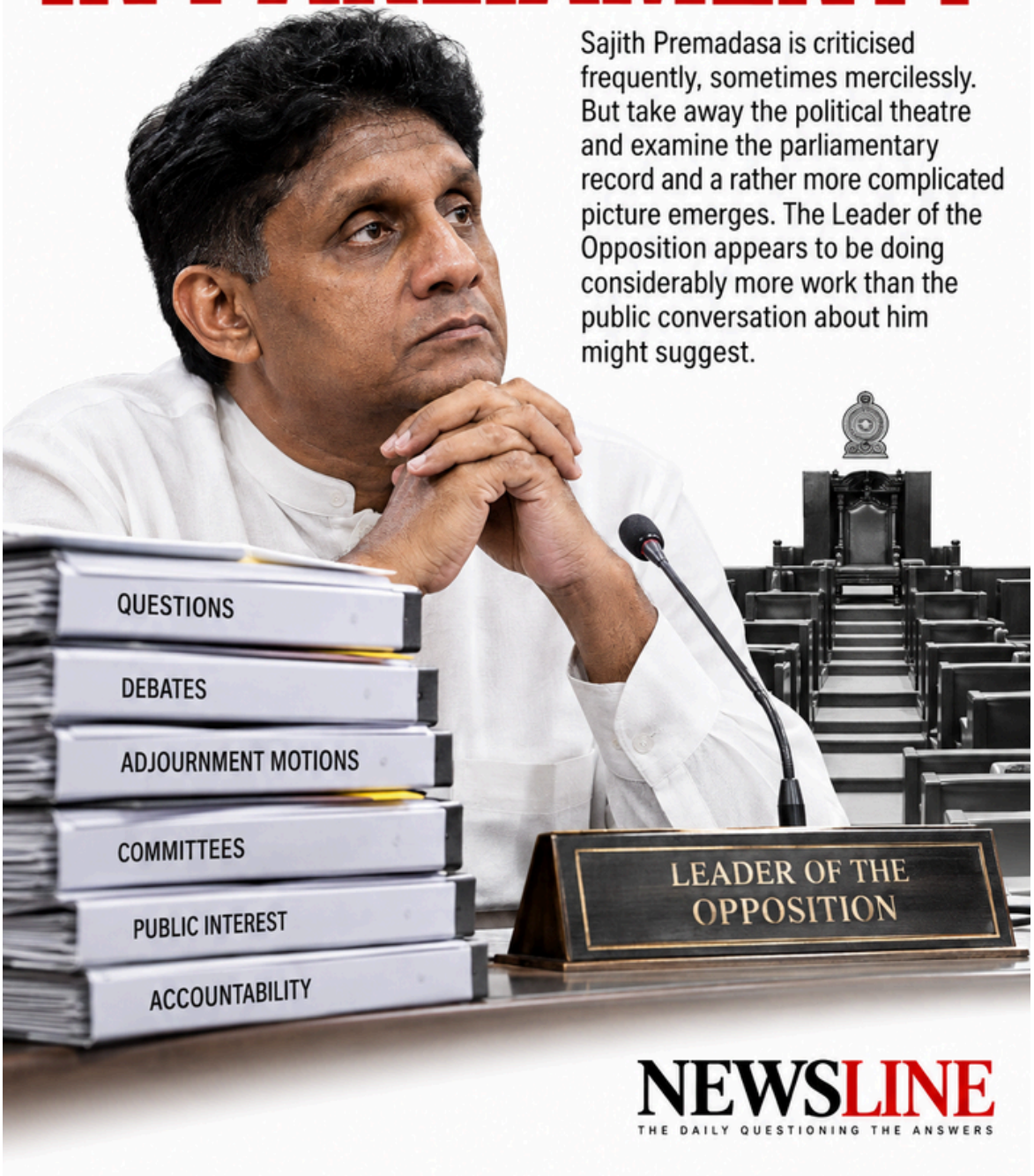
NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

THE LONELIEST JOB IN PARLIAMENT?

Sajith Premadasa is criticised frequently, sometimes mercilessly. But take away the political theatre and examine the parliamentary record and a rather more complicated picture emerges. The Leader of the Opposition appears to be doing considerably more work than the public conversation about him might suggest.



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NEWSLINE

There may be few more frustrating jobs in Sri Lankan politics today than being Leader of the Opposition.

Sajith Premadasa leads the principal Opposition party in a Parliament in which the National People's Power holds 159 of the 225 seats. His Samagi Jana Balawegaya has 40. The entire parliamentary Opposition elected in 2024 amounted to just 66 MPs spread across a collection of parties.

Those numbers matter.

A government with 159 MPs does not merely possess a working majority. It possesses enough parliamentary strength to make conventional Opposition politics extraordinarily difficult. An Opposition can question. It can investigate. It can expose. It can argue. It can attempt to shape public opinion. But, unless members of the Government itself break ranks, it cannot normally defeat the Government through numbers in the House.

That is the political arithmetic against which Premadasa's performance ought to be examined.

And when NEWSLINE looked beyond speeches, press conferences and the inevitable social-media attacks and examined the parliamentary activity recorded by Manthri.lk, something interesting emerged.

