

# RedPower

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THE CENTRAL ORGAN OF THE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION FRONT (JVP) - SRI LANKA

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## Let's make 2024 the year of New Political Transformation

**We need a new movement with a new vision and thinking to build the fallen country. National People's Power is the movement that creates that new renaissance era. Clergy, literary elites, and other artists should present ideologies for that new awakening.**

Farmers, fishermen and workers should think they are the stakeholders who generate the country's national wealth. Athletes should think they enter the international arena to bring glory to the country. Young people should think they get their education to conquer the new world for the country. Everyone should come together and recover the fallen country with a new awakening, new thinking, and

a new ideology instead of just a change of government.

If the decision to change the country is not taken now, we cannot prevent the country from being dragged into a more catastrophic situation. Therefore, first, we have to stop the destruction and, next, build the country. The countries of the world rose up because politicians, scientists, writers, professionals, farmers and workers came together

and worked with a national ambition to build the country. Nevertheless, we do not have such a chapter in our history. According to these national plans, Japan, China, India, and Vietnam have become the fastest-changing countries in the world today. We should put aside racial, caste, religious and cultural differences and stand up as a nation. Narrations of the past are suitable for studying our history. However, if we want to move forward with the world, we need a journey that combines discoveries and technology.

No matter how big the challenge before us is, we all have to fight together and win this. When we fell to 3%,

we came forward without being discouraged in the face of the forces that tried to discourage and disable us. Now, an opportunity has arisen in this election year for all progressives, patriots and well-wishers to get together and come forward with the courage to dedicate ourselves to creating a beautiful future for our children. Let's make 2024 the year that brings about a new political transformation in Sri Lanka.

(Excerpts from speech delivered by Comrade Anura Dissanayake at the "We, women, forgather for Compass" conference held at Galle on 07.01.2024.)

### Campaigners for fertilizer are not terrorists

Comrade Vijitha Herath

We oppose the government's bill, which can label anyone taking to the street against the sale of government institutions essential to the economy as terrorists or suppress even farmers who agitate for their rights, said Comrade Vijitha Herath, Member of Parliament of the National People's Power.

He said this even before the debate on the Terrorism Prevention Amendment Bill was presented to Parliament. Despite the likes of James Packer were not given the

opportunity to carry on the casino business in this country in the past, the economic policy followed by this government has created a situation where unemployed youths, even in areas outside Colombo, have to choose casinos for their income in the face of the economic pressure revealed Comrade Vijitha Herath.

He further revealed that the Minister of State for Finance made a misleading statement to Parliament that no new

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### Will Ranil adorn Indian Ocean's policeman's uniform or a court jester's attire?

According to the media, President Ranil Wickremesinghe has revealed a decision to join the US-led combating movement against the Houthis in Yemen. By deploying the Sri Lankan Navy for the security of the Red Sea, while warnings have been issued that the fierce war between Israel and Hamas is going beyond the regional level and entering the international arena would drag our country to conflicts that have been created by imperialist forces in many regions in the globe.

Moreover, our 'battle' ships are not geared to defend themselves when Houthis deal with sophisticated drones and missiles. Houthi leader has strongly warned that any target will be attacked against threats to the Red

Sea. They have warned that drones and missiles will be used, and pirate-type attacks will also be included.

It is also said that Iran supports Houthis, who control a large area of Yemen. The official government of Yemen is based in Riyadh, the Saudi capital. The move to send a ship against Houthis would jeopardize the relations our country has with Iran.

Due to the idiotic moves of President Ranil Wickramasinghe, who is going to implement a policy against the world in total violation of Sri Lanka's neutrality policy in international affairs, we not only lose the goodwill of a friendly country with whom we have very positive relations but also jeopardize our national security as the warning of the

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A Rational Land, a Just Society and a Liberated Human Being!

464/20, Pannipitiya Road, Pelawatta, Battaramulla, Sri Lanka  
Tele. +94112785612 | Fax. +94112786050  
www.jvpsrilanka.com  
e-mail : niyamuwanews@gmail.com

## Let's make this New Year one that writes history anew!

According to the world's standard calendar, 2023 ended, and we entered a new year. As a tradition, we wish each other a Happy New Year every new year's Eve. Nevertheless, we know from experience that life in any year in our country has not been auspicious despite the greetings. As such, in the newly dawning year of 2024, comrade Anura Dissanayake, in his New Year message, states without limiting ourselves to mere greetings, we should determine to make this year and the future starting from this year auspicious to all. He says it should be our wish for the new year.

The new year 2024 dawns with many crises, difficulties and challenges. Nevertheless, at the same time, he points out, we have an opportunity to overcome all these crises, difficulties and challenges in this new year. That is what makes this new year more special than last year.

The challenges of the new year are severe. The economic crisis that erupted in 2022 is further escalating, and the Ranil-Rajapaksa regime has placed the entire burden on the people. The year 2024 comes with an increased VAT burden as per IMF agreements. VAT has increased from 15% to 18%, and 97 types of goods not subject to VAT have been newly taxed. Among those goods are diesel, petrol, electricity bills, school equipment, agricultural equipment, fertilizer, and cremation. Ranil-Rajapaksa's tax burden is such that people have to pay taxes not only during their lifetime but also after death.

The price of essential goods will inevitably rise to an unsustainable level as a result of the newly imposed tax burden added to the increase in transport charges and the increase in production costs. Then, people will be confronted with extreme difficulties. With this, even the local industries and agriculture, which are already collapsing and closing down, will be breathing their last breath.

According to the bankrupt neo-liberal economic policy that has existed in this country for more than 40 years and according to the conditions of the International Monetary Fund, the country's remaining resources will also be sold in addition to the heavy tax burden imposed on the people. Bills to tax water are now being prepared. The Ranil-Rajapaksa administration is prepared to sell the electricity board, telecom and even the dairy cows. Thirty-two dairy farms owned by the Sri Lankan government and 28,000 acres of land are now ready to be leased to Amul.

