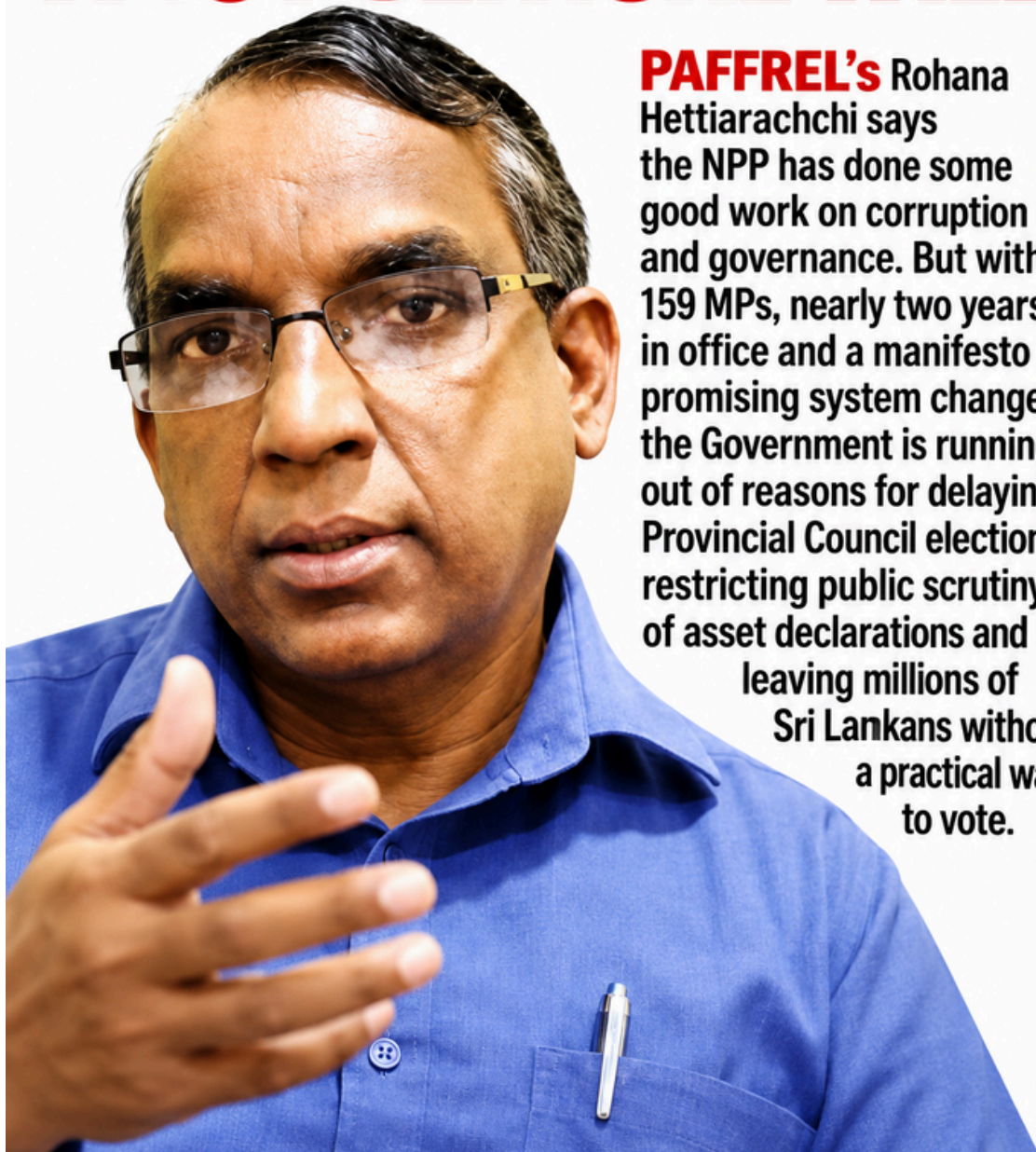


**NEWSLINE***Daily by Faraz***"Questioning
The Answers"**

THE PROBLEM IS NO LONGER THE LAW. IT IS POLITICAL WILL.



PAFFREL's Rohana Hettiarachchi says the NPP has done some good work on corruption and governance. But with 159 MPs, nearly two years in office and a manifesto promising system change, the Government is running out of reasons for delaying Provincial Council elections, restricting public scrutiny of asset declarations and leaving millions of Sri Lankans without a practical way to vote.



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PAFFREL's Rohana Hettiarachchi says the NPP has done some good work on corruption and governance. But with 159 MPs, nearly two years in office and a manifesto promising system change, the Government is running out of reasons for delaying Provincial Council elections, restricting public scrutiny of asset declarations and leaving millions of Sri Lankans without a practical way to vote.

Sri Lanka voted for change. First Anura Kumara Disanayake won the presidency and then the NPP was handed 159 seats in Parliament. It was an extraordinary mandate, built not simply on replacing one collection of politicians with another, but on changing the system itself.

Nearly two years later, the question is becoming unavoidable. How much of the system has actually changed?

PAFFREL Executive Director Rohana Hettiarachchi, speaking to Faraz Shaukataly on *Newsline: The Turning Point*, says his organisation and the March 12 Movement are now doing something rather important. They are tracking what the NPP promised against what the Government actually delivers.

That distinction matters.

Governments are very good at promises. They are also very good at committees, Cabinet papers, consultations and announcements. Delivery is rather more difficult.

One area where Hettiarachchi sees little excuse for further delay is Provincial Council elections.

The NPP manifesto, he says, promised Local Government and Provincial Council elections within its first year. Local Government elections have been held. Provincial Council elections have not.

The familiar explanation is that the electoral system remains tangled in legislation and delimitation. Hettiarachchi does not accept that this remains an insurmountable obstacle.

PAFFREL brought together representatives of 44 political parties around two months ago. According to Hettiarachchi, every party agreed that the immediate Provincial Council election could be conducted by reverting to the previous electoral system.

There was one important complication. The newer system provided for a 25 percent quota for women while the old system did not. Hettiarachchi says the parties agreed voluntarily to maintain 25 percent female representation among candidates.

If that account is correct, something rather important has happened. The technical argument is disappearing.

“My reading is that the Government simply lacks the political will,” Hettiarachchi said.

That deserves attention because elections are not supposed to be held when governments believe the timing is convenient.

Hettiarachchi suspects the Government would prefer to show greater progress on the ground before facing another election. Previous governments have done much the same thing, waiting for public frustration to subside or political conditions to improve.

The NPP, however, came to power promising to behave differently. Then there is corruption.

This is perhaps the more serious test because the battle against corruption was not a footnote in the NPP campaign. It was one of the principal reasons people voted for it.

Hettiarachchi says the Government is doing many good things in this area. But he is deeply concerned about provisions in the proposed changes to the anti-corruption framework, particularly those affecting what citizens can do with information contained in asset declarations.

At present, he says, publicly available information can be accessed, analysed and published.

That matters.

If a politician enters public life with one level of wealth and several years later possesses substantially more, citizens and journalists ought to be able to ask a perfectly reasonable question.

Where did the money come from? In a twist from the NDB Bank fraud, this time, the money wasn't there until it was!

Hettiarachchi says the proposed framework would still permit information to be accessed and possible wrongdoing to be reported to the Bribery Commission or pursued legally. The problem is what happens in between. His concern is that the public's ability to analyse that information and bring those findings into public discussion would be restricted.

PAFFREL has challenged the proposed legislation and appealed to President Disanayake to reconsider it.

There is an entirely legitimate argument on the other side. Asset declarations should not become weapons with which politicians and public officials are maliciously smeared using distorted or deliberately misinterpreted information.

Hettiarachchi accepts that.

Punish deliberate abuse if necessary.

But that is not the same thing as restricting legitimate scrutiny.

After all, what is the point of declaring assets if the public is prevented from asking meaningful questions about them?

PAFFREL is also concerned about concentrating substantial authority in the Director-General of CIABOC rather than the Commission collectively.

Hettiarachchi's argument is not about whether the present Director-General is good or bad. It is about something Sri Lanka has repeatedly failed to understand when designing institutions.

Never write a law on the assumption that a good person will always occupy the chair.

A powerful office may function perfectly well when occupied by someone independent, competent and restrained. The problem begins when someone politically compromised or less restrained inherits exactly the same powers.

Hettiarachchi therefore argues that authority should rest with the Commission rather than becoming excessively concentrated in one individual.

Checks and balances are not designed because we distrust everyone. They exist because eventually someone will come along whom we should have distrusted.

There is another democratic deficit that receives considerably less attention.

Hettiarachchi estimates that around one million people within Sri Lanka can effectively lose their opportunity to vote because they cannot physically reach their designated polling station on election day. They include some journalists working away from their polling areas, election observers, medical personnel, private security employees and remand prisoners.

Sri Lanka has postal voting, but not for everybody who happens to be working on election day. It is principally available to eligible public officials performing election-related duties.

There is no general advance-voting mechanism and no convenient alternative polling arrangement for many of these people.

Then there are Sri Lankans overseas. Hettiarachchi puts that population at roughly 2.5 million. Successive governments have promised to find a mechanism through which overseas Sri Lankans can vote.

The problem is considerably more complicated than simply putting a ballot box inside an embassy. Hundreds of thousands of Sri Lankans can be working in a single Middle Eastern country, some enormous distances from the embassy.

But difficulty is not an argument for doing nothing.

The present Government has appointed a committee to examine international systems and possible alternatives. That is welcome. Eventually, however, another committee must produce something more useful than another report.

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THE PROBLEM IS NO ...

These people send billions of dollars home. They support families, strengthen Sri Lanka's foreign-exchange position and remain Sri Lankan citizens.

Surely citizenship should mean something on election day too.

Hettiarachchi believes President Dissanayake remains personally popular and estimates his support at around 60 percent, although he makes clear that this is an assessment rather than the result of formal polling. He also believes the Opposition remains divided and weak.

He describes many NPP politicians positively and gives the Government credit for aspects of its work on corruption and governance. But there is a gap between being clean and delivering change.

The NPP made enormous promises. A new Constitution. Reform of the Executive Presidency. Lower household burdens. Electoral reform. Provincial Council elections. A different political culture.

People may be willing to wait. After everything Sri Lanka has endured, many clearly are.

They will not wait forever. Hettiarachchi put the danger in remarkably ordinary terms.

The kitchen.

Electricity bills remain painful. Household expenses remain difficult. Families do not experience economic policy through spreadsheets, GDP projections or ten-year plans. They experience it when they open the refrigerator, pay the electricity bill and decide what they can afford for dinner.

“If a government fails to feel the heartbeat of the public, they will run into serious trouble,” he warned.

That is probably the most important political observation of all.

AKD has something most Sri Lankan leaders who promised reform would have loved to possess. He has the presidency. He has 159 MPs. He has a mandate for change.

He inherited an electorate willing to tolerate difficult decisions because it believed something fundamentally different was being attempted.

The Government therefore has political capital.

The danger is believing political capital cannot run out.

On Provincial Council elections, PAFFREL says the remaining obstacle is political will. On electoral reform, millions of Sri Lankans remain effectively excluded from voting. On overseas voting, another generation of migrant workers is waiting. On anti-corruption legislation, PAFFREL is asking why a Government elected on transparency should contemplate restricting legitimate public scrutiny of asset declarations.

These are not attacks on system change. They are tests of it. Sri Lanka did not give the NPP 159 seats merely to explain why things cannot be done.

It gave them 159 seats because voters believed they could be.

Be that as it may.

FROM SRI LANKA TO NORWAY'S CABINET

She was born in Sri Lanka and left for Norway as a small child. Today Kamzy Gunaratnam is Norway's Minister of Transport. It is an impressive personal journey, but perhaps there is also a question in it for the country she left behind.

Kamzy Gunaratnam was appointed Norway's Minister of Transport on September 11, 2026, joining the government of Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre. It puts the 38-year-old Sri Lankan-born politician in charge of one of the most important portfolios in a highly developed European economy.



Born in Sri Lanka on March 27, 1988, Gunaratnam moved to Norway with her family in 1991. They initially settled in Hammerfest in Norway's far north before later moving to Oslo.

Her rise was not sudden. A member of Norway's Labour Party, she entered Oslo City Council in 2007 and served as Oslo's Deputy Mayor from 2015 to 2021.