As of May 2026, Manthri.lk ranked Premadasa third among MPs overall for parliamentary participation and first within his own party. It recorded 337 instances of participation across 14 different subject areas.

His strongest rankings included natural resources and environment, education, economy and finance, health, governance and parliamentary affairs, technology and energy, rights and representation, and justice, defence and public order.

That does not establish that every intervention was correct, effective or politically astute. Parliamentary activity is not the same thing as political effectiveness.

But it does challenge the easier caricature of an Opposition Leader simply occupying the chair and waiting for the Government to make mistakes.

The parliamentary record shows Premadasa repeatedly using one of the Opposition Leader's most important weapons: questions under Standing Order 27(2).

And the subjects have hardly been trivial.

During 2026 he has raised questions concerning the economic difficulties confronting the public, national fiscal and monetary policy, fuel supply and procurement, the rights of children, the EPF and ETF, an alleged US$2.5 million fraud relating to Sri Lanka's foreign-debt payment, compensation arising from the X-Press Pearl disaster, the proposed extension of the retirement age of Supreme Court judges and, most recently, Sri Lanka's preparations for the developing El Niño conditions.

There is another important detail.

These have not simply disappeared into the parliamentary ether. The official parliamentary record shows ministers answering a number of these questions, sometimes immediately and sometimes subsequently. In April, for example, the Government responded to an earlier Premadasa question concerning difficulties faced by SMEs. In May, a ministerial response was recorded to his earlier question on poverty. Questions concerning fuel, the economy, the alleged foreign-debt-payment fraud and judicial retirement have likewise produced government responses.

That is worth understanding because it goes to the constitutional purpose of an Opposition.

An Opposition does not have to win a parliamentary vote to perform a useful function. Sometimes its job is simply to force a question onto the official record and require the executive to provide an answer that can subsequently be tested against events.

Premadasa has also gone beyond questions. On 9 April, for example, the parliamentary record shows him moving an adjournment motion concerning the Easter Sunday attacks, while Manthri.lk records a mixture of oral contributions, procedural interventions, questions, debates and adjournment motions.

His attendance record is also difficult to dismiss. Parliament's own profile currently records Premadasa as present on 167 sitting days and absent on 13 during the Tenth Parliament.

None of this settles the political argument about Sajith Premadasa.

His critics are entitled to ask whether parliamentary industriousness has translated into a sufficiently compelling political message outside Parliament. They can question the SJB's organisation, its communications, its ability to broaden its constituency and whether Premadasa has successfully defined an alternative programme of government rather than merely opposing the Government's programme.

Those are legitimate political questions.

But there is a distinction between saying an Opposition Leader should be politically more effective and saying that he is not doing the parliamentary work.

The available evidence makes the second proposition considerably harder to sustain.

There is also an unusual psychological dimension to the present Parliament. The NPP did not scrape into government. It arrived with an extraordinary electoral mandate and 159 seats. The Opposition therefore operates in an environment where almost every parliamentary confrontation begins with everyone knowing what the numerical outcome will be.

Consider the no-confidence motion against Justice Minister Harshana Nanayakkara in July. Whatever one thought of the merits of that motion, the arithmetic was brutal: 36 MPs voted for it and 152 against.

That illustrates the structural problem facing Premadasa better than almost anything else.

How does an Opposition oppose when it cannot realistically defeat the Government on the floor of Parliament?

The answer may be that it has to play a longer game.
Premadasa appears to be trying to construct part of that game around the parliamentary record: ask the question, obtain the answer, put both on record and allow subsequent events to determine which side was right.

There is a political calculation behind that approach, too.

Premadasa and the SJB plainly hope that the extraordinary majority enjoyed by the NPP will not remain politically impregnable forever. Governments are ultimately judged not by the size of the mandate with which they entered office but by what they do with it.

That does not mean the SJB automatically becomes the beneficiary if public sentiment changes. Sri Lankan politics has repeatedly demonstrated that voters are capable of abandoning both governments and established opposition parties. The SJB therefore still has to persuade voters that it represents a credible alternative rather than merely the largest available alternative.

That distinction could determine Premadasa's political future.

There are also concerns voiced within the wider Opposition about the climate in which politics is now being conducted, including litigation, investigations and the conduct of state institutions. Such claims require evidence and should be examined individually rather than converted into a sweeping conclusion that institutions such as the Police, Customs, military or judiciary are acting politically.

But an Opposition that believes government decisions will eventually face greater public scrutiny has an obvious incentive to document those decisions now.

That may explain something about Premadasa's parliamentary strategy.

He does not possess the numbers to stop the Government.
What he possesses is the ability to make it answer.

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LONELIEST JOB...

And sometimes an answer given in Parliament becomes more important six months or two years later than it appeared on the afternoon on which it was given.

There remains a larger question that no parliamentary statistic can answer.

Can Sajith Premadasa convert diligence into leadership?

Being one of Parliament's most active MPs is evidence of work. It is not evidence that the electorate will ultimately choose him. Asking hundreds of questions demonstrates scrutiny; it does not by itself constitute an alternative economic or political programme. And leading the largest Opposition party does not give anyone a permanent claim to being the next government.

Those tests remain ahead of him.

But if the charge is simply that Sri Lanka's Leader of the Opposition is sitting back and doing very little while an overwhelmingly powerful Government governs unchecked, the parliamentary record tells a different story.

Premadasa is asking questions. He is putting ministers on record. He is intervening across a remarkably broad range of subjects. He is turning up.

Whether the country is listening is another matter entirely.

And whether those questions one day become the documentary trail by which this Government is judged may prove to be the more interesting question.

Be that as it may.

RANIL IS EVERYWHERE AGAIN. BUT ARE THE VOTERS THERE?

He is out of the Presidency. He is out of Parliament. Yet Ranil Wickremesinghe seems remarkably difficult to remove from Sri Lanka's political conversation. There are speeches, meetings, policy proposals and increasingly visible attempts to bring the Opposition together. But there is one question that all the publicity in the world cannot answer: are Sri Lankan voters actually coming back to Ranil Wickremesinghe?

NEWSLINE

Ranil Wickremesinghe has achieved something rather extraordinary.

He lost the Presidency. He is not a Member of Parliament. The United National Party that he has dominated for decades is today a shadow of the electoral machine that once governed Sri Lanka.

And yet Ranil is everywhere.

He speaks. The media reports it. He meets politicians. It becomes news. He offers an economic prescriptionand it enters the national conversation.

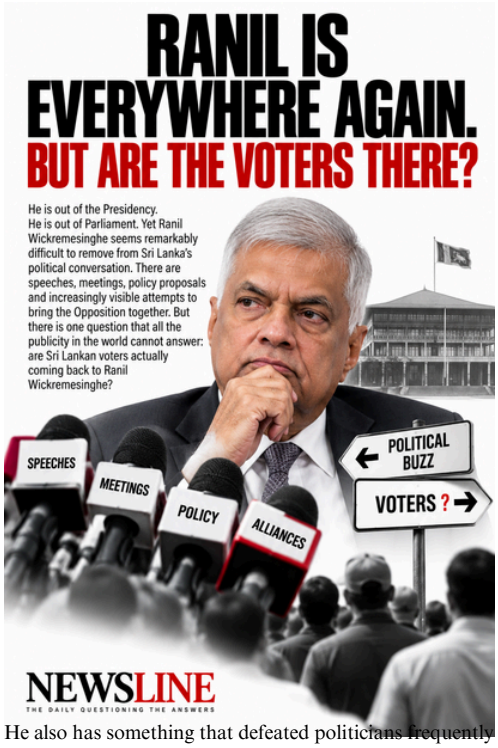
He talks about democracy, constitutional reform or the future of the Opposition and once again Ranil Wickremesinghe occupies political space considerably larger than the parliamentary representation of his party would appear to justify.

The question is whether that represents a genuine political revival.

Or are we confusing visibility with popularity?

There is an important difference.

Wickremesinghe undoubtedly retains influence. Forty-two years of legislative service, six periods as Prime Minister and a term as President have left him with relationships throughout politics, business, diplomacy and the bureaucracy. He knows the machinery of the Sri Lankan state perhaps better than almost anyone still active in politics.



He also has something that defeated politicians frequently lose: access to attention.

But attention is not an election.
The last occasion on which Sri Lanka's voters were asked directly whether Ranil Wickremesinghe should remain President produced an unambiguous result.

At the 2024 presidential election, Anura Kumara Dissanayake received 5,634,915 votes, or 42.31 per cent. Sajith Premadasa received 4,363,035, or 32.76 per cent.

Wickremesinghe, despite contesting as the incumbent President and campaigning on his stewardship of the economic recovery following the 2022 collapse, received 2,299,767 votes 17.27 per cent.

That is nearly 2.1 million votes fewer than Premadasa and more than 3.3 million fewer than Dissanayake.

Those numbers cannot simply be wished away.

There was another warning sign.

Polling conducted shortly before that election suggested that support for Wickremesinghe personally was substantially greater than support for the UNP.

In August 2024, the Institute for Health Policy estimated UNP general-election voting intention at just 9 per cent.
The distinction is crucial.

Ranil Wickremesinghe had a political constituency. The United National Party had a considerably smaller one.And therein lies perhaps the central problem confronting both man and party today.

For decades the UNP was one of the two great pillars of Sri Lankan politics. Governments changed, leaders came and went, but the UNP remained an institution capable of mobilising voters throughout the country.

That electoral infrastructure has fractured.

Much of its former political territory is now occupied by Sajith Premadasa's Samagi Jana Balawegaya.

The 2024 parliamentary election then demonstrated the scale of the transformation, with the NPP securing an overwhelming parliamentary majority while the traditional political establishment was reduced to fragments.

So what exactly is Ranil Wickremesinghe rebuilding?

Recent events provide some clues.

On September 19, Wickremesinghe unveiled what he described as a programme for Sri Lanka's future, including proposals for constitutional and electoral reform, investment, employment and economic development. He said discussions would be conducted with political parties other than the NPP and spoke of eventually transferring responsibility to a younger generation.

There have also been attempts to encourage cooperation across the Opposition.

Most significantly, Wickremesinghe and Sajith Premadasa appeared on the same platform at the commemoration of J.R. Jayewardene's 120th birth anniversary this week, amid continuing discussion about closer cooperation between the UNP and SJB.