It is clear that due to the continuous collapse of the economy and the increase in the prices of goods and services, people will no longer be able to live in the old way. Then, society will further collapse, crimes, thefts, and frauds will increase, and people will be forced to rethink their future.

Meanwhile, the government is also preparing new suppression laws to suppress the people.

As already happening, these crises and challenges will teach people great experiences in life. This situation will force the citizenry to consider continuing the 75-year-old 'rotating' political journey. Also, this situation will force the people to decide whether they will continue to tolerate this neo-liberal predatory economic system and the corrupt political culture created by it or not.

The people will also have to decide whether they will continue to tolerate the current system of governance that drags the country and the people to the precipice of destruction by selling all the country's resources to foreign countries and companies, leasing them and borrowing more and more.

As such, the opportunity to start a new economic and political journey by overcoming the challenges and liberating the country from all these disasters and crises has arisen for the people in this new year. It is the mandatory presidential election is scheduled to be held according to the constitution. That presidential election will be an unequivocal opportunity to lead our country to a new, winning path.

The people indeed make the history of a country. However, a group of corrupt rulers decided the course of our country's history instead. Therefore, the people themselves should correct the wrong history. This new year should be a year of rewriting the history of Sri Lanka and a year of victory in a new freedom struggle that will truly build the Sri Lankan Nation.

That is because the corrupt family regimes that have ruled this country throughout history have bankrupted the country economically, made it politically weak and failed nationally. We must regain our true freedom, sovereignty and independence. We must build the Sri Lankan nation and protect Sri Lanka's pride. We must make Sri Lanka stand tall in front of the world. It can be done.

Accordingly, the people who have learned lessons from history should make the new year 2024 a year to change the dark past and rewrite history for a brighter future. We now witness the early signs of people coming together with determination.

As such, we request all the progressive forces, including Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher, Malay and people of all religions, producers, and business people, to come forward with courage to erase the dark and painful past of a dependent and bankrupt country, to rewrite the history of the country, to build a new society with economic independence, social justice and human dignity and wish them all a Happy New Year.

## Doctors in England strike



Doctors in England started a 72-hour strike on 3rd January in their long-running dispute with the British government over pay levels. The six-day strike is set to be the longest in the history of the state-funded National Health Service.

Patients in Britain's state-owned National Health Service have been warned that there will be "significant disruption," with thousands of appointments and procedures postponed or even canceled. The strike began at 7 a.m.

and was to run until Saturday morning.

Tens of thousands of junior doctors, which make up around half of the medical workforce in the NHS, will also go on strike for a six-day stretch early this year, the longest walkout in the health service's 75-year history.

Meanwhile, Senior doctors and other medics have been drafted to cover for emergency services, critical care and maternity services.

## Workers strike closes Eiffel Tower on 100th anniversary of founder's death

The Eiffel Tower in Paris was closed to visitors Wednesday because of a strike over contract negotiations timed to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the death of its creator, Gustave Eiffel.

One of the world's most-visited sites, the Eiffel Tower is open 365 days a year — though it is occasionally affected by strikes — and is expected

to play a central role in the 2024 Paris Olympics.

Some tourists were visibly dismayed upon seeing a big sign beneath its iron façade announcing the closure in multiple languages, and apologizing for the inconvenience. Others took photos anyway, or rearranged their Paris plans.

## Teachers in Kenya to strike on opening day of new term



Kenya National Union of Teachers (\*KNUT) has called for a nationwide teachers strike starting on the opening day of the new term.

KNUT has blamed the Ministry of Labour for failing to address the issues affecting teachers which include delocalization of teachers, promotions and performance contracting systems among others.

The strike action was scheduled to commence on the opening date of the new term. The teachers should report for a new school term until the strike is formally called off by the Secretary General through a vote of the National Executive Committee as

provided for in our constitution," he stated.

The unions directed teachers to stay away from classes until all the issues they have listed are resolved to the full satisfaction of teachers and when the strike will be formally called off.

On Saturday, a conciliation committee from the Ministry of Labor and Social protection met with the KNUT steering committee seeking to avert the teachers' strike, but the meeting wasn't successful.

Teachers' Service Commission has already announced transfers of over 3000 head teachers who are expected to report in new work stations come January next year despite protests from KNUT.

The most affected are head teachers of Primary and Secondary schools who have served in one station for more than 9 years and had been directed to hand over by last week Friday.

# 2024 - a year for Smart Politics

The year 2024 is special in South Asian politics. It is because the national elections that will determine the future political course of many major countries in South Asia will be held this year. Bangladesh, with a population of 170 million, is set to elect a new prime minister in its parliamentary elections early this month.

With a population of 230 million, Pakistan will hold general elections in early February. India's Lok Sabha elections, which will decide the next five years for 1.4 billion people, will be held in April and May. Sri Lanka has no scheduled general election, but the presidential election is scheduled for October. If necessary, the President can call a general election before that.

Meanwhile, last Sunday, December 24, a leading news published on the front page of a weekly national newspaper in Sri Lanka managed to attract much attention. The news headline was "Emerging party comes forward in leaps and bounds". Although the name of the party in question was not mentioned in the news published, citing the government's intelligence agencies' emphasis on the government, everyone understood it was the NPP. Although the government was warned of defeat, it was implied that the victory of the NPP was inevitable.

Meanwhile, another conversation has emerged in the society. It is the talk of which election will be held in the new year. During the budget debate, the President stated that two major elections would be held this year. Of course, it would be so. As such, the presidential election must be held on a Saturday between September 15 and October 15 this year. It has to be held this year according to the constitution, not something given by the President or the government. Now, the Election Commission has full power to hold the presidential election

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**In the upcoming presidential election, there is no leader in Sri Lankan politics with a widespread appeal and a popular base that can even come close to the candidate of the NPP, Comrade Anura Dissanayake. Accordingly, NPP victory in the next presidential election is inevitable. A general election will be held after that, so it is a political reality that two major elections will be held this year.**



on the appointed date. As the presidential election has to be compulsorily held, it is one of the elections that will be held this year.