She subsequently entered the Norwegian Parliament, the Storting, in 2021 and served as first deputy chair of its Transport and Communications Committee before being appointed Transport Minister.

There is another remarkable chapter to her story. Gunaratnam was on Utøya on July 22, 2011, when a terrorist attacked a Labour Party youth camp and murdered 69 people. She survived. She remained in politics.

There is something here for Sri Lanka beyond the

familiar celebration of another Sri Lankan-born person doing exceptionally well overseas.

Norway did not make Gunaratnam a Cabinet minister because she was born in Sri Lanka. It appointed a Norwegian politician who had spent nearly two decades working her way through local government, national politics and the parliamentary machinery dealing with transport.

That distinction matters.

Sri Lanka is often proud when people born here, or descended from Sri Lankans, reach positions of consequence elsewhere. We celebrate the achievement, quite rightly. But perhaps we should occasionally ask the harder question.

What was it about the society they entered that allowed them to rise, and would somebody arriving in Sri Lanka as a three-year-old immigrant have been given the same opportunity?

That may be the more important part of Kamzy Gunaratnam's story.

Be that as it may, from a Sri Lankan childhood to responsibility for helping keep Norway moving, it is quite a journey.

THE IMF HAS SAID YES. NOW READ THE SMALL PRINT.

Sri Lanka has reached staff-level agreement with the IMF on its seventh review. Another US\$345 million could follow. That sounds like good news, and it is. But there is an important word in that sentence: could. The 2027 Budget now matters enormously.

Sri Lanka has cleared another important hurdle in its long journey out of economic collapse. The International Monetary Fund and the Government have reached staff-level agreement on the seventh review of the four-year Extended Fund Facility.

Subject to approval by the IMF Executive Board, Sri Lanka will gain access to SDR 254 million, approximately US\$345 million. That would take total IMF financial support disbursed under the present arrangement to about US\$2.7 billion.

Those are respectable numbers. There are others.

The economy expanded by 4.2 percent in the second quarter of 2026. That represents eleven consecutive quarters of growth. Headline inflation is running at 8 percent and gross official reserves reached US\$6.9 billion by the end of August.

Banks remain well capitalised and profitable. Fiscal performance during the first half of the year was strong. Debt restructuring is described as largely completed.

Two years after Anura Kumara Disanayake became President, therefore, the economy is demonstrably more

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THE ICE IS NOT...

stable than the wreckage Sri Lanka confronted during the crisis.

The Government deserves acknowledgement for maintaining that stability.

But that is not quite the end of the story.

The US\$345 million has not yet been approved for disbursement. Before the IMF Executive Board signs off, two important things have to happen.

The first is the financing assurances review, which examines financing commitments and progress with debt restructuring.

The second is politically much more interesting.

The Minister of Finance must present Sri Lanka's 2027 Budget to Parliament in line with the parameters of the IMF programme.

That Minister of Finance is also President Anura Kumara Disanayake.

And there lies the real story.

The NPP was elected with an extraordinary political mandate. It controls 159 seats in Parliament. It promised change.

It also inherited an economy whose recovery architecture had already been built around an IMF programme negotiated under the previous administration.

The Government chose not to dismantle it.

That was probably inevitable. It may also have been sensible.

But as Sri Lanka moves further away from the emergency of 2022, the question becomes increasingly legitimate: when does economic stabilisation become the Government's own economic programme?

The IMF continues to prescribe some fairly clear boundaries. Energy pricing should remain cost-reflective. Fuel prices should move with international prices. Exchange-rate flexibility should continue.

Revenue mobilisation must be sustained. Tax exemptions and incentives require discipline. Vulnerable people should be protected through targeted assistance rather than broad subsidies.

None of that is necessarily unreasonable.

But governments are elected to make choices.

The 2027 Budget therefore becomes rather more than another annual exercise in taxation and expenditure.

It will provide one of the clearest indications yet of how much room the NPP believes it has to pursue its own economic philosophy while remaining inside the IMF framework.

There is another uncomfortable consideration.

Sri Lanka has achieved stability, but stability is not prosperity.

An economy can grow while households remain under pressure. Reserves can improve while disposable incomes remain squeezed. Banks can be profitable while small businesses struggle for credit. Inflation can be brought under control after prices have already risen beyond the reach of many families.

