

Rapid Response

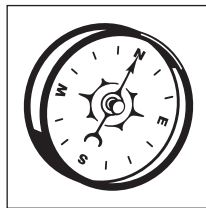
to Overcome Current Challenges



JATHIKA JANA BALAVEGAYA (NPP)

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to Overcome Current Challenges



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We do not need a sophisticated grasp of statistics or politics to understand the socio-economic catastrophe that has befallen our country due to the misguided economic and social policies pursued by various governments since independence. A corrupt political culture that has become entrenched in Sri Lankan society, grew over many decades. We only need to look at the current struggle people endure to secure their daily essentials to realize the severity of the economic crisis facing Sri Lanka. To feel and experience this crisis we need not know about our rapidly declining foreign reserves or how indebted we have become as a country. Simply trying to buy some groceries or not knowing whether the gas cylinder you purchased will explode is sufficient evidence of the precariousness of our lives.

There are too many examples of how widespread this crisis is and how it has spread like a cancer across our society. Parents who are forced to pursue politicians and officials to admit a child to school, or the children who relentlessly pursue tuition and pass their A/Ls but do not have access to higher education or the children who drop out of school because of economic hardship are all manifestations of this crisis and how it has ruined our education system.

The fact that a country that boasts a ‘free’ healthcare where households have to spend more than 50% of their income on personal health is ample evidence of the

problems in our country's health policy. Our elders suffer the indignity of having to queue for hours to receive a meagre senior citizen's allowance. Other elders are abandoned on streets, left to fend for themselves, with no system to take care of them in their twilight years. Widespread domestic violence is another indicator of the levels of frustration in this society and how dangerous life in Sri Lanka has become.

The young people thronging passport queues desperate to leave this country because they see no future for themselves is a clear indicator of the sense of helplessness that has engulfed our youth. Businesses are collapsing because the problems of small and medium scale entrepreneurs are unaddressed while crony businessmen close to the government become mega-rich. These are all indicators of the economic crisis that is sweeping across Sri Lanka.

Unregulated development, often carried out by those with political influence, is resulting in frequent loss of life and property due to natural disasters such as landslides and floods on a scale we have never seen before. This shows how even our natural environment has been corrupted by this cancer of political and social dishonesty.

The current government attempts to place the blame for these multiple crises on the pandemic. However, what the pandemic has exposed are long-standing weaknesses in our social, political and economic institutions. These are nothing new. We have inherited an economy and a society that cannot withstand a natural disaster or an unexpected emergency. This situation is the logical outcome of misguided policies



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and priorities we have pursued for many decades.

It is not just us but the whole world is experiencing a similar crisis. The world economy has grown, but it has grown in a way that has created tremendous inequality. The Earth's environment has been devastated. As a result, the entire world has begun to think and move in a different direction. Many today believe that we need to build a more just, compassionate, and humane world. Although this is not an easy task, we believe that at least a few initial steps need to be taken towards this change. There is an awakening of such a spirit all over the world.

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We have nowhere left to turn nor a moment to lose. Continuing on this disastrous path will endanger not only our lives but the lives of many generations to come, including those of our own children. At this point, should we not awaken our conscience to stand for a profound and broad change? Is it not time we revisit these destructive socio-economic policies and join hands with a political movement capable of achieving this change?

As the National People's Power (NPP), we present some initial ideas and proposals for laying the foundation to achieve the socio-economic transformation that our society desperately needs. We invite you to join us to refine these proposals and become a partner in making them a reality.

Jathika Jana Balawegaya (NPP)
2021 December

A Thriving Economy Instead of a Dependent Economy

It is very clear that the current economic crisis is a result of irrational economic strategies pursued by successive governments of our country and compounded by fraud, corruption and waste.

Introduced in 1977, the Open Economic Policy has been destructive through its prioritization of personal gain over social responsibility. A clear indicator of the culture of greed this economic system has bred is how a select group of people benefits, and profit from fraudulent and corrupt business practices even in the face of the pandemic. This culture of greed and the destructive economic thinking that shapes it has also created a system of political power centred in the hands of a few. This anti-democratic economic system is not unique to our country, but a global economic and political trend that has been followed to varying degrees by successive governments that have ruled Sri Lanka in the last few decades.