So what is the other election? There is no doubt that it will be the parliamentary general election. Because whoever wins the presidential election between September and October, apart from Mahinda Rajapaksa, the new President will dissolve this Parliament and hold a general election. The way the political forces are aligned and the public will is being expressed, it will be difficult for Rajapaksas to find a candidate in the next presidential

election. They cannot even think of victory.

In the upcoming presidential election, there is no leader in Sri Lankan politics with a widespread appeal and a popular base that can even come close to the candidate of the NPP, Comrade Anura Dissanayake. Accordingly, NPP victory in the next presidential election is inevitable. A general election will be held after that, so it is a political reality that two major elections will be held this year.

But in the meantime, a story of holding the general election before the presidential election is also spreading in society. The

councillors belonging to the Rajapaksa group are spreading this opinion in society. SJB MPs, too, harbour this opinion. Indeed, it is the will of those MPs that is being attempted to spread in the society.

There is a way of thinking of the MPs who are still in the Rajapaksa party and those who are now aligned with Ranil. They know they cannot retain their seats when the presidential election is held first and then the general election. When they think that the NPP will win the presidential election and hold the general election after that, they know that it is not easy to save even the electoral seats in the general election after the extreme defeat in the presidential election.

Therefore, they think that if the general election is held before the presidential election, they can use the power of the parliament seat or ministerial position that they already hold. Since both the President and the government are already theirs, they can still retain their parliamentary seats even if they cannot form a government. Because of this, they wish to hold the general election early. News also appeared that some suggested this idea to the President.

But this is more challenging than it seems. As the presidential election must be held according to the constitution and its timing is fixed, there is nothing for anyone to make a new decision for it. The will or unwillingness of the President or the government does not determine it. But the general election is different. For that, the President should dissolve the Parliament. That is because the term of office of the Parliament is until 2025.

Either the President must dissolve the Parliament, or the Parliament must pass a resolution and notify the President. Therefore, even though there is nothing to make a new decision for the presidential election, the

President should decide for the general election and implement it.

Also, if the general election is to be held before the presidential election, it should be held and completed before the start of the presidential election. It means the general election must be held before July. If so, Parliament will have to be dissolved between March and April. No such preparations are yet in sight.

The other point is Ranil Wickramasinghe's way of thinking. He still intends to contest the next presidential election. Instead of building the UNP, he is thinking of getting the support of the Rajapaksas or the Pohattu MPs who are currently with him. Ranil will not even be able to run for the presidential election if the UNP does not get even a single member of Parliament if the general election is held earlier.

Also, suppose an early general election is held. In that case, the number of Pohottuwa MPs will decrease significantly, so if Ranil thinks of getting support from Pohottuwa, the number of MPs who will support him will decrease. Since the general election result is not favourable to Ranil, he would like to contest the presidential election using the current parliamentary power. Even if the Rajapaksas present their own candidate, Ranil will think that he can get the support of a group of people from Pohottuwa.

When all these factors are weighed, holding a general election before the presidential election is improbable. It seems that the presidential election is most likely to be held first, as holding the presidential election is mandatory. But even if there is a chance that the general election will be held earlier due to the political manoeuvre, the facts are still lined up to hold the presidential election first, so all forces thinking of a change in power must prepare for a presidential election.

# Online Safety Bill: Safety or Suppression?

A bill named Online Safety Bill was tabled in Parliament on the 3rd of October 2023. From the beginning of the proposal of the Bill, civil organizations, political parties, pressure groups and the general public criticized and demanded the withdrawal of the Bill. Many groups and individuals went before the Supreme Court to get the Bill determined as a contravene to the Constitution of Sri Lanka. A total amount of 45 Supreme Court Determination (SD) matters were filed. It is a record-breaking amount of SD matters against one Bill, and it reflects the unwillingness of the public to accept the Bill. It also reflects that people no longer blindly follow what this mandate less President and Government does.

When we evaluate this Bill, it is very important to consider the context as well as the content. Following is the Point of View expressed to Red Power regarding the Online Safety Bill by Mr J.M. Wijebandara, Senior Attorney at Law.

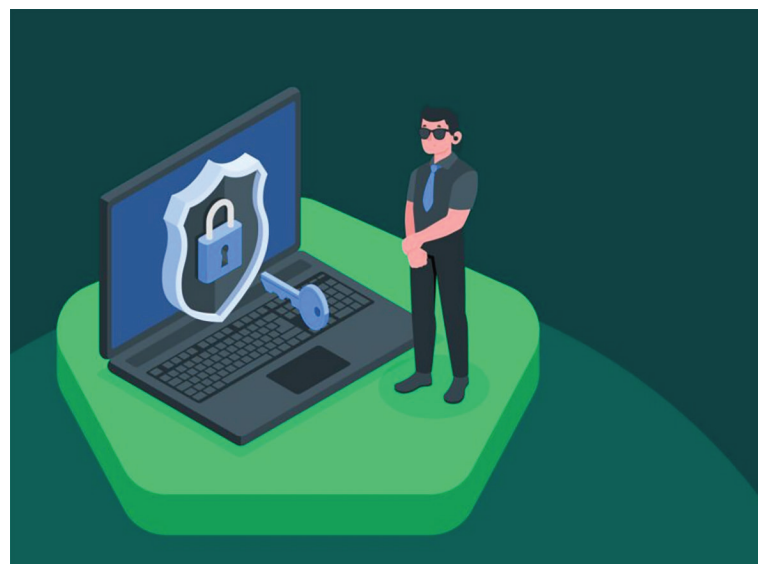
In principle, I do agree that whether it is the state sector or private, individuals should not enjoy wild beast freedom or unrestricted freedom. The fundamental objective of the law is to control human behaviour in such a way that it does not encroach on the freedom of the other. We are in a global village, and everyone is connected to the internet via social media. We see drastic changes in human behaviour compared to the physical behaviour that existed before the internet era. Therefore, in principle, there should be some kind of regulation with regard to the conduct in social media.

