

Sri Lanka: Govt has ended corrupt political culture - Tilvin Silva

Saturday 8 February 2025, by [KUMARASINGHE Uditha](#), [SILVA Tilvin](#) (Date first published: 26 January 2025).

Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) General Secretary Tilvin Silva in an interview with the Sunday Observer shared his perspectives on the current political developments in the country and the Government's way forward. He said during its short tenure in office, the Government has put an end to the corrupt political culture which swindled public funds, creating an administration which is free from fraud and corruption. The people have realised that the Government has fulfilled an enormous task to get the country out of the crisis, giving every possible relief to the people.

Excerpts of the interview

Q: Around five months have passed since President Anura Kumara Dissanayake was elected and around two months since the National People's Power (NPP) Government was set up with a two-thirds majority. In retrospect, what is your assessment of the progress made so far?

A: Our political opponents level criticisms thinking that the NPP Government was formed three to four years ago. This Government was set up two months ago. The people have realised that the Government has fulfilled an enormous task within its short tenure in office. We have worked hard to get the country out of the crisis. On the other hand, some relief measures have been given to the people. The biggest task we made was to end the corrupt political culture which swindled public funds creating an administration which is free from fraud and corruption. We have minimised waste of public funds. We have stopped the practice of politicians being above the people. At present, people don't see any politicians going along with so many security personnel and backup vehicles, and this is a big change.

Our political opponents said that if an NPP Government comes to power, we won't get any foreign assistance or aid and we will lack international connections. We have practically proven during the past two to three months that the NPP Government has received the highest number of foreign aid and investments. Countries worldwide have accepted that we are a democratic Government, free from fraud and corruption. Therefore, countries such as China, India and many other countries have decided to help us. We have already given much relief to the people and steps were also taken to reduce electricity tariffs. If there are few shortcomings, the Government has done a lot during this short tenure in office.

Q: What are the benefits that the country will gain by the President's recent visits to India and China? How does the Government intend to balance these two giant regional powers without taking anyone's side?

A: We have a good political understanding on their strengths and contradictions between two countries. When the President went to India, he categorically said that we would not allow anything

to happen in Sri Lankan territorial waters which would pose any threat to India's national security but we didn't bow down before India. However, we strengthened our bilateral ties with India. India has pledged to extend its support to our digitisation project and poverty eradication drive. In addition, we have obtained nearly a US\$ 400 million loan from India to upgrade our railway signalling system. They have agreed to write it off and turn it into a donation. The President's Chinese visit was also a very fruitful in that 15 MoUs were signed. The biggest was the US\$ 3.7 billion investment in an oil refinery project in Sri Lanka. China has also donated 500 million Yuan which can be used in our projects. Recently, we met a large number of foreign Ambassadors including those from Australia, US and UK and they pledged support to us. They have seriously taken into consideration that the Government has checked violence, racism and created an administration free from fraud and corruption.

Q: Nabbing corrupt persons associated with past regimes was one of the main promises of the NPP Government. Yet, critics say that apart from a few illegal vehicle assembly cases, no substantial charges have been brought against any politician. What is the reason for the delay?

A: Whoever has committed any wrongdoing, the law will be implemented against them regardless of their positions. Those who made a big hue and cry saying that the culprits are not brought to book, now say that the Government takes revenge against its political opponents. A former Minister of the Kurunegala district was arrested in a case of alleged misappropriation of public funds which had occurred over ten years ago. When that arrest was made, his friends and close associates went before the media and said that the Government has resorted to taking revenge from its opponents. We have given full freedom to the law enforcement authorities to conduct their investigations.

Q: Likewise, there are accusations that this Government also is not making much headway regarding the Easter Sunday attacks' probe and also the killings of journalists such as Lasantha Wickrematunge and the disappearance of journalist Prageeth Eknaligoda under past regimes. What is the reason for this delay?

A: Steps should be taken regarding these incidents. As we all are aware, these are very complex issues because the Governments in power at that time were connected to these incidents. If ordinary citizens had committed such offences, we should have implemented the law against them. The investigations into the Easter Sunday carnage had revealed that some former intelligence and Army officers had also got involved in those incidents and some of that information had been distorted and concealed. However, the investigations are continuing and I hope we will be able to reveal the truth soon.

As for Lasantha Wickrematunge's assassination, the information on those investigations has been distorted. His assassination took place before 2015 and a new Government came to power in 2015 and it didn't take any action in that regard. Then Gotabaya Rajapaksa Government came to power in 2019 and they took every possible measure to distort and conceal that evidence. Amid these hardships, we will continue investigations and hope we could bring all those culprits who were connected to those crimes to book.

Q: Reducing the Cost of Living was a main campaign plank of the NPP and indeed, the Government has managed to bring down power tariffs. However, it has not substantially reduced fuel prices. What is the reason for this?

A: The Government has given a 20 percent reduction in electricity tariffs to consumers and 30 percent to industries. Accordingly, the rates of all services and industries should come down and we will monitor that closely. We have given a series of relief measures to the poorer segment of the

society. The amount of money given under the Aswesuma program and its beneficiaries has been increased. In addition, nearly 1.3 million children have been given an allowance of Rs.6,000 each to purchase school stationery while Rs.60 provided for a preschool student on meal has been increased up to Rs.100. A fuel price formula was introduced earlier and the state monopoly of distributing fuel was given up in the recent past.

The distribution of fuel was also given to Sinopec and IOC. At present, fuel is imported and distributed by CPC, Sinopec and IOC. Therefore, the price is decided based on the cost incurred by these three companies to import fuel. However, a situation has been created where the Government is not in a position to decide on the fuel prices. The fuel price is decided on based on the price formula and if the fuel is sold by the CPC below that price, Sinopec and IOC will also follow suit. Then the Government will have to provide the loss they incur due to selling fuel at lower prices. At present, there is an issue as the Government is not in a position to do that. We think we could further reduce the fuel prices when the new oil refinery is set up and use oil tanks in Trincomalee to refine crude oil.

Q: Judging by the market conditions, the Government has not been able to end the shortage of certain varieties of rice and also bring down rice prices in general. Again, critics say that the NPP Government is also being held hostage by the big mill mafia. What is your comment?

A: Actually, this is not an issue created by us and it was there when we came to power as well. All those paddy fields had been cultivated during the tenure of the former Government. The issue was that the Government institutions didn't have accurate data. When the decisions were taken based on that wrong information, it paved the way to create a rice shortage in the local market. However, we imported nearly 170,000 metric tons of rice and controlled the shortage. When Ranil Wickremesinghe was the President, 20 kilograms of rice packs were distributed among people countrywide with the intervention of then Agriculture Minister Mahinda Amaraweera. Red rice stocks in the Southern province rice mills which were distributed among the people. It is a known fact that red rice is not consumed everywhere in the country. Most people in Anuradhapura consume Nadu rice. Red rice stock in the South was over as a result of distributing red rice countrywide.

There is no possibility of importing red rice and then a kilogram of red rice would be at over Rs.300. There is a small issue until the paddy harvest is reaped during this harvesting season.

Q: There are fears that the economy could be adversely affected if there are uncontrolled imports of private vehicles. What is the Government's plan to protect the economy whilst allowing vehicle imports?

A: There are several reasons for us to import vehicles. Our vehicle market has become inactive due to the non-import of vehicles for a long time. There are a large number of people who depend on this industry and they have lost their jobs. Therefore, a certain number of vehicles has to be imported to activate the vehicle market. According to the agreement the former Government signed with the IMF, there is a particular percentage that the Government should maintain its revenue. Then the taxes should be imposed to achieve this target. However, we cannot impose more taxes on the masses.

If a tax is imposed on imported vehicles, then the Government's tax revenue will go up. That is why a decision was taken to import vehicles. Initially, we would allocate nearly US\$ one billion to import these vehicles. We believe these vehicle imports will not have any adverse impact on the economy. We have been able to successfully exceed the targets given by the IMF and increase our foreign reserves.

Q: The Opposition as well as media critics also charge that the political inexperience of most NPP Ministers and MPs could be a major disadvantage in governance. What is your comment on this?

A: Today we have to suffer because of certain actions taken by some of those well experienced politicians. They committed the Central Bank daylight robbery based on their experience and still we are suffering due to that. Many frauds and corruption took place under the former Governments. So many development projects were suspended and cancelled due to the attempts of those well experienced Ministers. Some politicians of former Governments used their experience to swindle public funds, get commissions and solicit bribes. We believe this lack of political experience is in a way good for the country. New Ministers and MPs are catching up their duties so quickly.