The next phase cannot simply be about satisfying another review.

It has to be about converting macroeconomic recovery into something Sri Lankans can actually feel.

The IMF has given Sri Lanka another conditional green light.

The more interesting question now is what President Disanayake does when he stands before Parliament with the 2027 Budget.

That is where we may finally discover how much of Sri Lanka's post-crisis economic policy belongs to the IMF, and how much belongs to the Government Sri Lankans elected to change it.

Be that as it may, US\$345 million is useful. Economic ownership may eventually prove considerably more valuable.

159 VOTES. BUT THE CONSTITUTION STILL HAS THE LAST WORD

The Government came to office promising to fight corruption and has 159 MPs behind it. Now parts of its Anti-Corruption Amendment Bill have run into constitutional difficulties. The interesting question is not whether the NPP has the numbers, but what it chooses to do with them.

Sri Lanka probably needs no convincing that corruption remains a serious problem. The country has spent decades watching allegations emerge, investigations begin, governments change and cases disappear somewhere between public outrage and judicial conclusion.

The NPP understood that frustration rather well and made anti-corruption central to the promise of change that carried Anura Kumara Disanayake to the presidency and subsequently delivered 159 seats in Parliament.

That makes what happens in Parliament on Thursday rather important. The Anti-Corruption Amendment Bill is due for its Second Reading, but the Supreme Court has already examined the proposed legislation and found constitutional difficulties with several provisions.

One involves asset declarations by owners, chairpersons and directors of certain media institutions. The Court found the provision inconsistent with constitutional protections concerning equality and freedom of expression.

It can still be enacted with a two-thirds majority, something this Government possesses comfortably enough on paper.

Another issue concerns declarations involving people who have lived in the same household as the person making the declaration for more than six months. The proposed change has also encountered constitutional difficulty and would require a special majority if retained in its present form.

More significant is the question of bail. A proposed provision restricting the ability of a Magistrate to grant bail, while also placing restrictions upon the High Court, has been found constitutionally problematic enough to require both a two-thirds majority and approval at a referendum if enacted in its present form.

The Government has indicated that it does not intend to hold a referendum, meaning the provision will have to be amended or removed.

There is nothing extraordinary about legislation being challenged before the Supreme Court. That is part of constitutional government.

Parliament proposes laws, citizens are entitled to challenge them and the Court determines whether those proposals comply with the Constitution and, where they do not, what would be required for them to become law.

What makes this particular exercise interesting is the political context. This is a Government elected specifically to change the way power is exercised, and it has been given an unusually large parliamentary majority with which to do it. The size of that majority is both its great political advantage and an important test of how it intends to govern.

The NPP can overcome some constitutional objections because it possesses enough MPs to produce the required special majority.

But the fact that Parliament is constitutionally permitted to enact something with two-thirds does not necessarily answer whether the Government should proceed without reconsidering the provision itself.

That distinction becomes especially important when legislation touches the media, personal financial information, judicial discretion and the liberty of an accused person.

Sri Lanka needs stronger anti-corruption machinery, meaningful asset declarations and investigators capable of following money and prosecuting wrongdoing. Public officials who accumulate wealth inconsistent with legitimate income should expect scrutiny.

But anti-corruption cannot become a convenient justification for weakening safeguards intended to protect everyone. The rule of law is not strengthened by giving one institution greater power while unnecessarily diminishing the authority or independence of another.

Thursday therefore offers the Government an opportunity to demonstrate what its 159 seats actually mean.

It could use its majority simply to overcome those objections that the Constitution allows a two-thirds



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SRI LANKA HAS US\$6.9 BILLION IN RESERVES. HOW MUCH OF IT IS REALLY OURS?

Sri Lanka's gross official reserves stood at around US\$6.9 billion at the end of August. It is an important recovery from the desperation of 2022 and certainly worth acknowledging. But gross reserves and money immediately available for Sri Lanka to spend are not necessarily the same thing.

There are few numbers that demonstrate Sri Lanka's recovery from the economic crisis more dramatically than foreign exchange reserves. In 2022, the country reached the point where finding dollars to pay for essential imports became a national emergency. Fuel queues, power cuts and shortages were the visible consequences of a balance sheet that had gone badly wrong.