However, in Sri Lanka, one of the major problems we are confronted with today is that this Parliament lacks the legitimacy to introduce any law. That is one of the major concerns the civil society faces in Sri Lanka. People have lost their trust in Parliament.

In fact, they have totally rejected their own elected cabinet of ministers, elected Prime Minister and elected President. Within 'Aragalaya' (mass uprising in 2022), people have come all out to reject them; in fact, they were rejected. The indirect impact is that the entire election result is diluted or rejected by people. After 'Aragalaya,' this present government's structure was formulated among those who were already in the rejected Parliament. Therefore, the major struggle in Parliament is not to enact laws or formulate policies for the betterment of the country but to survive as much as possible until the 11th hour and not to face an election.

Parliament safeguards

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Executive President to avoid dissolution and the Executive is safeguarding the Parliament to avoid defeat of executive's wrong decisions such as selling and leasing out national assets, irrational alienation of profitable enterprises to foreign investors, etc. All these are not done according to adopted, negotiated and deliberated policy, but only for their survival. Hence, they do not want to go against each other. The executive and Parliament both struggle to survive without facing the people. They know that people have already rejected them, but they are trying to do whatever

possible to adopt all available rat tactics to delay facing people at an election.

Against this backdrop, many laws and bills came in. One such Bill is the Online Safety Bill. Other such bills were Anti-Terrorism Bill, Broadcasting Regulatory Commission Bill etc. Very recently, they water-cannoned women in a peaceful demonstration on the very day the Ministry of Women and Children affairs was considered in the annual budget in the Parliament. That is how the conduct and have seen that the senior DIG of the Western Province walking with thugs to attack peaceful demonstrators

at 'Galle face Protest Site'. Now, the Supreme Court has found the then President, Secretary, Inspector General of Police, and Intelligence chief responsible for not discharging their duties and acting promptly to avoid a terror attack on Easter Sunday. Recently, the Supreme Court held that some in Rajapaksa bulk are made accountable for the economic collapse. Also, the current acting IGP was recently ordered to pay two million rupees for being found responsible for violating human rights. Can he be made permanent in this background?

What have they attempted with this Bill? That is to establish a commission which appears to be a puppet of the Executive President. If we consider the entirety of the Bill, this commission is vested with powers to decide what is true and what is false. If we go through sections 12 to 23 and several other procedural provisions, we see that should this be enacted, the power to decide which is true or which is false will ultimately fall in the hands of the Executive President. That is why the entire society, organizations, activists, and everybody came forward and challenged this Bill in the Supreme Court.

Supreme Court also found many clauses incompatible with the Constitution and should be amended. Then, the government proposed amendments. Then, the Supreme Court held that if amended, it could be passed by a simple majority in the Parliament. However, up until now, it has not proceeded after that. Therefore, this Bill, if enacted, would result in allowing the executive to dissemination information from media to the public and through social media, if anything detrimental to the dependencies of the government and existing crooked current structure.

If this bill is allowed to become law in this country, they can suppress legitimate criticism. If you say something and the commission finds your expression false, you have no forum to prove your truthfulness. It is up to this so-called commission of the President to decide which is correct and which is wrong. This is deadly against the established fundamental rights, which contained the right to dissent and also express your views commending or condemning the government. People have the freedom of expression, freedom of thought, freedom of association, freedom to join political parties and work alone

or together with other people. So, even in social media, people have freedom, provided no person is entitled to defame any other person. Therefore I do not see any genuine attempt from the part of the legislature to address these issues.

We should remember section 3 of ICCPR Act (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Act) until the High Court determination has found the police have abused the provisions of article 3 of the ICCPR Act by producing people and tendering B reports to the Magistrate's Courts, remanding them and keeping people in remand for very long time. Online Safety Bill also has introduced the same offences, creating a repetition of offences. They are trying to sanction the civil rights activists by arresting them, producing them before courts and remanding them. Up to now there, many B reports have been filed; some artists were remanded and then enlarged on bail but did not proceed to any trial. No charge sheet has been framed. In fact, it is impossible to frame charges under section 3 of the ICCPR Act. So that has been entirely and absolutely abused by the executive in order to safeguard their own interest, thereby putting democracy at a disadvantage and in jeopardy.

The acting IGP, the same person referred previously, has recently issued a Notice saying that Police will establish a special unit to deal with religious crimes. Is he discharging the duties under Police Ordinance, Constitution or Administrative laws? No. Who needs the religious sentiment to be aroused? We know how arousing religious sentiment has been experimented on by those craving for power. They try to win elections but not introduce any laws to safeguard individual rights and not ensure the smooth functioning of society.

During the last year or so, they initiated several laws intending to control rising opposition against the current illegitimate government, which has no legitimacy or justification for ruling and for entering into international agreements or alienating assets. When these things happen, trade unions, progressive parties, social activists, and university students come forward and voice up. So, the ulterior motive of introducing these laws is to suppress the voice of democratic criticism to which all citizens of a democratic country are

[Excerpts from an interview 'Red Power' had with Comrade Anura Kumara Dissanayake, leader of JVP]

*While the economy is shrinking, the government is imposing more and more taxes on the people and collecting even their last rupees. How will people cope with this situation? How will they respond?*

Ranil Wickramasinghe government's plan has become to balance the accounts. Otherwise, it is clear that they will not make an effort to get out of this problem by providing systematic solutions to the issues that have arisen in the economic body. The government must reduce the gap between revenue and expenditure to balance the accounts. The government expects 40,164 million rupees as revenue this year. However, the economy is behind even as it was in 2019. The national product is even lower than it was in 2019, and they have imposed an unlimited tax burden on the people, which is their only way to get 40,164 million rupees.

