



I am bound solely to the expectations and aspirations of the people

- **The steps taken towards a new transformation in Sri Lanka will not be reversed in the face of any obstacle**
- **Within just one year, a decisive turnaround has been marked in all sectors of the country**

- President states during a meeting with the Sri Lankan community in the United States

President Anura Kumara Disسانayake stressed that he is bound solely to the expectations and aspirations of the people of the country and that in fulfilling the expectations placed in the present Government by the people a year ago, he is not prepared to bow down to anyone's influence.

He emphasised that within just one year, the present Government has marked a decisive turnaround in securing economic stability, upholding the rule of law, establishing an efficient public service, eradicating fraud and corruption, curbing drug trafficking and organised crime and fostering a healthy political culture. The President further stated that these victories achieved across all sectors will be carried forward and would not be reversed under any circumstance.

He noted that the next challenge facing the country is to ensure that the economic gains already achieved flow down to the ordinary people and that this year's national budget will be prepared with that goal in mind.

President Anura Kumara Disسانayake made these remarks while attending a meeting with the Sri Lankan community living in the United States, held on the afternoon of the 25th at the Center for the Arts, College of Staten Island in New York.

The meeting, organised by Sri Lanka's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York, was attended by a large number of Sri Lankans residing in the United States, including professionals. The views they raised were discussed at the event and the President's commitment towards Sri Lanka's new economic transformation was commended.

During the meeting, the President further informed the community of the new economic, social and political transformation taking place in Sri Lanka and invited them to contribute to the nation-building process by confidently investing in Sri Lanka.



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Following is the full speech delivered by President Anura Kumara Dissanayake:

Before the recent presidential election, I met and spoke with Sri Lankans here in New York. A significant contribution was made by overseas Sri Lankans towards the victory we achieved on 21st September last year, for which I am deeply grateful.

Why did you work to end the administration that was in place and establish a new government? That decision was no ordinary one. We were not a group with hereditary claims to politics, but rather a movement that had secured only 3% of the vote in the 2019 election. Yet, in the 2024 presidential election we achieved a remarkable victory. Thereafter, in the general election too, we recorded a major success, securing the highest number of parliamentary seats under Sri Lanka's proportional representation system in history.

It has now been a year since that victory. For what purpose was this government established? Have results been delivered in relation to that purpose, or not? I believe we must review the past year based on these questions. However, we are not prepared to measure ourselves against the decisive opinions of groups that neither contributed to nor supported the establishment of this administration. We should be judged by the factors that brought about this transformation.

Even though you live abroad, if you were to write about Sri Lanka in the years 2022/2023, you would record them as the period when the country went bankrupt. On 12th April 2022, the government officially announced that it would suspend debt repayments. From that moment everything began to collapse. Development projects were halted midway; professionals began leaving the country; ordinary people were left without sufficient income to sustain their daily lives. The nation faced every possible economic disaster. So severe was the crisis that, for the first time in Sri Lanka's history, a ruling government was ousted by the people themselves.

Since independence, changes of government in our country had always occurred through elections. But for the first time, without an election, the people took to the streets and removed the rulers. That created a severe economic crisis. Therefore, our foremost challenge was to stabilise the economy, and to ensure that such an economic catastrophe would never again occur in Sri Lanka.

After one year, we have been able to alleviate a considerable part of the crisis that engulfed the nation and establish a degree of stability. Today, Sri Lanka is being described as a country that has managed to overcome its economic crisis at remarkable speed. Reports issued by international financial institutions also bear witness to this.

Economists usually note that when a country suffers such an economic collapse, it loses a decade — meaning it takes 10 years to return to its previous state. However, we believe that Sri Lanka will be able to reach the economic level it had in 2019 by next year. We have achieved this within a very short period of time. Based on all available data and figures, we can make this projection.