None of them are new to politics or work alone and they all work as a team. They have already delivered so many positive things which the well experienced politicians couldn't do in the past.

Q: Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) politicians and various sections have raised concerns on the Government's decision to reclaim the official residence of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa. Would you comment?

A: Those who try to survive with the help of public funds even after they get defeated have panicked. We have received a mandate to change the country's political culture and curtail the perks and privileges enjoyed by politicians. We first commenced to curtail that on our own and not from Mahinda Rajapaksa. We didn't appoint our relatives to Government institutions or offer them top positions. We stopped using luxury vehicles and started using normal vehicles. We didn't give official residences to Ministers and asked them to stay at the Madiwela Housing Complex. We didn't give police security to Ministers. So, we have already curtailed many perks and privileges enjoyed by former Ministers and MPs. While doing so, we also asked former Presidents to minimise their wasteful expenditure.

This is not an issue just confined to Mahinda Rajapaksa. If some particular individual has retired from the Presidency, if he or she attempts to survive on public funds, it's a shameful act. When there are over 2.5 to three million people who are not in a position to even have their three meals a day, how can one particular individual live in a huge State-owned house along with hundreds of security personnel merely because he held the Presidency. It was Mahinda Rajapaksa's supporters who said that the LTTE has been wiped out and there is a threat. Then what is the purpose of having such a huge security for him? There is a culture that they have maintained to live above the people such as VVIPs spending public funds as they please. When their movement is disturbed, they start crying but that is not relevant to us.

If Mahinda Rajapaksa doesn't have a house, we are ready to give him a house. However, that won't be a huge official residence that he has occupied so far. Therefore, he should either pay the rent of the house or should vacate it and we are ready to provide him a suitable house. We believe there is no stable economy in Sri Lanka where we can treat Mahinda Rajapaksa like a king. He has three sons so they should be ashamed of keeping him in an official residence. They have a responsibility to look after their father.

Q: The Opposition and various sections have raised concern on the Clean Sri Lanka program launched by the Government. Can you explain?

A: Clean Sri Lanka is the massive socio, economic and political movement commenced in recent times to change the country. This is not a mere garbage disposal project. The prime objective of the program is to ensure cleanliness in the country and create an awareness to change the attitude of

the people. Therefore, it will take a few years to effect these changes. When this project was started, some institutions jumped the gun and even a small issue came up when the police attempted to remove the modifications in buses. However, there is a law which prevails in the country and the police attempted to remove those modifications of buses but we have controlled it now. We have to implement the Clean Sri Lanka project step by step. This is a difficult task but this will bring a lot of benefits to the society.

Q: The Opposition alleges that the Government has failed to fulfill its pledges given to the people. Your views?

A: This Opposition has failed. Earlier, they were in the Government. But the people ousted them from Government and confined them to a limited number of MPs in the Opposition. I think they have not gained any experience from the people's mandate given to them. All what they said during the election campaign on the NPP have proved to be completely false. Even today, if they want to rectify their mistakes, they should submit constructive criticism to the Government. A constructive dialogue should begin in Parliament without levelling baseless allegations.

However, the Opposition doesn't have that ability and ideologically they are very poor. We like the manner in which the current Opposition conducts itself and they would never be able to win public confidence.

Q: The Opposition alleges that the NPP vote base has declined and it suffered a setback in the recent Cooperative Society Elections which were held in a few areas. Would you elaborate?

A: When they formed Governments, did they win all 160 electorates in the country? They were also defeated in over 50 electorates. At the last election, the NPP won 21 electoral districts but was defeated in the Batticaloa district. In politics, you can't win all districts. Recently, the NPP won nearly 25 to 30 cooperative society elections and were defeated in only two.

Q: Some say that you are actually running the Government behind the scenes. Is this a true description of the work you do?

A: That is not so. The President and the Ministers do a great deal of effort. Actually, I don't work as hard as them and I only look after the party activities. However, the Government cannot be run without Ministers, its parliamentary group and officers. Similarly, the support of the JVP and NPP is also needed to run the Government. Therefore, we work collectively sharing our responsibilities. I fulfill the task entrusted on me. So, it is difficult to judge whose work is more important. The duty done by our office assistants is also vital to continue the Government.

Tilvin Silva

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