

Sri Lanka's Political Shift: Anura Kumara Dissanayake's Historic Victory

Sri Lanka's new President, Anura Kumara Dissanayake, leader of the National People's Power (NPP) and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), achieved a historic victory by winning 42.3% of votes in a run-off election on September 22, 2024. This marked the first time in Sri Lanka's history that the presidential race required a second tally of votes due to no candidate securing the required 50% majority in the first round.

Dissanayake's campaign focused on good governance, anti-corruption measures, and reviving the struggling economy. His promise to renegotiate, rather than scrap, the \$2.9 billion IMF bailout agreement while addressing economic hardships resonated with voters. This victory represents a break from the traditional political elites, with the JVP, a party with Marxist origins, securing about 42% of the vote share.

Economically, Dissanayake inherits a country still reeling from the 2022 financial crisis, which left Sri Lanka unable to import essential goods, driving millions into poverty and sparking widespread unrest. One of his key challenges will be managing Sri Lanka's foreign relations, particularly its ties with China. Despite his Marxist leanings, Dissanayake has sought to allay fears about his perceived tilt towards China, pledging that Sri Lanka's territory would not be used in any way that threatens the national security of any country in the Indian Ocean Region, including India.

Dissanayake's NPP has adopted a more pragmatic approach recently, which was reflected in his visit to India for an agricultural summit, signaling his intent to maintain strong ties with Sri Lanka's northern neighbor. Balancing his populist promises with the IMF's stringent conditions and handling relations with China while reassuring India of Sri Lanka's neutrality will be crucial to his presidency's success. The international community, particularly India, is watching closely as Dissanayake seeks to steer Sri Lanka out of its economic quagmire.

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