

Anura Kumara Dissanayake is a well-known Sri Lankan politician and the leader of the **Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)**, a left-wing political party. His political career is characterized by his strong advocacy for socialist values, anti-corruption campaigns, and his outspoken opposition to neoliberal policies and the dominance of traditional political families like the Rajapaksas.

Early Life and Education

Anura Kumara Dissanayake was born on November 24, 1968, in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka. His early life was shaped by the political and social environment of rural Sri Lanka. Dissanayake attended Madawala Primary School and later Nalanda College in Colombo, a school known for producing many political figures in Sri Lanka. His interest in politics began during his school and university years, influenced by the turbulent political landscape of the 1980s, particularly the rise of the JVP as a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary force.

Dissanayake pursued higher education at the University of Kelaniya, where he became deeply involved in student activism, a common entry point into politics for many in Sri Lanka. His student activism eventually led him to join the JVP.

Entry into Politics

Dissanayake formally joined the **Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna** in the late 1980s, a period of political upheaval in Sri Lanka. The JVP, which was originally formed in 1965 as a revolutionary Marxist party, became notorious for its role in two armed uprisings against the government in 1971 and 1987–1989. These uprisings were brutally suppressed, and the JVP was banned for several years.

However, after re-entering the political mainstream in the 1990s, the JVP shifted its focus from armed struggle to parliamentary politics. Anura Kumara Dissanayake emerged as a key figure in this transformation. His articulate speeches and clear stance on social justice issues gained him a loyal following. He was first elected to Parliament in 2000, representing Colombo District under the JVP banner.

Leadership in JVP

As a member of the JVP, Dissanayake became known for his commitment to socialist ideals and for his vocal criticism of Sri Lanka's two dominant political parties—the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). His rise within the JVP coincided with the party's shift from its revolutionary roots to becoming a more moderate and parliamentary-focused organization.

By the 2010s, Dissanayake had become a leading figure within the JVP, known for his strong opposition to corruption, cronyism, and the influence of the Rajapaksa family in Sri Lankan politics. His advocacy for the working class, along with his criticisms of neoliberal economic policies, resonated with many Sri Lankans who were disillusioned with the mainstream political establishment.

In 2014, after several leadership changes within the JVP, Anura Kumara Disanayake was elected as the party's leader. Under his leadership, the JVP has sought to broaden its appeal by positioning itself as a clean, anti-corruption party, while still maintaining its core socialist values. He has advocated for workers' rights, fair economic policies, and increased transparency in government.

Key Policies and Contributions

1. **Anti-Corruption Campaigns:** One of Disanayake's central themes throughout his political career has been the fight against corruption. He has been a vocal critic of successive governments, particularly during the presidencies of Mahinda and Gotabaya Rajapaksa, accusing them of corruption, nepotism, and undermining democratic institutions.
2. **Economic Justice and Workers' Rights:** As a socialist, Disanayake has consistently pushed for policies that benefit the working class and the poor. He has advocated for increased government investment in healthcare, education, and welfare, and has opposed privatization efforts, especially in key sectors like energy and transportation. He has also supported stronger labor protections and wages for Sri Lankan workers, particularly those in agriculture and manufacturing.
3. **Opposition to Neoliberal Policies:** Disanayake has been a fierce critic of neoliberal economic policies, which he argues disproportionately benefit the wealthy and multinational corporations at the expense of the poor. He has opposed International Monetary Fund (IMF) austerity measures, privatization, and free-market reforms, favoring instead state-led economic development and redistribution of wealth.
4. **Democracy and Good Governance:** Anura Kumara Disanayake has frequently called for strengthening democratic institutions in Sri Lanka, including an independent judiciary, free media, and stronger checks on executive power. His opposition to the authoritarian tendencies of some Sri Lankan leaders, especially the Rajapaksas, has earned him respect from civil society groups and the general public.

5. **Environmental and Agricultural Policies:** Dissanayake has also highlighted the importance of sustainable development and the protection of Sri Lanka's environment. He has criticized large-scale development projects that harm the environment and displace local communities, advocating instead for policies that prioritize the needs of small farmers and local industries.

Presidential Candidate and Opposition Leadership

Dissanayake ran as the JVP's presidential candidate in the 2019 election under the banner of the **National People's Power (NPP)** coalition, which sought to broaden the JVP's appeal by including other left-leaning and progressive groups. Though he did not win, his campaign was marked by a strong anti-corruption message and a focus on social justice. His performance in the election solidified his position as a major opposition figure.

In the context of the ongoing economic crisis in Sri Lanka, particularly following the collapse of the Rajapaksa government in 2022, Dissanayake has been an outspoken critic of the political establishment's handling of the economy, including the mounting national debt and the worsening living conditions for ordinary Sri Lankans. His leadership of the JVP and the NPP has positioned him as one of the key challengers to the ruling political class, with an increasing number of citizens seeing him as a credible alternative.

Challenges and Criticism

While Anura Kumara Dissanayake has been lauded for his principled stance against corruption and his advocacy for social justice, he also faces significant challenges. The JVP, despite its historical legacy and strong grassroots support, has struggled to break into the mainstream and win a significant number of parliamentary seats. