Asian regional webinar bringing together trade unions from across the region to discuss their experiences, the political, social, and economic transformations they are confronting, and the emerging challenges facing trade union movements today. According to Mr. Suresh, these are some of the concrete steps currently being undertaken to address the impact of US tariffs across the region.

Ms. Lalitha Ranjani Dedduwa Kumara noted that there first needs to be a national-level programme focused on securing workers' rights. In that regard, she stressed the importance of strengthening weaker sectors through organisational programmes, particularly in sectors where labour protections remain limited. While such programmes already exist, she argued that they need to be implemented more effectively and expanded further. She especially highlighted the garment sector and informal workers, pointing out that manpower services are now widely used despite workers in those arrangements having almost no labour rights or protections.

She also referred to a specific example to illustrate these challenges. A request made to the National Labour Advisory Council in 2016 to represent these weaker sectors was only addressed in 2025. According to her, although it took many years, this eventually created some space for bargaining and representation.

At the international level, particularly within the Asian regional context, she explained that their Free Trade Zone union is involved in the Asia Floor Wage Alliance. Through this alliance, they advocate around four main issues across the region, including the right to organise, living wages, and dignified employment. She also highlighted a major regional campaign linked to C190 called 'Violence out of Fashion,' which is primarily focused on the garment sector and addresses violence and harassment faced by workers.

Ms. Dedduwa Kumara emphasised that while these organisational programmes and campaigns do exist, the key question is how far they are actually able to achieve meaningful outcomes for workers and beneficiaries. Although campaigns are ongoing, she argued that these efforts need to be significantly strengthened in order to achieve their intended goals and targets.

Responding to the question on recommendations for rebuilding the collective strength of the trade union movement, Mr. Rusiripala Tennakoon stated that Sri Lanka is now facing a new economic landscape, which requires a new form of trade unionism. There is a need to collectively and formally rebuild a professional centre informed by global conditions, similar to efforts made in the 1990s, in order to bring workers back to the centre of national development.

According to him, this new trade unionism must be strategic, informed, united, and globally aware. He argued that efforts to build a unified centre of this nature should form the basis for moving forward. If trade unions can respond with clarity, unity, and responsibility, he suggested that workers could once again be placed at the centre of national development, noting that workers are currently excluded from that space altogether.

He further explained that such unity would also help trade unions respond more effectively to external pressures, including US tariffs, by pushing the government to think and act in the correct direction during moments of crisis. At the same time, he argued that the trade union movement must recognise that contemporary trade unionism requires more than traditional forms of street protests and slogan-based mobilisation.

As an example, he referred to the earlier efforts around the formation of an National Trade Union Centre (NTUC) nucleus. He noted that bank employees themselves would not have been directly affected by proposals to convert the provident fund into a pension scheme, since they were already entitled to both pensions and provident funds as a unique category of workers. Nevertheless, he stated that they took leadership in opposing that move and were able to stop the proposal and remove it from the parliamentary order paper. He presented this as an example of the type of collective and principled leadership needed within the trade union movement going forward.

Mr. Chathura Samarasinghe responded that a key reason for the decline of the trade union movement was its departure from its basic principles. He argued that this marked the beginning of the weakening process, which has continued over time. He further stated that trade unions were increasingly influenced and manipulated by political parties, and that under such party control, the movement gradually lost its independence. So the trade union movement must reduce excessive dependence on political party influence. Instead of following party agendas, the movement should be able to set its own priorities, act independently, and strengthen collective coordination and action.

About Muragala | CPPP

Muragala | Centre for Progressive Politics & Policy (CPPP) is a politics and policy-oriented think tank which promotes equal & equitable societies in Sri Lanka & the region. Our work lies at the intersection of political science, political economy, and political sociology. Together, we aim to generate ideas, enrich the discourse, and mobilise social action to create a more robust Global South discourse and politics.

Muragala publications can be accessed at: <https://muragala.lk/publications/>