Earlier, 138 essential goods and services were exempted when VAT was implemented. However, according to the recently passed Tax Amendment Act, 97 of those 138 categories of goods and services exempted from VAT were removed from that list. Diesel, petrol, gas, electricity, hospital equipment, library services, book printing, dairy products, etc., which are very close to people's lives, were newly added to the VAT on goods and services.

The previous governments had exempted those 97 categories of goods and services from VAT because they were susceptible to people's lives and the economy. Nevertheless, the government's new

# Let's take the country to a New Era



imposition of 18% VAT on those 97 categories will cause severe problems for our country's economy and people's lives. Also, VAT was increased to 18% in general. Due to this, a situation arises where people cannot buy essential goods and services. Also, imposing unlimited taxes will cause the economy to shrink again, and the expected results will not be achieved.

Even before the imposition of this VAT, the people were finding it difficult to make ends meet. Therefore, new taxes have been imposed in such a way that the lives of the people have been dragged from the pan to the hearth. Will the people continue to tolerate this pressure? The people coming forward to fight for their right to live cannot be avoided.

In particular, the

National People's Power has decided to organize a series of district-level protests and fight for the people's right to live. Also, we can only get out of this crisis by changing this economic policy that has been followed for a long time, achieving big growth in the production of goods and services in our country and entering into a new economic plan. Therefore, we invite the people to rally to transform this country into a new economic strategy. We emphasize that we cannot stop the people from taking to the streets and fighting for the right to live.

***The year 2024 is considered to be the year when the most significant change of power in Sri Lankan politics will happen. What is your reading of this? How is the preparation of the***

***national people's force for that?***

Two major elections are scheduled to be held in 2024. Especially in the presidential election, whichever party wins, the parliamentary election will be held immediately after that. For a long time, the people of our country changed governments and leaders with different expectations through changes of governments and rulers.

However, in the end, what happened to the people was that the economy became so bankrupt that they could not fulfil their basic needs in their lives. Despite appearing in two faces, the two groups, which are the same ruling group, no longer have a story to tell before the people. Earlier, the stories they told us about voting to 'save the nation', 'achieve

economic development', 'make Asia's miracle', etc., are not valid anymore. However, now they have no story to tell the people. These two parties are in the same camp in the history of Sri Lanka and are politically very poor. On the other hand, the people's opposition to them and distrust towards them has grown tremendously.

Therefore, we believe that this year can be transformed into a year for a new transformation. What type of transformation do we need? This year will definitely become a year of alignment for a new socio-economic transformation. Therefore, we firmly believe this year can be made the year ending the curse of 75 years.

***The crucial role of the National People's Power***

*in Sri Lankan politics is becoming evident due to the interest shown by foreign countries in the Jathika Jana Balawegaya (NPP) and through public opinion polls. What is your message to people for the new year?*

Yes. The Jathika Jana Balawegaya (NPP) is rapidly gaining a massive response from the people to the point of taking power in our country. Among the Sri Lankans abroad, rural people, middle-class people, professionals, intellectuals, industrialists, business people, and especially religious people are preparing for this transformation.

What type of transformation does our country need? The people of our country have changed governments and leaders with expectations for a long time. However, looking back, a state has been created where people's expectations have been completely shattered. Therefore, we need a journey that will completely transform this socio-economic and political journey. It is not just an activity of a political party. It should become an activity of all the people in this country. There is a need for a new movement to build and establish the national unity of our country, regardless of Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim population divisions, religious differences or caste differences in the north, south and east, against the thieving group that has brought our country to the edge of disaster. The country needs a new political transformation. The Jathika Jana Balawegaya (NPP) is contesting these elections in the form and mediation of a new style of national liberation struggle with national unity. There will not be just a change of government or just a change of leaders. The country needs to make this transformation.

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In the World Bank's 2023 International Debt Report, it is highlighted that "Amid the biggest surge in global interest rates in four decades, developing countries spent a record \$443.5 billion to service their external public and publicly guaranteed debt in 2022. The increase in costs shifted scarce resources away from critical needs such as health, education, and the environment. The increase in costs shifted scarce resources away from critical needs such as health, education, and the environment".

In a recent press release, the World Bank, acknowledging its role as a significant actor in the current crises affecting the global economic and financial system, has stated, "Debt-service payments — encompassing both principal and interest — surged by 5 percent compared to the preceding year for all developing countries." The report specifically highlights the plight of the 75 countries eligible to borrow from the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA), aimed at supporting the world's poorest nations, revealing that these countries collectively disbursed a record \$88.9 billion in debt-servicing costs in 2022.

Over the past decade, the burden on these nations has intensified, with interest payments quadrupling to reach an unprecedented high of \$23.6 billion in 2022. Looking ahead, the World Bank's report projects a distressing outlook for the 24 poorest countries, anticipating a substantial 39 percent surge in overall debt-servicing costs in 2023 and 2024. This alarming trajectory underscores the urgent need for global attention and collaborative efforts to address the escalating financial challenges faced by the most vulnerable nations.

"Every quarter that interest rates remain elevated results in more developing countries facing distress and confronting the difficult choice of servicing their public debts or allocating resources to public health, education, and infrastructure. The alternative is another lost decade." - Intermit Gill, the World Bank Group's Chief Economist and Senior Vice President.

