

Sri Lanka: Govt. to carry on with Ranil's Urumaya

Friday 11 October 2024, by [ARIYAWANSHA Niranjala](#) (Date first published: 6 October 2024).

The previous government's Urumaya programme, under which freehold title is given to people who use state land based on a permit or grant issued by the government, will continue, the Land Commissioners General's Department said.

The deeds are given upon the voluntary handing over of the permits.

Similar programmes have been carried out by different governments in accordance with the Land Development Ordinance (as amended) for political advantages, critics have said.

The latest version of the programme began under President Ranil Wickremesinghe. He promised to hand over two million freehold titles. But the programme was suspended under election laws after being launched in Dambulla in February.

However, the new President, Anura Kumara Dissanayake, has instructed that land distribution should continue, Land Commissioner General Bandula Jayasinghe told *the Sunday Times*.

He said so far 21,491 freehold deeds had been distributed under the Urumaya programme and another 110,000 people would be handed over deeds soon.

Under Urumaya, restrictions previously imposed on state lands, such as sale or transfer, have been removed.

There are about two million who have land licences and grants, but only about 200,000 have applied for freehold rights under Urumaya.

"Due to various reasons, many people do not have their licences or grants," Mr. Jayasinghe said.

"Although the law prohibits anyone from selling or transferring government licensed or granted land, due to economic hardship or various other reasons, many people have informally arranged to sell or lease their land in whole or in part, or transfer it to someone else," Mr. Jayasinghe noted.

But he said those who have the licence or grants without such problems should apply for Urumaya as soon as possible. He encouraged those with legal ownership of the licences to apply to the Divisional Secretary.

In 1983, licences like 'Jayabhumi' and 'Swarna Bhumi' were introduced to grant farmers rights to government land. Licences have historically favoured husbands over wives. Wives are only entitled to life interest after their husband's death. Legal regulations also dictated that the land belonged to the oldest male child. Recognising the unfairness of these laws, the Land Act No. 11 of 2022 now grants 50% of the land to the wife and the remaining 50% to the children, in line with common property laws.

Addressing the challenges, the Land Commissioner said the obstacles were being removed.

Under the process, the Registrar General's Department registers the receipt of land grants or licences and then the Surveyors Department re-registers it and prepares an outright grant. Then they will make a freehold grant for that outright grant and will send it, along with the old licence, to the President for his approval. The President cancels the old licence and approves the freehold deed. It will be sent back to the concerned person through the divisional secretary.

The commissioner said that with efficient coordination between relevant agencies, a freehold deed could be issued in two weeks.

Landless people of the hill country, people who had problems in land transfer during or after the war in the north and the east, urban residents who are currently landless or homeless, or have land-related problems, and people displaced by development projects cannot apply for Urumaya, he said.

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P.S.

The Sunday Times

https://www.sundaytimes.lk/241006/news/govt-to-carry-on-with-ranils-urumaya-573331.html?fbclid=IwY2xjawFxx-hleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHXbeog_YG-2jnwsS-spQHk1YacIjs5ocDMKSKtxrmZWVLgcf1yyBp7V-ow_aem_2ZllZkP8EKf7BFoW_ch_KQ