This economic policy laid the foundation for the severe economic crisis that we face today. Instead of prioritizing and strengthening production, the key features of this policy are the unnecessary expansion of financialisation, austerity measures subsidy cuts, creating market monopolies, inefficient and excessive borrowing, and sale of public property and state-owned enterprises to a small coterie of favoured individuals and companies. This policy, which gradually evolved, is called neoliberalism. Its operation, alongside globalization, allowed the domination



of financialisation and created an artificial financial market that created economic bubbles, deviated from commodity production. One of its worst consequences was the global financial crisis which affected the United States in 2006. Although the crisis was temporarily alleviated by state intervention, crises are an endemic feature of this economic system and we are currently heading towards a global recession.

Analyzing the post-independence development of the Sri Lankan economy reveals that the economy has not been managed systematically to achieve an eco-friendly and people-friendly society for a better life for all. Instead of being able to claim a significant share of foreign trade, it has failed to even preserve the place Sri Lanka occupied in the past. Borrowing for narrow political interests and personal financial interests of rulers rather than borrowing for economic development priorities, and rampant fraud and corruption have pushed the state towards bankruptcy. The country is now victim to a vicious cycle of debt and a crisis of foreign exchange reserves.

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Our Approach

We advocate a value-added economic approach that considers which products and services should be manufactured, which production methods should be adopted, which technologies to use, how to utilise human and physical resources, how foreign trade structure should be shaped and how benefits of the manufacturing process should be shared among the people. At the same time we envision a new approach that takes into account humanity, social justice, eco-friendliness, economic sustainability, the specificities of our history and culture, public participation, optimal resource utilization and economic democracy.

- **A comprehensive national plan on economic development goals to be achieved in the short, medium and long term**
- **Prepare the human resources required to implement the above plan**
- **To provide an opportunity for every citizen to participate in the collective task of nation-building, in the public and private sectors**
- **Food security, quality and safety to take precedence in the production process**
- **Gradually discourage the importation of goods that can be produced locally**
- **Introducing technology, new methods, creativity and innovative products to all sectors to increase productivity**

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- **Call for industries and foreign investments with new technology that will generate the economic growth required to achieve our economic goals.**
- **An export oriented approach with value-added products taking into account global trends and promote the production of goods and services that can generate more foreign exchange by joining the global supply chain.**
- **Modernization of the agriculture and the fisheries industries through a network that extends from the farm to international markets.**
- **Finance green projects through the issuance of long-term green bonds to mitigate the adverse effects of global climate change**
- **Increase the number of companies and professionals in relevant fields to enhance the GDP contribution and foreign exchange earnings in the technology sector and improve our position in the Technology Competitiveness Index and ensure Citizen and Government Digital Literacy**
- **Introduce a naval service hub with state of the art technology taking advantage of the geographical location of Sri Lanka**
- **Redesign the tourist industry based on promoting Sri Lanka's climatic, geographical, and cultural diversity**

Government Debt

We intend to present a more detailed proposal to resolve the foreign debt problem under an NPP government. This note only points out the main measures we have identified to increase the capacity for debt servicing and stabilise foreign reserves.

- **The people who are responsible for creating the Sri Lankan debt trap will not be allowed to escape from their liabilities. A commission of experts will be appointed to conduct a thorough investigation and audit of all current foreign debt**
- **Develop a formal plan for the next 5 years showing how to improve the level of foreign reserves**
- **Work diplomatically with counterparts to restructure debt repayment and obtain debt relief**
- **Provide a reliable and transparent mechanism for our overseas workers, and members of the diaspora to remit foreign exchange and invest in new entrepreneurial ventures in Sri Lanka that are needed to bring foreign exchange to the country**



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Eco Structures

When an employer, employee or any other party works according to individual goals and objectives in the existing goods and service production chains under various structures, different types of conflicts can arise among them. Under an NPP government, an environment conducive to decision making based on knowledge and consensus to increase efficiency and productivity minimising conflict so that production and distribution processes can be more democratic will be established. We will encourage structures that prioritise national production and industry, which take collective responsibility with democratic decision making systems. We will study and learn from current global trends in this regard.