Hence, it is futile to elaborate on the global sovereign debt problem, a central element of the existing Imperialist financial system. In essence, "Debt" has become the bayonet of contemporary Neo-Colonialism. Consequently, we dedicate a

# 'IMF Debt Restructuring' a hidden vicious trap!



portion of our article to elucidate and unveil the so-called IMF-prescribed "Debt Restructuring" process. This term, embedded in the IMF's vocabulary, has taken on the guise of a new malevolence, wearing a deceptive façade with a pink tint.

When a country faces insolvency due to its incapacity to repay foreign loans promptly, all credit agencies and global financial institutions such as the World Bank, IMF, ADB, etc., ultimately proclaim that the country has defaulted. This implies that the country will be unable to sustain its international import-export activities, which constitute the lifeblood of any nation within this intricately interconnected economic system.

No foreign bank or institution is willing to engage in credit-based transactions; the only remaining option is to conduct business through direct cash payments. However, this approach sets off a chain reaction, leading to a cascading effect, including a stark devaluation of the local currency and a shortage of hard currencies. Sri Lanka, most recently, underwent this familiar pattern, highlighting the common challenges faced by developing countries in such situations.

## Navigating Global Turmoil: The International Monetary Fund's Strategic Move with 'Debt Restructuring' in the Face of Instability and Crises.

Let's delve into the unfolding

narrative of debt restructuring in Zambia. In 2020, Zambia chose to forego a \$42.5 million Eurobond repayment, marking the first instance of an African nation defaulting on its debt during the Covid-19 era.

Zambia had grappled with escalating debt challenges for several years, exacerbated by a confluence of factors such as a downturn in commodity prices, economic mismanagement, and the repercussions of the global health crisis. However, Zambia's default raised concerns about the country's fiscal sustainability, prompted questions about its capacity to fulfill future debt obligations, and sparked discussions on the imperative for debt restructuring.

In late October, the country reached an agreement in principle with a bondholder group, solidifying a restructuring deal with official creditors. China has also recently called on Zambia's additional creditors to shoulder a "fair burden" in the nation's ongoing debt restructuring efforts.

Zambia's inability to reach a definitive agreement with all its creditors is not due to a lack of effort. It serves as a test case for the Common Framework, established by the G20 international forum in November 2020 to address the debts of low-income countries. The framework was anticipated to lead to all creditors making comparable contributions to assist a defaulting country in resolving its debt crisis.

## Examining Shortcomings in the Common Framework: Insights from Zambia's Experience"

Delving into Zambia's tumultuous journey of debt restructuring reveals a protracted struggle with mounting financial challenges. These difficulties were compounded by a convergence of factors, such as a decline in commodity prices, economic mismanagement, and the pervasive impacts of the global health crisis.

In a pivotal moment in 2020, Zambia made the unprecedented decision to forego a \$42.5 million Eurobond repayment, marking the nation as the first in Africa to default on its debt during the challenging era of the Covid-19 pandemic. This landmark event captures Zambia's complex entanglement with economic adversity and highlights the intricate decisions made in navigating the multifaceted landscape of debt management.

## However, Zambia's experience demonstrates that the Common Framework has failed to deliver.

The IMF could only offer \$1.3 billion over three years to help with Zambia's \$8.4 billion financing gap. However, the conditions tied to this funding involve tough choices for the Zambian government and require sacrifices from the people.

Zambia's official creditors have been assembled into a committee, with China and France taking the helm as co-chairs. However, the proceedings led by official creditors have been characterized by a measured pace, indicating a priority on reaching agreements that align with their respective geo-strategic interests rather than prioritizing Zambia's best interests.

This approach raises questions about the efficacy of the debt resolution process and underscores the potential divergence between creditor motivations and Zambia's urgent need for a sustainable and

equitable solution.

In June 2023, consensus was finally reached among official creditors on a standardized template applicable to all. According to this template, each individual creditor is now tasked with establishing a binding agreement with Zambia. However, the process of crafting these individual agreements is still underway, indicating that the details and terms are currently a work in progress.

In October 2023, Zambia made a significant announcement, confirming that it had successfully reached an agreement with the holders of its US\$3 billion Eurobonds. In collaboration with Zambian authorities, these creditors asserted that their agreement constituted a comparable contribution to the efforts of official creditors in addressing Zambia's debt crisis.

However, in November, Zambia's official creditors and certain independent experts rejected the deal. Their contention was that the terms offered to the commercial creditors were more favorable compared to those extended to the official creditors.

While both parties agreed to accept a reduction in the value of their debts, the contention arose from the assertion that commercial creditors would receive approximately 20c more for each dollar of debt outstanding than the official creditors. Consequently, this disparity has necessitated a reopening of negotiations between Zambia and its bondholders to address and rectify the perceived inequities in the proposed deal.

The existing method of sovereign debt restructuring is proving inadequate for Zambia and its populace. A fresh approach is imperative—one that upholds Zambia's legal obligations to its creditors while concurrently addressing the nation's imperative for a sustainable and equitable resolution to its debt crisis.

For the past three years, Zambia has been attempting to navigate the debt restructuring process following the guidelines set by the IMF and G20, yet success has remained elusive. A parallel examination of Sri Lanka's situation reveals striking similarities in the challenges faced by both nations.

Sri Lanka defaulted in April 2022, initiating discussions with the IMF

**Our country needs...**

From Page 05

year, a good and vast space has been opened for that. An election where an obvious change of power could be achieved should be held this year. Neither Ranil Wickramasinghe nor his anti-democratic movement will be able to avoid it. Therefore, we should use this opportunity successfully.

We invite the people to change the course of our country, which has been going on for a long time, and enter a new style of national freedom struggle.

We have to carry out a struggle to free our country from this corrupt gang and the corrupt state. We have to struggle to build our country's economy as it has been made bankrupt and has reached a stage where plans are made to sell all the sensitive centres of the economy, the country's resources and human resource management. We are entering the election with a perfect plan to combine our capabilities and transform our country into a developed nation worldwide. We request people to take an active part of this transformation. At the beginning of this year, the Jathika Jana Balawegaya is making an open invitation to all groups to rally with us to fulfil people's aspirations.