Today the picture is considerably better. Gross official reserves are around US\$6.9 billion, giving Sri Lanka a foreign exchange cushion that would have appeared almost unimaginable during the worst days of the crisis.

That is an achievement and should be recognised as one. But there is a danger in allowing one large number to do too much work.

Gross official reserves are exactly what the description says they are: gross. They can include foreign currency assets that are subject to particular arrangements or cannot necessarily be treated in exactly the same way as freely usable dollars sitting in an account waiting to pay an import bill.

The most obvious example in Sri Lanka's case has been the currency swap with the People's Bank of China. That arrangement has formed part of the country's reported reserve position, while its usability has historically been subject to conditions.

That does not make the reserve figure false. It makes understanding its composition important.

There is another reason the distinction matters. Sri Lanka is moving from the immediate crisis-management phase into a period in which external debt payments again become increasingly relevant. The country must finance imports, meet external obligations and maintain enough reserves to convince markets that another foreign exchange crisis is not waiting around the corner.

The headline figure therefore tells only part of the story.

What matters is how much of the reserve stock is readily usable, how rapidly the Central Bank is accumulating foreign currency, what liabilities sit against those assets and how the position changes as debt-service obligations increase.

There is also an interesting policy tension. The Central Bank wants to build reserves, which generally means purchasing foreign currency from the domestic market when conditions allow. At the same time, businesses need dollars for imports and investors need confidence that foreign currency can move through the economy without the restrictions associated with the crisis years.

Building the buffer without unnecessarily distorting the market is therefore part of the challenge.

Sri Lanka should nevertheless take considerable comfort from how far it has travelled.

A country that once struggled to finance basic imports now has billions of dollars recorded in official reserves. That represents restored tourism earnings, remittances, exports, external financing and a degree of confidence that simply did not exist during the collapse.

SRI LANKA HAS US\$6.9 BILLION IN RESERVES. HOW MUCH OF IT IS REALLY OURS?

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But confidence is better served by clarity than by impressive headline numbers.

The public should be able to understand not merely how large Sri Lanka's reserves are, but what they consist of, how much is readily available and what level the country ultimately needs if it is to withstand another serious external shock.

US\$6.9 billion is certainly better than the alternative Sri Lanka experienced four years ago.

The next stage of the recovery should be ensuring that the country's reserve strength is as substantial underneath the headline as it appears from the headline itself.

Be that as it may, having US\$6.9 billion in gross reserves is reassuring. Knowing exactly how much of it we can use would be even more so.

NEW SRI LANKA CRICKET BILL TO BE PRESENTED IN PARLIAMENT TUESDAY

The government is set to present the new Sri Lanka Cricket Bill in Parliament on Tuesday, October 6, as part of proposed sweeping reforms to the administration and governance of cricket in Sri Lanka.

According to Parliament's Order Paper, the Bill will be presented by the Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports. Parliament is scheduled to meet at 9.30 a.m.

The proposed legislation seeks to establish Sri Lanka Cricket under a new statutory framework covering the control, governance, regulation, promotion, development and administration of cricket in the country.

The Bill also seeks to promote good governance, integrity, transparency, accountability and inclusivity, while providing equal opportunities and safeguarding the welfare of those involved in cricket.



It also contains provisions aimed at protecting the sport from corruption and other improper conduct and sets out the proposed constitution, powers and functions of Sri Lanka Cricket.

Among the major changes previously outlined by Parliament is a new governance structure involving independent directors. District Cricket Associations would no longer directly participate in decision-making at Sri Lanka Cricket and would instead operate through Provincial Cricket Associations.

The proposed law also sets out eligibility and disqualification criteria for directors and includes restrictions relating to corruption, betting, match-fixing and certain sanctions imposed by cricket and anti-doping authorities.

Cabinet earlier approved the preparation of legislation to restructure Sri Lanka Cricket, while the Attorney General subsequently granted clearance for the Bill.

Cabinet then approved its publication in the Government Gazette and presentation to Parliament.

Tuesday's presentation will constitute the First Reading of the Bill, the initial stage of the parliamentary legislative process.

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