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- **Introduce networking structures for production and distribution in small and medium scale industrial production, agriculture, livestock, and fisheries sectors**



Eliminate Fraud, Corruption, and Waste

The neo-liberal economy is a political-economic network of fraud, corruption, and theft. This is obvious from the fact that no one who robs public property can be brought to justice and punished in the current context.

- **Those who steal public property should be punished through a formal judicial process and such property should be recovered and re-invested to improve public services**
- **Transform the government's economic operations system to a comprehensive e-governance system**
- **Introduce technology to eliminate corruption, fraud and to maintain high financial discipline**

Social Security

All people and communities living in our society should have the basic facilities required to live with dignity, security, and justice. The government's primary responsibility is to provide the socio-economic environment for the well-being of all citizens in general, especially, women, children, the elderly, and the disabled. In doing so, the government will ensure that social security is not considered a commodity and develop a social protection plan that involves both the public and private sectors.

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Education

Education plays a significant role in enabling the social mobility in Sri Lanka. Moreover, producing citizens with values essential for a democratic and pluralistic society is possible only through education. That is why free education is an important priority for us. The role of the government is of great importance for maintaining a quality education system with the objective of developing economic and human resources.

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- **Free education from early childhood to higher education**
- **Equal opportunities to all persons to access education based on skills and ability**
- **Structural changes in education, using specialized knowledge and relevant data**
- **Measures to regulate the quality as well as fees of private education**
- **Measures to regulate postgraduate studies in both public and private higher education sectors**
- **Gradual and planned allocation of a minimum of 6 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for education**





Health

Health, according to the World Health Organization, is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity. The wellbeing of all people is a major factor as it contributes to the advancement of their living status and social development.

- **A health system that provides all citizens with necessary treatments by constantly monitoring their health**
- **A quality health service to all citizens without discrimination on the grounds of gender, income or social status, profession etc.**
- **A set of actions to reduce the percentage of the income of a family unit allocated for healthcare**
- **A minimum of 5 per cent of Gross Domestic Product on healthcare**
- **Taking measures to increase the active and healthy lifespan of a citizen**

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Culture, Arts and Entertainment

Culture is a field that should be free. Therefore we believe it is the responsibility of the government to ensure the conditions required to enjoy a cultural life. Today, this particular area has become something that the general public cannot enjoy. The field of culture has much potential to provide the general public burdened with livelihood struggles to engage in arts and entertainment and to develop their artistic taste and be creative. An NPP government will extend its support in numerous ways to implement a comprehensive arts and cultural programme, which will be planned with participation from artists representing different creative fields like cinema, theatre, dance, music, literature, painting, sculpture, and traditional crafts.

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Public Transport

Commuters are a diverse group (men, women, adults, children, and differently-abled) that have a multiplicity of transport requirements. Therefore, arrangements will be made to maintain a transportation service, which responds to their diverse requirements.

- **Gradual transformation towards an environmental-friendly, efficient, reliable, secure, and dignified public transport system**
- **Quality and quantity-wise development of the public transport service to provide 80 per cent of people's mobility requirements within a decade**
- **Promotion of different modes of transportation (pedestrian walkways, cycle lanes, and waterways etc.)**

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Women

Our primary objective is to bring the socio-economic, cultural and political issues affecting women in the context of the current crisis to the forefront of Sri Lankan political discourse. Due to the marginalization of women from major socio-economic, cultural, and political activities, they are constantly subjected to injustice, discrimination, and inequality. This situation is prevalent in the home, in society and the community, in the workplace, and in all walks of life. Although the role of women seems to have superficially expanded, it has also put unbearable pressure on women.

