

Sajith Premadasa is a prominent Sri Lankan politician and the current leader of the opposition. He is the son of former President Ranasinghe Premadasa, a key figure in Sri Lanka's political history. Over the years, Sajith has established himself as a central figure in the United National Party (UNP) and later, the leader of the newly formed Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), a breakaway faction from the UNP.

Early Life and Education

Sajith Premadasa was born on January 12, 1967, in Colombo, Sri Lanka. As the son of Ranasinghe Premadasa, who served as the President of Sri Lanka from 1989 until his assassination in 1993, Sajith was introduced to politics at an early age. His mother, Hema Premadasa, was also active in social and charitable work, further embedding public service in Sajith's upbringing.

Premadasa received his primary education at St. Thomas' Preparatory School in Colombo before attending Royal College, Colombo, one of the most prestigious schools in Sri Lanka. After completing his early education, he pursued higher studies abroad. He earned a degree in economics, politics, and international relations from the London School of Economics (LSE), gaining insights into global political and economic frameworks that would later influence his political career.

Entry into Politics

Sajith Premadasa's political journey began in the 1990s following the assassination of his father by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 1993. While his father's death shocked the nation and left a leadership vacuum in Sri Lankan politics, it also opened the door for Sajith to follow in his father's footsteps. He officially entered politics in 2000 when he was elected to Parliament as a representative of the Hambantota district, the political base of his father.

As a parliamentarian, Sajith quickly gained a reputation as a dedicated public servant. He focused on poverty alleviation, rural development, and housing projects, building a strong support base in the southern parts of the country, particularly in rural areas. His initiatives in housing mirrored his father's own policies, further cementing his image as a leader for the poor and underprivileged.

Political Leadership and Party Role

Sajith Premadasa's rise within the UNP was steady but marked by internal conflict. By 2011, he had been appointed as the Deputy Leader of the United National Party, positioning him as a potential future leader. His ambitions, however, were often at odds

with the long-serving UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe, resulting in a power struggle within the party.

In 2019, after years of internal rifts and growing dissatisfaction with Wickremesinghe's leadership, Premadasa was nominated as the UNP's presidential candidate in the national election. His campaign focused on populist policies, pledging to address issues such as income inequality, corruption, and housing shortages. Despite his efforts, Premadasa was defeated by Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who won by a significant margin amid growing nationalist sentiments in the country.

Formation of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB)

Following his defeat in the 2019 presidential election and amid the declining fortunes of the UNP, Sajith Premadasa took a bold step by forming the **Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB)** in 2020. This new political party aimed to revitalize the opposition and provide an alternative to both the ruling Rajapaksa family and the increasingly unpopular UNP leadership under Wickremesinghe.

Under Premadasa's leadership, the SJB became a major force in Sri Lankan politics. In the 2020 parliamentary elections, the SJB emerged as the main opposition party, with Premadasa becoming the Leader of the Opposition. His party capitalized on growing discontent with the Rajapaksa government, focusing on economic mismanagement, corruption, and the erosion of democratic institutions.

Key Policies and Contributions

1. **Housing and Rural Development:** Like his father, Sajith Premadasa has prioritized housing and poverty alleviation. Throughout his political career, he has launched various housing schemes aimed at providing affordable homes to low-income families. His focus on rural development is a continuation of his father's legacy, and he remains dedicated to improving the quality of life for Sri Lanka's underprivileged citizens.
2. **Education and Healthcare:** As part of his broader development agenda, Premadasa has championed increased investment in education and healthcare, advocating for more equitable access to these essential services, particularly in rural areas.
3. **Anti-corruption and Transparency:** During his presidential campaign and tenure as opposition leader, Premadasa has consistently emphasized the need for transparency and good governance. He has been a vocal critic of the Rajapaksa family's administration, particularly regarding corruption and nepotism.

4. **Economic Reforms:** Premadasa's platform has also included economic reforms aimed at addressing income inequality and promoting inclusive growth. He has called for a more progressive tax policy and greater investment in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to stimulate local economies.

Challenges and Criticism

Despite his rising popularity, Sajith Premadasa has faced numerous challenges. His leadership has been questioned by critics who argue that he lacks the political acumen or experience needed to lead the country during times of crisis. Others have pointed to his failure in uniting the fractured UNP and his eventual breakaway to form the SJB as a divisive move that weakened the opposition at a critical time in Sri Lanka's political landscape.

Premadasa's electoral defeats, both in the 2019 presidential election and in subsequent elections, have also cast doubts on his ability to gain widespread support outside his core base in rural southern Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, his persistence and continued focus on social welfare have kept him relevant in Sri Lankan politics.

Personal Life

Sajith Premadasa is married to Jalani Premadasa, and the couple has a daughter. Unlike many politicians, Premadasa has kept a relatively low profile regarding his personal life, choosing instead to emphasize his political work and public service.

Legacy and Future Prospects

As of today, Sajith Premadasa's political career is still unfolding. His leadership of the SJB and his role as Leader of the Opposition have made him a key figure in Sri Lankan politics, particularly in the context of the country's ongoing economic crisis. Whether he can translate his policies and popularity into national leadership remains to be seen, but he is positioned as one of the primary challengers to the current government.

Premadasa's commitment to social justice, rural development, and housing reform are likely to shape his legacy, much as these issues did for his father. His future political trajectory will depend on his ability to navigate Sri Lanka's complex political landscape, build broad coalitions, and effectively challenge the ruling establishment.