**Campaigners for...**

From Page 01

casino licenses have been granted. However, a casino has been allowed on Nelum Kuluna, and Indian companies have been given the opportunity to open a new casino, revealed Comrade Herath.

Although an attempt was made to introduce the Anti-Terrorism Act last year to suppress public opposition against such destructive measures, it had to be withdrawn as the sessions of the Human Rights Commission were being held at the time. The NPP, together with other progressive forces, vehemently oppose the attempt by the Ranil-Rajapakse government to bring it back to suppress the democratic rights of the masses, said Comrade Vijitha Herath.

**Will Ranil adorn...**

From Page 01

Huthi rebels also would apply to Sri Lanka.

Is Ranil Wickremesinghe trying to adorn the uniform of Indian Ocean policeman following Israel's role given to them by US imperialists or adorn court jester's attire of motley coat, tight breeches and a cap'n'bells?

Whatever, it would not be healthy for the country but could be a bonanza for the Ranil-Rajapaksa gang, for they could engineer an 'Easter' type catastrophe to postpone elections.

**JVP statement condemning the terrorist attack in Iran**

Issuing a statement condemning the terrorist attacks carried out in Iran's Kerman province, the Political Bureau of the JVP offers the party's condolences and condemns the attack.

The message states:

It is with profound sorrow that we learn about the explosions that killed nearly 100 people and wounded many more at a ceremony in the city of Kerman, in Iran.

We condemn with contempt the heinous and inhumane crime against the people. Only brutal and vicious criminals could commit such a horrific crime against the people.

The world has experienced such terrorism carried out or supported by imperialism that is on the verge of losing its grip internationally. Such monstrous crimes could be halted only by defeating imperialism and its lackeys.

We express our solidarity with the Iranian people at this hour of grief and send to the people in Iran and the families of the deceased our deepest condolences.

**Online Safety Bill...**

From Page 04

entitled. This rejected and illegitimate government is trying to safeguard their personal interest, which is certainly not the interest of the nation and its citizens. It is only in their own interests to evade their culpability and to get their criminal charges and cases withdrawn. Should there be laws introduced to safeguard such malice interests?

How should the conduct in social media be regulated is a perfect topic to discuss and debate. In formulating laws, there should be social dialogue and stimulus from society, indicating that there is a problem and how it should be addressed. Once we see the factual problem, we talk to experts regarding the origin of the problem and how it should

be handled. Then, come to the discussion of laws. There should be lengthy intellectual discussions, public forums and seminars. Then, they should go to the legal draftsman to formulate the law in writing. Then, that is also debated and discussed, and there are more deliberations after the initial draft. Then it goes to the cabinet and, if approved, again should allow people to challenge it before the judiciary. None of these procedures were adopted when the Online Safety Bill was introduced.

When people criticize the President or voice against a rejected parliament, is there a social need or need for laws to prevent that? No. These are not social problems. These are a legitimate exercise of

people's fundamental rights. If there is any lacuna in the law, Penal Code or Offences against children or Child abuse should be amended and procedural and evidence laws can be amended to adopt computer evidences and internet evidence to ensure that all culprits who commit crimes using online platforms are brought before the law. There are ways and means. However, one cannot come to a conclusion without negotiations, dialogue, debate, intellectual exchange of opinions, expert opinions, social know-how, and all other things that should be considered. Of course, even in future, I am for introducing an Online Safety Bill, but not this one they have introduced and not under the raised hands of this rejected Parliament.

**Debt Restructuring...**

From Page 06

even before the default occurred. Subsequently, within a few months, Sri Lanka reached an Extended Fund Facility (EFF) agreement with the IMF. As a prerequisite for these discussions, the IMF proposed the establishment of an expert committee for debt restructuring. Additionally, the IMF recommended the engagement of two internationally acclaimed companies, namely Lazard and Clifford Chance to undertake consultation work, particularly with private creditors or bondholders. After nearly 18 months—an unusually prolonged period for a country facing a crisis—and having expended millions according to some media outlets its 5.6 million USD of in consultation fees. What tangible achievements has Sri Lanka gained from these efforts?

Due to the impractical and deliberately complicated debt restructuring guideline template, Sri Lanka is compelled to make additional interest payments totaling 3.1

billion USD. There is no sign of any meaningful debt restructuring or noteworthy "haircuts" (percentage cancellation of the total debt) on the horizon. The much-discussed "haircuts" initially suggested by the IMF at 50%, later revised to 30%, are now facing further reduction proposals from creditors, settling at a suggested 20%.

The only noticeable outcome is that, without canceling a single dollar from Sri Lanka's substantial debt stockpiles, the country has disbursed millions of dollars to these questionable companies. This includes hefty fees for so-called experts, the imposition of burdensome taxes on an already struggling populace and economy, and an attempt to privatize state-owned enterprises, with the blame shifted onto them as the alleged culprits for the economic downturn.

Moreover, these external monetary entities, akin to sharks, are being granted privileged access to highly sensitive and

valuable information concerning the Sri Lankan economy and state-owned enterprises (SOEs). This raises concerns that their subsequent actions may involve leveraging this acquired information to exploit the fruits of the Sri Lankan economy with minimal returns for the country.

Upon scrutinizing the debt restructuring processes in Sri Lanka and Zambia, it becomes apparent that the IMF and G20 prescribed debt restructuring template or guidelines seem crafted not with the intention of genuinely restructuring the debt but rather to prolong the process, extracting every last penny from the financially beleaguered country and draining its economic vitality.