Something is clearly moving.

But it does not necessarily follow that what is moving is the electorate.

That distinction is important because Sri Lankan political discussion has an extraordinary capacity to become self-referential. Politicians speak to journalists. Journalists speak to politicians. Political operatives speak to both. Social media amplifies all three.

Eventually everyone can become convinced that something enormous is happening.

The voter may be somewhere else entirely.



"Questioning The Answers"

THE RAJAPAKSAS...

That is why claims of a Ranil resurgence require evidence beyond newspaper columns, television appearances, political meetings and social-media engagement.

Where is the polling?

Where is the demonstrable movement in voting intention?

Where is the evidence that the people who rejected Wickremesinghe in September 2024 have reconsidered him?

And perhaps most importantly, where is the evidence that younger voters who abandoned Sri Lanka's traditional parties are returning to the UNP?

Until those questions can be answered, political visibility should not be mistaken for electoral recovery.

There is nevertheless another side to the Ranil story.

The circumstances under which he became President in 2022 were extraordinary. He inherited a bankrupt state after Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled the country and resigned. Whatever one's political view of Wickremesinghe, the economy he eventually handed over was substantially more stable than the economy he inherited.

That provides him with a political argument which is unlikely to disappear.
His supporters can say: you may not like Ranil, but when the country was collapsing he took responsibility.
His opponents can respond that the stabilisation imposed enormous costs on ordinary Sri Lankans and that Wickremesinghe governed without having personally won the presidential mandate in 2019 or a parliamentary seat in 2020.

Both arguments will continue.

But the electorate has already had one opportunity to judge his post-crisis record. It gave him 17.27 per cent.There is also the matter of age and succession.
Wickremesinghe is now 77.

That does not constitutionally prevent him from contesting another presidential election. The Constitution disqualifies someone who has been twice elected President by the people; Wickremesinghe has not been twice elected President by the people.

The more interesting question therefore is not whether Ranil can contest again.

It is whether rebuilding Sri Lankan liberal-centrist politics around Ranil Wickremesinghe personally is the most plausible route being contemplated by those around him.

His own recent language contains an intriguing clue. He talks increasingly about programmes, coalitions and eventually handing responsibility to younger people.

Perhaps Ranil's next political project is not actually another Ranil presidency.

Perhaps it is becoming kingmaker rather than king.
That would make considerably more sense of what we are watching.

An alliance or accommodation involving the UNP and SJB would bring together political organisations that once constituted a single electoral family. Wickremesinghe retains experience, international relationships and considerable political connections.

Premadasa possesses something Wickremesinghe presently does not: the leadership of the principal parliamentary Opposition and a much larger demonstrated electoral base.

Whether the two political cultures can genuinely coexist is another question altogether.

There is also a simpler route back into Parliament.

Wickremesinghe is not constitutionally condemned to political retirement merely because he currently sits outside the House. A future parliamentary election could provide a route back if he contests and wins, while changes involving a party's National List representation can also create parliamentary openings depending on the circumstances.

But again, legality is not political viability.

The UNP's problem is not finding a parliamentary chair for Ranil Wickremesinghe.

It is finding voters for the UNP.

That is a much bigger job.

And this is where the remarkable efficiency of the Wickremesinghe political communications operation can become both an asset and a trap.

A sophisticated media operation can keep a politician relevant. It can ensure speeches are covered, arguments circulated and appearances noticed. It can remind the country that Ranil Wickremesinghe remains available.

What it cannot manufacture indefinitely is electoral consent.

There is an old political temptation to confuse what people in Colombo are talking about with what Sri Lanka is thinking.

The test of the Ranil revival therefore should not be how frequently his photograph appears in newspapers,how many television bulletins carry his comments or how enthusiastically his interventions circulate among political insiders.

Go to Galle. Go to Anuradhapura. Go to Matara, Kurunegala, Jaffna, Kandy, Monaragala and Gampaha.

Ask the shopkeeper.

Ask the teacher. Ask the three-wheeler driver. Ask the young graduate looking for his first job. Ask the family paying the electricity bill.

Then compare those answers with the conversation taking place inside Colombo's political drawing rooms.

That would tell us considerably more.

Ranil Wickremesinghe should never be casually written off. Sri Lankan politics has done that to him before, sometimes spectacularly prematurely.

A man whose party was reduced to a single National List seat in 2020 was President of Sri Lanka less than two years later.

But 2022 required an almost unimaginable combination of political circumstances.

A country collapsed. A President fled. A government disintegrated. Parliament selected the successor. A return to the Presidency through a nationwide election would be an entirely different proposition.

There is presently no sound evidential basis for saying that Wickremesinghe is on course to achieve it. Nor should the opposite conclusion be presented as certainty. Sri Lankan politics is too fluid for that.

What the evidence presently allows us to say is considerably simpler.

Ranil Wickremesinghe remains influential. Ranil Wickremesinghe remains relevant.

Ranil Wickremesinghe remains exceptionally good at ensuring that Sri Lanka continues talking about Ranil Wickremesinghe. But influence is not popularity. Publicity is not votes.

And relevance is not resurrection.

The next chapter of Ranil Wickremesinghe's extraordinary political career may therefore depend upon whether he recognises that distinction himself.
He may yet return to Parliament.

