

Ranil Wickremesinghe is a prominent Sri Lankan politician who has served multiple terms as Prime Minister of Sri Lanka and was elected President in 2022 amidst one of the country's most severe political and economic crises.

### **Early Life and Education**

Born on March 24, 1949, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Wickremesinghe comes from a well-established family involved in both politics and business. His uncle, J. R. Jayewardene, was Sri Lanka's first Executive President, making Wickremesinghe's entry into politics a natural progression. He attended Royal College in Colombo and later studied law at the University of Ceylon, qualifying as an attorney.

### **Political Career Beginnings**

Wickremesinghe began his political career in the 1970s, becoming a Member of Parliament in 1977 for the United National Party (UNP), the same party that his uncle led. His early roles in government were significant, including his appointment as the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and later as Minister of Youth Affairs and Employment.

### **Terms as Prime Minister**

Wickremesinghe's political career has been characterized by multiple terms as Sri Lanka's Prime Minister. He first assumed office in 1993 after the assassination of then-President Ranasinghe Premadasa. He also held the position in 2001–2004, 2015–2018, and briefly in 2019, with each term facing its own unique challenges.

1. **First Term (1993-1994):** Wickremesinghe became Prime Minister after the assassination of President Premadasa. However, his term was short-lived due to the victory of Chandrika Kumaratunga and the People's Alliance in the 1994 general election.
2. **Second Term (2001-2004):** His most significant tenure came in 2001 when he was appointed Prime Minister following an economic downturn in Sri Lanka. During this period, Wickremesinghe initiated peace talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an ethnic insurgency that had caused a long-standing civil war in Sri Lanka. His government brokered a ceasefire with the LTTE in 2002, facilitated by international mediation, particularly from Norway. However, his approach to the peace process was controversial, and President Kumaratunga dissolved Parliament in 2004, bringing an end to his term.
3. **Third and Fourth Terms (2015-2019):** In 2015, Wickremesinghe returned as Prime Minister under President Maithripala Sirisena after a significant election victory. His government implemented democratic reforms, including the 19th Amendment,

which curtailed presidential powers and reinstated a two-term limit for the presidency. However, tensions with President Sirisena led to Wickremesinghe's dismissal in 2018, an action deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, which reinstated him. His political alliance suffered a significant setback in 2019 after a series of missteps, including his government's failure to prevent the Easter Sunday bombings.

### **Presidency and Crisis Leadership (2022)**

Wickremesinghe was elected as President of Sri Lanka in July 2022 by the Sri Lankan Parliament after the resignation of Gotabaya Rajapaksa. His presidency came during a time of immense political and economic turmoil, including mass protests, an economic collapse, and unprecedented inflation. Rajapaksa's government had faced widespread criticism for its handling of the economy, which had led to severe shortages of food, fuel, and medicine.

Wickremesinghe's election as president was viewed with mixed reactions. Some saw him as a stabilizing figure with international connections who could help Sri Lanka navigate its economic crisis, while others criticized him as being too close to the political establishment, particularly the Rajapaksa family. His presidency has been focused on stabilizing the economy through talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), debt restructuring, and restoring political order in the wake of widespread civil unrest.

### **Key Contributions and Policies**

1. **Economic Policies:** As a politician, Wickremesinghe is known for his liberal economic views. During his various terms in office, he has emphasized the need for foreign investment, free-market policies, and privatization. His approach has often been in contrast to the more state-controlled economic policies of other Sri Lankan leaders.
2. **Peace Process with the LTTE:** His most notable contribution to Sri Lankan politics was his attempt to broker peace with the LTTE during his second term as Prime Minister. Although the ceasefire ultimately collapsed, Wickremesinghe's efforts were seen as a bold move toward resolving the ethnic conflict that had plagued Sri Lanka for decades.
3. **Reforms:** During his time in office from 2015 to 2018, he was instrumental in passing constitutional reforms aimed at curbing executive power, fostering transparency, and restoring the independence of key institutions.

### **Criticisms**

Despite his long tenure in Sri Lankan politics, Wickremesinghe has faced criticism from various quarters. Critics argue that his pro-Western economic policies have been too neoliberal and have exacerbated inequality in the country. His peace efforts with the LTTE, while initially praised, were also seen as too conciliatory by some nationalist factions. Additionally, his role in the political crisis of 2018, when he clashed with President Sirisena, has been viewed as a failure of leadership.

### **Personal Life**

Wickremesinghe is known for being a reserved and intellectual politician, with a deep interest in history and international relations. He is married to Maithree Wickremesinghe, a professor of English, and they have maintained a relatively low-profile personal life.

### **Legacy**

Ranil Wickremesinghe's legacy is still evolving, especially as he currently holds the office of President. He is seen as a skilled negotiator and technocrat, with a deep understanding of both local and international politics. His ability to navigate crises, from civil war to economic collapse, has defined his political career, although the full impact of his leadership will likely be judged based on how successfully he manages the ongoing economic recovery efforts in Sri Lanka.