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A key factor behind our country's economic collapse was the failure to earn the required amount of dollars. Yet, this year has recorded the highest growth in all four of the country's main foreign exchange-earning sectors. Nearly 2.5 million tourists will have visited our country this year, making 2025 the year with the highest number of tourist arrivals in Sri Lanka's history.

Similarly, this year has seen the highest inflow of dollars from foreign remittances, marking the greatest income from that source to date. Within just one year of assuming office, foreign direct investment amounting to USD 1 billion has been secured, while a further USD 1.4 billion has been

invested in relation to the Port City project. Accordingly, this year has also become the year with the largest inflow of foreign investment. Through this, we have been able to resolve the foreign reserves problem we once faced. Looking ahead, by 2028 we will face the challenge of resuming debt repayments. Therefore, we are working with confidence that by 2028 the economy will have the strength required to meet those obligations. In this way, Sri Lanka has advanced from a state of debt default to a position where debt repayments can once again be made.

The next crisis we faced was the Government's inability to generate sufficient revenue. Historically, Sri Lanka has never achieved the revenue projected in the annual budget. Yet, for the first time, in 2025 the country has exceeded its projected government revenue. Similarly, in every past year, government expenditure exceeded the estimates made in the budget; this year, that gap has narrowed. As a result, we have established a degree of economic stability.

However, stability alone is not enough. The benefits of this recovery must flow to the ordinary people. Unless the economy is stabilised, there is no way to deliver those benefits to the grassroots. Therefore, our first challenge was to stabilise the economy; the challenge before us now is to ensure that the gains of this economic recovery are channelled downwards. This year's national budget has been designed entirely with that objective. It focuses on areas such as strengthening agriculture and the fisheries industry with government support, developing small and medium enterprises and creating new economic opportunities.

When we came into office, the people of this country had expectations regarding our state machinery. Our state apparatus was highly inefficient and broken. Therefore, in rebuilding the nation, efficiency within this machinery must be strengthened.

Because state employment had long been filled on the basis of political favouritism, essential recruitments had not taken place. As a result, we have decided to recruit 70,000 new employees into the public service. At the same time, we have introduced new salary scales to make public service more attractive. We have implemented the largest salary increase in Sri Lanka's history. In 2025 alone, Rs. 110 Billion has been allocated for this purpose, with the same amount to be provided again in 2026 and 2027.



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Accordingly, by 2027, salaries will have been increased by a total of Rs. 330 Billion. In addition, we have commenced a programme of digitalisation across the public service. By next year, we expect all transactions with the Government to be carried out through a digital system. A number of reforms have also been initiated within the public sector. The Inland Revenue Department, the Excise Department and the Customs Department are to be fully digitalised.

For a long time, exporters and investors have pointed to the need for a single-window system for all processes. We are now preparing to introduce a new mechanism for this purpose and consensus on its implementation has been reached. These are measures we have taken to strengthen a collapsed public service.

We are also restructuring outdated institutions. The Ceylon Electricity Board, for example, can no longer continue under its old model. Therefore, we have proposed a new institutional framework to improve its efficiency. In this way, we are introducing new structures for institutions that can be made more efficient. Considerable work has already been done to streamline state institutions, though much more remains to be done.

The people also expected good international relations. Our country had, to some extent, become a blacklisted nation in the eyes of the world. We were seen as a state that did not respect democracy, where journalists were assassinated, human rights were violated and the economy was collapsing under corruption and fraud. It was essential for us to restore Sri Lanka as a respected and dignified nation on the global stage. Therefore, we needed to build strong diplomatic relations and a positive international image of Sri Lanka.

Today, there is renewed hope regarding Sri Lanka within international organisations. This was highlighted during my meetings with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Accordingly, we are working hard to restore to our country its rightful dignity and recognition in the international arena and we have already achieved a considerable number of results in this regard.