He may attempt another presidential contest.

But there is a third possibility which deserves considerably more attention: that the final exercise of Ranil Wickremesinghe's political influence will not be getting himself elected again but helping determine what replaces the political order that defeated him.

And perhaps, after nearly half a century at the centre of Sri Lankan politics, that is the more consequential question.

Be that as it may.

4.2% GROWTH. BUT WHO IS FEELING IT?

Sri Lanka's economy grew by 4.2 per cent in the second quarter of 2026. That is good news. But after an economic catastrophe which destroyed incomes, savings and purchasing power, GDP growth alone cannot tell us whether the recovery has reached the household.

NEWSLINE

Sri Lanka has another encouraging economic number to celebrate. The economy grew by an estimated 4.2 per cent in the second quarter of 2026 compared with the same period last year. After the extraordinary contraction that accompanied the economic crisis, sustained positive growth matters.



"Questioning The Answers"

4.2% GROWTH...

Businesses cannot invest, wages cannot sustainably increase and government revenue cannot expand indefinitely unless the economy itself grows.

But a country can be recovering while many of its people do not yet feel recovered. GDP measures economic production. It does not measure whether the family that depleted its savings during the crisis has rebuilt them, whether the pensioner can comfortably buy medicine or whether the small businessman whose costs exploded between 2022 and 2024 has restored his old margins.

Nor does falling inflation mean prices have returned to where they were. It means the rate at which prices are increasing has changed. That distinction is easily lost when economic statistics become political ammunition.

Sri Lanka therefore needs to begin asking a different question about economic recovery. Not simply whether the economy is growing, but where that growth is going and who is actually feeling it.

Are real household incomes rising? Is disposable income recovering? Are small businesses expanding? Are young people finding productive employment? Is private investment creating sufficiently well-paid jobs? And, critically, is the improvement occurring outside Colombo and the Western Province?

These are not questions aimed at this Government alone. For decades Sri Lanka has celebrated macroeconomic achievements without adequately examining their distribution. Governments have announced GDP growth, infrastructure investment, falling unemployment and increasing per-capita income while large sections of the population continued to experience something quite different.

The economic crisis made that disconnect impossible to ignore. Sri Lanka now has an opportunity to measure recovery differently.

Alongside GDP, every major economic announcement should increasingly be read against household income, poverty, food expenditure, real wages, employment quality, SME activity and regional economic performance. That would not diminish a 4.2 per cent growth rate. It would tell us what it actually means.

Because eventually the success of Sri Lanka's recovery will not be decided in a statistical release. It will be decided at the supermarket counter, the pharmacy, the electricity meter and the family dinner table.

That is where economic recovery finally becomes real.

Be that as it may.



WE KEEP BUYING PADDY. WHY DOES THE FARMER KEEP NEEDING RESCUE?

Another Rs 2.5 billion is going to the Paddy Marketing Board to buy the Yala harvest after Rs 6 billion already allocated proved insufficient. Helping farmers when markets fail is understandable. But Sri Lanka has been intervening in paddy for generations. Perhaps the bigger question is why the underlying problem survives every intervention.

NEWSLINE

There is something remarkably familiar about Sri Lanka's latest attempt to protect the paddy farmer. The Government allocated Rs 6 billion for the Paddy Marketing Board to purchase paddy from the 2026 Yala harvest. With harvesting still incomplete in several producing areas and the available allocation proving insufficient, another Rs 2.5 billion has been approved for accelerated purchasing.

There is nothing inherently wrong with that. When farmers are confronted by depressed farm-gate prices during harvesting, a government purchaser can provide an important floor beneath the market. Agriculture also has a food-security dimension that ordinary commodity trading does not.

But Sri Lanka should ask why this problem keeps returning. The farmer wants a decent price for paddy, the consumer wants affordable rice, the miller has to cover processing, storage and financing costs, and the Government wants all three to be happy. Those objectives do not always coexist comfortably.

The result has been a recurring cycle of guaranteed prices, government purchasing, storage, milling arrangements, controlled releases and arguments about large private millers. The machinery keeps moving, yet the controversy keeps returning.

Perhaps the problem is that Sri Lanka has spent too much time debating the price of paddy and not enough examining the economics of producing it. How much does it actually cost an efficient farmer to produce a kilogram of paddy? How much is lost after harvesting? How efficient are storage and transport?

How concentrated is milling capacity? How productive is Sri Lankan paddy cultivation compared with competing producers? How much taxpayer money is repeatedly required to make the system work?

Those answers matter more than another argument about whether the guaranteed price should move by a few rupees.

The long-term objective should surely be a paddy economy in which farmers can earn sustainable incomes without requiring emergency government intervention every harvesting season, while consumers can buy rice without governments repeatedly fighting shortages, surpluses or price spikes.

That requires productivity, irrigation, technology, reliable market information, storage, competition and transparent pricing. Government purchasing may remain part of that architecture, but it cannot be the architecture.

Be that as it may.

39 NEW HEALTH PROJECTS. WILL WE LOOK AFTER THEM?

Thirty-nine health-sector projects are heading towards implementation from 2027. New hospitals, buildings and equipment photograph beautifully. The less glamorous question is what happens ten years later. Sri Lanka needs to become as good at maintaining public infrastructure as it is at building it.