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- **Take steps to reduce vulnerability of women who have become the lead actors in the economy due to the feminization of labour**
- **Act against the persecution and oppression of socially marginalized sections of society such as same-sex, transgender, and other communities. Strive towards a society where freedom and equality for all are guaranteed and where people can live free from violence and oppression**
- **Reform laws to prevent discrimination based on gender and sexuality**
- **Enable women's political representation and participation**
- **Oppose all forms of violence, including institutionalized forms of violence, and update the laws against ongoing violence**

- **Oppose gender stereotypes that are reproduced and perpetuated by various institutions such as education, religion, media, etc., and create alternative discourses and make necessary interventions to reduce prejudices, stereotypes, and superstitions perpetuated by society**



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Children and the Youth

- Strengthen the coordination between the institutional systems for child protection, namely the judiciary, probation, social services and the National Child Protection Authority
- Propose structural and legal reforms needed for a strong child protection system
- Prioritize the participation of the youth in implementing the political, economic, and social changes required to create a society that respects the justice and equality that the youth aspire to

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Elders

Services will be established to enable the growing elderly community of our country to live safely, happily, and productively. Taking care of them is a social responsibility of the government.

Persons with disabilities

Implement special programmes for the special needs of persons with disabilities in the provision of services such as health, education, and transport, while recognizing their equal rights to enjoy opportunities, privileges, and rights.



Political Reforms

Lack of democratization of the state is a major problem faced by Sri Lanka. Therefore, the following reforms will be made to facilitate good governance and to establish a system in which democracy and people's sovereignty are ensured.

- **A strong parliament with a cabinet accountable to parliament instead of an executive presidency where power is arbitrarily concentrated in one person.**
- **A President elected by parliament as the head of state and armed forces**
- **A system of governance led by the prime minister and the cabinet, following the principles of checks and balances among the executive, legislature, and judiciary**

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People's Representatives

- **Abolish special privileges granted to elected representatives**
- **Ensure the right of the citizen to access information about the assets and qualifications of those elected as public representatives and the right of the citizen to challenge false information**
- **Constitutional reforms to include the right to recall people's representatives**
- **A pool of public vehicles for members of parliament and other means to encourage sharing of resources**

Sri Lankan Nation

- To introduce a new system of governance that decentralises political and administrative power based on democracy, equal representation, and participation, affirming the Sri Lankan identity of all nationalities in the country and to make the Provincial Councils formal and efficient institutions
- A commission with powers to prevent discrimination against any individual or social group based on nationality, religion, caste, language, gender, or sexuality
- Steps to acknowledge cultural differences between different communities and to promote coexistence within this cultural diversity

A Proud and Independent Country

- A non-aligned foreign policy that acknowledges the reality of geopolitics and regional balance of power and is not biased towards any camp in global politics
- Liaise with international and regional organisations to work with mutual respect and cooperation to find solutions to socio-economic issues arising globally and locally



Steps to acknowledge cultural differences between different communities and to promote coexistence within this cultural diversity

National Security

National security is primarily ensured by pursuing a friendly and non-partisan foreign policy and listening to the just demands of people of all ethnicities and religions.

- **Implementation of a mechanism that protects the freedom and security of citizens, independence, territorial integrity, sovereignty, and dignity of the country**
- **A consistent and diplomatic conflict resolution mechanism to deal with and overcome internal military, political, economic and cultural threats and to face international threats against national security**
- **Establishment of mechanisms for early detection of threats to public safety posed by natural disasters, epidemics, famine as well as industrial and environmental pollution, and protection of civil liberties of citizens in such cases**
- **Ensuring stability in internal coexistence by preventing religious and cultural conflicts between different communities and establishing peace among the people**
- **Prevent the impact of technological threats on national security and expand cyber security**

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Judiciary

We aim to enable the public to seek justice without any restrictions and to create a quality and efficient judicial service that is accessible to the people.

- **Establish and strengthen the present Judicial Service Commission to be independent so as to allow the judiciary to function without political interference and to grant appointments and promotions only on merit and qualification**
- **Decentralise activities so that any citizen of the country can file a case in the Supreme Court in cases of violation of fundamental rights and implement a programme to provide free legal aid**





We have nowhere left to turn nor a moment to lose. Continuing on this disastrous path will endanger not only our lives but the lives of many generations to come, including those of our own children. At this point, should we not awaken our conscience to stand for a profound and broad change? Is it not time we revisit these destructive socio-economic policies and join hands with a political movement capable of achieving this change?

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