The 2023 World Bank debt report concludes with a stark statement: "The report notes that IDA-eligible countries have spent the last decade adding to their debt at a pace that exceeds their economic growth—a red flag for their prospects in the coming years. In 2022,

the combined external debt stock of IDA-eligible countries hit a record US\$1.1 trillion—more than doubles the 2012 level. From 2012 through 2022, IDA-eligible countries increased their external debt by 134%, outstripping the 53% increase they achieved in their gross national income (GNI)."

Hence, in 2024, the World Bank may need to engage an author endowed with a more extensive vocabulary than the one in 2023. This author should aptly articulate the escalating sovereign debt challenges faced by neo-colonized nations, which have intensified even further.

The only viable solution to this perpetual debt crisis is to replace the failed imperialist-designed economic system with a new global economic paradigm that prioritizes the well-being of people and the environment. Otherwise, nations will first fall victim to the "Debt Trap" and subsequently find themselves subjected to the ordeal of "Debt Restructuring."

# RedPower

## Bring to justice politicians involved in corrupt drug deal

**Comrade Dr. Nalinda Jayatissa, National Executive Member of NPP**



The government is working to protect its political allies in the case of the corrupt drug deal, says Comrade Dr Nalinda Jayatissa, the National Executive Member of the NPP and insisted that the government should bring before the law those politicians and political authorities who claim to have advised in this regard should be brought before the law without further protection.

Comrade Dr Nalinda Jayatissa said this on the 19th of December at a press conference held at

the head office of the JVP on the 19th of December.

Comrade Dr. Nalinda Jayatissa said, "22,500 units of immunoglobulin drugs in question have been purchased by the State Pharmaceutical Corporation between last July and September and given to government hospitals. Several hospitals had informed the ministry that complications were reported from the patients who were given that medicine. During the last economic crisis, India gave us credit facilities to buy food and medicine. Under the guise of the credit facility, the Ministry of Health turned to purchasing medicines from Indian companies, setting aside the

existing procedures. An opportunity was created to buy Indian medicines from the Indian credit facility only with the signature of the Chief Executive of the National Drug Regulatory Authority. There are serious problems with the drugs brought in that way. That is why blindness and drug-related deaths were caused by such drugs. A nearly three billion-dollar transaction cannot be done without the minister's approval. Some officers in the supply department and the secretary of the health ministry have been arrested. However, the law will not be implemented for the Minister Keheliya Rambukwella, who was in charge of the subject then."

## What exists is a government that even children are fed up with

**Comrade Samanmalee Gunasinghe, National Executive Member of NPP**



The government that has extended the time that bars and wine stores are kept open is giving liquor to fathers and sending mothers abroad, said Comrade Samanmalee Gunasinghe, the National Executive Member of the NPP, adding that crimes related to children who have been left unprotected in this situation are on the rise and now there is a government that even the children are

fed up with.

Comrade Samanmalee Gunasinghe expressed these views on the 3rd, attending a press conference of the NPP Women's Organization held at the JVP head office.

Speaking further, Comrade Samanmalee said, "The whole country was waiting for some relief from the 2024 budget. However, as always, that hope is just a dream. The economic agenda prepared with the IMF has been well adjusted to their needs for next year as well. Today, a taxing budget has been presented to flatten the suffering people

further. Meanwhile, a large slice has been cut from the allocations for the Ministry of Children and Women Affairs.

When pregnant mothers, lactating mothers and children have nutritional deficiencies and the situation is getting worse, the 152 billion rupees allocated in 2023 have been cut to 77 billion rupees in 2024. Due to this cut, there is severe pressure on children and women and among the people with special needs. Therefore, the only thing left today is to find answers by ousting the government."

## NZ High Commissioner meets AKD



**A meeting between the New Zealand High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Mr Michael Appleton, and the leader of the National People's Power, Comrade Anura Kumara Dissanayake, took place on 6th January at JVP head office.**

**Mr Michael Appleton began his duties in Sri Lanka when he officially opened the New Zealand High Commission in Sri Lanka, and this meeting was held to mark his departure from his two and a half years of duty in Sri**

**Lanka.**

**Comrade Anura Dissanayake especially praised the contribution made by Mr Michael Alton for coming to Sri Lanka amid the challenging Covid epidemic and strengthening the diplomatic relations between the two countries.**

**Comrade Vijitha Herath, National Executive Member of the National People's Power, was also present.**

## Workplace awareness programme commenced



Issuing a statement condemning the terrorist attacks carried out in Iran's Kerman province, the Political Bureau of the JVP offers the party's condolences and condemns the attack.

The message states: It is with profound sorrow that we learn about the explosions that killed nearly 100 people and wounded many more at a ceremony in the city of Kerman. in Iran.

We condemn with contempt the heinous and inhumane crime against the people. Only brutal and vicious criminals could commit such a horrific crime against the people.

The world has experienced such terrorism carried out or supported by imperialism that is on the verge of losing its grip internationally. Such monstrous crimes could be halted only by defeating imperialism and its lackeys.

We express our solidarity with the Iranian people at this hour of grief and send to the people in Iran and the families of the deceased our deepest condolences.

## SYU joins Cuban Revolution Celebrations



A meeting organized by the Cuban Embassy in Sri Lanka was held on the first day of January to mark the 65th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution.

After the revolutionary

victory in 1959, Socialist Cuba protected the revolution until now with many sacrifices and massive sanctions carried out by imperialists.

As a result of the unique

nature of Cuba's diplomacy, people from all over the world stand up for them.

The Ambassador of Cuba to Sri Lanka, Andres Marcelo Gonzalez Garrido, Comrade Sunil Handunneththi, Members of the Cuban-Sri Lanka Friendship Association, political representatives together with International Affairs Secretary of the SYU Anjana Amarasinghe its National Organizer Comrade Eranga Gunasekara and former Vice President of the World Democratic Youth Federation Comrade Kalpana Madhubashini representing the Socialist Students Union participated in the celebrations.