NEWSLINE

There is welcome news for Sri Lanka's public health service. After evaluating health-sector project proposals submitted during 2025 and 2026, 39 projects considered sufficiently ready are to proceed as part of the country's public investment programme.

The purpose is sensible: address infrastructure shortages in government healthcare institutions and upgrade facilities to modern standards. NEWSLINE hopes every worthwhile project gets built.
But we would add one requirement: maintain it.

Sri Lanka's public sector contains an extraordinary amount of infrastructure purchased with taxpayers' money or foreign assistance that subsequently deteriorates because maintenance becomes somebody else's problem. A building is commissioned, a plaque is unveiled and a photograph is taken. Then the political attention moves elsewhere.

Hospitals make the consequences particularly serious. Sophisticated medical equipment requires servicing, air-conditioning and electrical systems require maintenance, laboratories require consumables and buildings require repairs.

An impressive new unit without doctors, nurses, technicians and operating budgets is ultimately an expensive shell.

This is not a criticism peculiar to the present administration. It is an institutional weakness accumulated over many governments. Capital expenditure attracts attention because something tangible appears at the end of it. Maintenance expenditure rarely does.

Nobody cuts a ribbon because an MRI machine received its scheduled preventive maintenance. But that maintenance may ultimately save taxpayers considerably more money than replacing the machine after it fails.

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39 NEW HEALTH ...

The 39 projects therefore provide an opportunity to change the model. Every project should have a life-cycle cost before construction begins: capital cost, expected staffing, annual maintenance, equipment replacement schedules and the recurrent expenditure required to operate the facility properly.

Then Parliament and the public could judge not simply whether something was built, but whether Sri Lanka can afford to operate what it builds. The same principle should eventually extend beyond hospitals to roads, schools, reservoirs, government buildings, railway infrastructure and water systems.

Sri Lanka does not suffer only from an infrastructure deficit. It suffers from a maintenance deficit.

If these 39 health projects are still functioning beautifully twenty years from now, that will be a considerably greater achievement than opening all 39 on time.

Be that as it may.

WE BUILT OVER THE WATER. NOW WE'RE PAYING TO PUT IT BACK.

Development and land reclamation around Piliyandala altered natural drainage, reduced water-retention capacity and increased flooding. The proposed solution includes drainage works, retention areas and protected wetlands. There is a much bigger lesson here for Sri Lanka: water remembers where it used to go.

NEWSLINE

Sometimes a Cabinet decision tells a much larger story than the project it is approving. The Government has approved a storm-water drainage and environmental improvement project beside the Piliyandala–Kesbewa bypass, and the explanation for why it is needed deserves attention.

Urbanisation around Piliyandala over the past decade, including construction through reclaimed paddy lands and other development, has affected natural drainage. Reclaiming low-lying land reduced the area's ability to retain water, increased surface runoff and contributed to flood risk even during relatively modest rainfall.

The response now includes improving drainage, rehabilitating culverts, constructing water-retention areas and protecting environmentally sensitive wetland areas. In other words, we removed some of nature's drainage system and are now spending money trying to recreate it.

There is a lesson here considerably larger than Piliyandala. Sri Lanka's wetlands, marshes, paddy fields, canals and floodplains are not empty land waiting for something economically useful to be placed upon them.

They are infrastructure.

They store water, slow runoff, absorb rainfall and reduce pressure on drains and canals. And they do it without sending the Treasury an invoice.

Urban development inevitably requires compromises. Cities need houses, roads, businesses, schools and transport systems, and not every piece of undeveloped land can remain untouched. But development decisions must price the environmental service being destroyed.

If reclaiming ten acres saves money today but requires taxpayers to spend hundreds of millions later on drainage, pumping and flood mitigation, the original economics may have been an illusion. Climate variability makes this still more important because increasingly intense rainfall can expose weaknesses that previously appeared manageable.

Sri Lanka therefore needs to stop treating storm-water management as something constructed after flooding begins. It is part of urban planning itself.

Every major development in a flood-sensitive area should answer a simple question before approval: where will the water go? Not where we hope it will go, but where, physically, it will go when extraordinary rain arrives.

Piliyandala's answer is now costing money. The useful thing would be to learn the lesson before the next town makes the same mistake.

Because roads can be redirected. Water usually finds its own way home.

Be that as it may.

AKD HAS THE NUMBERS. NOW COMES THE HARDER TEST.

Anura Kumara Dissanayake achieved what once looked politically impossible: he took a movement from the margins of Sri Lankan politics to the Presidency and then secured 159 seats in Parliament. Nearly two years later, the more interesting question is no longer how AKD won. It is what he will ultimately do with power on a scale few Sri Lankan leaders have possessed.

NEWSLINE

Anura Kumara Dissanayake has already secured his place in Sri Lanka's political history. Whether he secures the place he wants in its economic and institutional history remains unresolved.

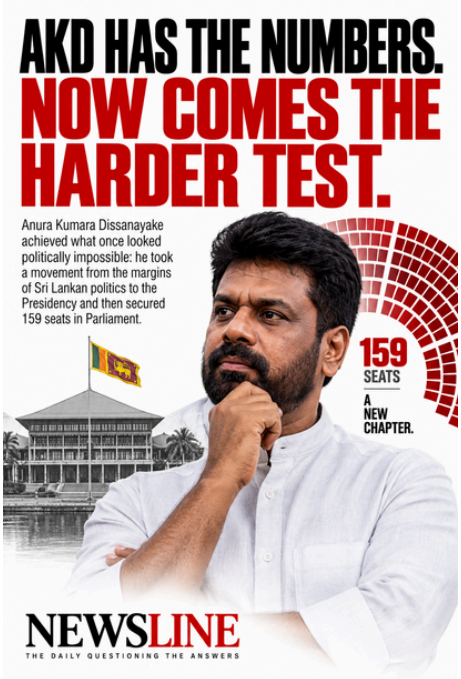
The scale of the transformation is worth remembering. The political tradition from which Dissanayake emerged spent decades outside the centre of governmental power. Today the National People's Power occupies 159 of Parliament's 225 seats while the principal Opposition, the SJB, has 40.

That majority gives President Dissanayake something most democratic leaders can only envy: political room.

He cannot plausibly explain an inability to pass ordinary legislation by pointing to a hostile Parliament. He does not depend upon an unstable coalition assembled from competing parties. His Government possesses the numbers to pursue a substantial programme.

But enormous parliamentary power creates enormous political responsibility. AKD also arrived carrying something less measurable but equally important: expectation.

His movement was not elected merely to administer Sri Lanka slightly better than its predecessors. It promised a different political culture. Corruption, privilege, waste, abuse of power and the relationship between politicians and the State formed part of the argument that brought the NPP into office.



That makes the standard against which it will ultimately be judged unusually high. There is already an interesting contradiction in the AKD presidency, although not necessarily an unhealthy one: the insurgent politician became a cautious President.

Dissanayake entered office with an economy too fragile to withstand drastic shocks. His administration continued broadly within the economic stabilisation programme it inherited rather than attempting to dismantle it, while placing its own emphasis on governance, anti-corruption and the conduct of the State.

That is politically significant. The movement that spent years attacking Sri Lanka's established economic and political order discovered, once responsible for the Treasury, reserves, debt and international financing, that government imposes disciplines opposition does not.

That is not necessarily hypocrisy. It may simply be government.

The more revealing test is whether AKD can combine economic pragmatism with the political



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AKD HAS THE NUMBERS...

transformation he promised. That is considerably harder.

Arresting somebody accused of corruption attracts headlines. Building institutions in which corruption becomes structurally difficult attracts fewer. Removing an extravagant privilege is popular, while creating procurement systems capable of resisting political interference for the next twenty years is less visible.

Changing politicians is relatively easy. Changing the State is extraordinarily difficult.

This may ultimately become the defining distinction of the Dissanayake presidency.

If his anti-corruption programme depends principally upon the integrity of Anura Kumara Dissanayake and the people immediately around him, Sri Lanka will have achieved less than it imagines.

If it produces institutions that remain independent when AKD himself is eventually gone, it will have achieved something much more important.

The same applies to economic reform. Sri Lanka is growing again, but economic stabilisation and economic transformation are different things.

Stabilisation repairs the patient. Transformation changes what made the patient sick.

Sri Lanka still needs substantially greater investment, exports, productivity, competition and well-paid employment. It still has to confront inefficient parts of the State, and it must do so while protecting citizens who absorbed an extraordinary economic shock.

This is where AKD's huge parliamentary majority can become either his greatest asset or his greatest danger. A large majority allows difficult reform, but it can also weaken scrutiny.

The Government has 159 MPs against an Opposition divided among considerably smaller groups. That imbalance makes the Government's own attitude toward criticism particularly important. A confident administration should not fear questions simply because they are uncomfortable.

Parliamentary scrutiny, independent journalism, courts, auditors, regulators and a functioning Opposition are not inconveniences standing between a good government and progress. They are part of the machinery that helps prevent a good government from eventually becoming a bad one.

Sri Lanka has learned that lesson repeatedly. The President therefore faces a fascinating choice: he can use 159 seats primarily to govern quickly, or he can use the security provided by 159 seats to build institutions strong enough eventually to constrain even his own Government.

The second would be much more unusual.

There is also the matter of time. Political mandates depreciate. The enthusiasm surrounding a new government inevitably encounters electricity bills, taxes, food prices, jobs, strikes, bureaucracy and the ordinary irritations of governing.

At that point citizens stop comparing the Government with its promises. They compare their lives with their expectations.

That is why the next phase of AKD's presidency may be more difficult than the first. Winning power required persuading Sri Lankans that the old political order had failed. Using power requires demonstrating that the new one works.

Those are entirely different political skills.

AKD's supporters can point to economic stability, continuing growth and an administration that says it is confronting corruption and attempting to change the culture of government. His critics can demand faster improvements in living standards, stronger institutional safeguards and evidence that investigations and enforcement are consistent rather than politically selective.

Both propositions can be tested over time. And that is precisely why AKD should be judged neither as the revolutionary some once feared nor as the national saviour others imagined.

He should be judged as President.

By what happened to the economy, what happened to institutions, whether corruption became harder, whether government became more competent and whether opportunity widened. Ultimately, the bigger test is whether Sri Lanka becomes a country in which the quality of government depends less upon the identity of the person occupying the Presidential Secretariat.

Anura Kumara Dissanayake has something his predecessors frequently wished they possessed: the numbers.

History will be considerably more interested in what he did with them.

Be that as it may.

4.2% GROWTH. BUT WHO IS FEELING IT?

Sri Lanka's economy grew by 4.2 per cent in the second quarter of 2026. That is good news. But after an economic catastrophe which destroyed incomes, savings and purchasing power, GDP growth alone cannot tell us whether the recovery has reached the household.

NEWSLINE

Sri Lanka has another encouraging economic number to celebrate. The economy grew by an estimated 4.2 per cent in the second quarter of 2026 compared with the same period last year.

After the extraordinary contraction that accompanied the economic crisis, sustained positive growth matters. Businesses cannot invest, wages cannot sustainably increase and government revenue cannot expand indefinitely unless the economy itself grows.

But a country can be recovering while many of its people do not yet feel recovered. GDP measures economic production.

It does not measure whether the family that depleted its savings during the crisis has rebuilt them, whether the pensioner can comfortably buy medicine or whether the small businessman whose costs exploded between 2022 and 2024 has restored his old margins.

Nor does falling inflation mean prices have returned to where they were. It means the rate at which prices are increasing has changed. That distinction is easily lost when economic statistics become political ammunition.

Sri Lanka therefore needs to begin asking a different question about economic recovery. Not simply whether the economy is growing, but where that growth is going and who is actually feeling it.

Are real household incomes rising? Is disposable income recovering? Are small businesses expanding? Are young people finding productive employment? Is private investment creating sufficiently well-paid jobs? And, critically, is the improvement occurring outside Colombo and the Western Province?

These are not questions aimed at this Government alone. For decades Sri Lanka has celebrated macroeconomic achievements without adequately examining their distribution. Governments have announced GDP growth, infrastructure investment, falling unemployment and increasing per-capita income while large sections of the population continued to experience something quite different.

The economic crisis made that disconnect impossible to ignore. Sri Lanka now has an opportunity to measure recovery differently.

Alongside GDP, every major economic announcement should increasingly be read against household income, poverty, food expenditure, real wages, employment quality, SME activity and regional economic performance. That would not diminish a 4.2 per cent growth rate. It would tell us what it actually means.

Because eventually the success of Sri Lanka's recovery will not be decided in a statistical release. It will be decided at the supermarket counter, the pharmacy, the electricity meter and the family dinner table.

That is where economic recovery finally becomes real.

Be that as it may.

MO MARKETPLACE

NEWSLINE
Daily by Faraz
"Questioning The Answers"

WE KEEP BUYING PADDY. WHY DOES THE FARMER KEEP NEEDING RESCUE?

Another Rs 2.5 billion is going to the Paddy Marketing Board to buy the Yala harvest after Rs 6 billion already allocated proved insufficient. Helping farmers when markets fail is understandable. But Sri Lanka has been intervening in paddy for generations. Perhaps the bigger question is why the underlying problem survives every intervention.

NEWSLINE

There is something remarkably familiar about Sri Lanka's latest attempt to protect the paddy farmer. The Government allocated Rs 6 billion for the Paddy Marketing Board to purchase paddy from the 2026 Yala harvest. With harvesting still incomplete in several producing areas and the available allocation proving insufficient, another Rs 2.5 billion has been approved for accelerated purchasing.

There is nothing inherently wrong with that. When farmers are confronted by depressed farm-gate prices during harvesting, a government purchaser can provide an important floor beneath the market. Agriculture also has a food-security dimension that ordinary commodity trading does not.

But Sri Lanka should ask why this problem keeps returning. The farmer wants a decent price for paddy, the consumer wants affordable rice, the miller has to cover processing, storage and financing costs, and the Government wants all three to be happy. Those objectives do not always coexist comfortably.

The result has been a recurring cycle of guaranteed prices, government purchasing, storage, milling arrangements, controlled releases and arguments about large private millers. The machinery keeps moving, yet the controversy keeps returning.

Perhaps the problem is that Sri Lanka has spent too much time debating the price of paddy and not enough examining the economics of producing it. How much does it actually cost an efficient farmer to produce a kilogram of paddy?

How much is lost after harvesting? How efficient are storage and transport? How concentrated is milling capacity? How productive is Sri Lankan paddy cultivation compared with competing producers?

How much taxpayer money is repeatedly required to make the system work?

Those answers matter more than another argument about whether the guaranteed price should move by a few rupees. The long-term objective should surely be a paddy economy in which farmers can earn sustainable incomes without requiring emergency government intervention every harvesting season, while consumers can buy rice without governments repeatedly fighting shortages, surpluses or price spikes.

That requires productivity, irrigation, technology, reliable market information, storage, competition and transparent pricing.

Government purchasing may remain part of that architecture, but it cannot be the architecture.

After decades of interventions, Sri Lanka should know enough about paddy to design a system that does not have to be rescued twice a year. The farmer deserves better than permanent uncertainty. So does the taxpayer.

Be that as it may.