We also had to ensure the rule of law. In our country, the law had been one where the powerful and wealthy could escape justice, while the poor were punished. There was a prevailing public perception that certain individuals were above the law, while others were subject to it. However, today we are proving in practice that no one in Sri Lanka is beyond the reach of the law. Anyone may be brought under its authority. This decisive transformation has already taken place and it is our responsibility to firmly uphold the rule of law. The steps we have taken in this direction will continue and will not be reversed.

When the people cast their votes, they did so with great expectations. We, as a government, are now aligned with those expectations and aspirations. We are working to fulfil the mandate of the people without bowing to anyone's influence.



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The people also expected an end to fraud and corruption. In our country, the waste of public funds by politicians had become an accepted norm. Such matters could not be questioned and politicians acted as though they had unlimited power to squander the people's money. This is wrong. At a time when the economy had gravely collapsed and the people were suffering without gas and fuel, Rs. 470 million was allocated to renovate the President's official residence. This shows how politicians once had no restraint in spending public funds.

They believed they could spend as they pleased. It was thought that a President had no limits. Yet those limits only lay within the personal decency of whoever occupied that seat. Therefore, it became necessary for us to establish limits by law, and we did so. Under this law, former Presidents will no longer be entitled to state-provided residences. This is not an act of revenge against anyone. We harbour no personal hostility towards any individual. But our country requires political decency. Until that culture is built, we are compelled to set boundaries through law.

For the first time in Sri Lanka's history, we now have a government that does not waste a single cent of the people's money. That is the true spirit of the people's mandate. The collapse of our nation was the direct result of past failures in this regard. Therefore, to change this situation, change must occur across all these areas. Today, we are fulfilling the mandate of the people to build a state free from bribery and corruption.

The people also expected that those guilty of fraud and corruption would be punished, and today, we are doing just that. Furthermore, justice must be served for the assassinations and abductions that stained our country's reputation in the international sphere. These demand justice and we are conducting investigations.

No one has the right to denigrate our war heroes. We honour their service during the war. Yet crimes committed under the cover of that struggle cannot be excused and we are investigating those as well. A society's faith in justice is not built merely on the existence of laws. It is founded on the conviction that the law is applied fairly. Merely having laws does not create confidence in justice. That belief is built when injustice occurs and justice is then delivered. This is exactly what we are ensuring.

Our investigations into crimes and corruption are never politically motivated. The Bribery or Corruption Commission and the Criminal Investigation Department conduct the necessary inquiries. Our role is only to provide them with the required facilities. Our duty is to refrain from interfering. These processes must never depend on the government in power, but on the relevant institutions. Strengthening those institutions is what we are committed to.

We are also taking measures to curb drug-related and organised crime. In doing so, we are dismantling parallel structures of governance. A country cannot operate with two separate states; there should be only one state and it must function through a unified state apparatus. Accordingly, we are implementing a range of necessary reforms and transformations for our nation.



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As a result, we have entered the path to fulfilling the mandate given to us by the people a year ago. Partially completed projects have also been restarted. The Katunayake Airport project, originally scheduled for completion in 2023, was halted midway. We plan to resume work on it by February–March next year. Similarly, a large number of construction projects that were previously stalled are now being addressed.

For example, the SAARC Cultural Centre in Matara, a massive building constructed under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, has been left unused. No one is willing to take responsibility for it. We are now focusing on restructuring such projects so they can be put to productive use.

Thus, we are moving forward with stability and reform. We have been able to meet many of the expectations of the people's mandate, though progress is not yet sufficient and more time is needed. For this, your contribution is vital. Today, investment opportunities have been created in the country. We do not need anything from you; only your projects are required.

Moreover, as overseas Sri Lankans, you can make a substantial contribution to the tourism industry. Collaborative programmes can be organised in partnership with the Embassy, enabling active engagement with Sri Lanka rather than remaining distant observers. We invite everyone to become a community actively involved in supporting the country in various ways.

This occasion was attended by distinguished guests including the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Employment, Vijitha Herath and Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, and former Chief Justice, Jayantha Jayasuriya PC.

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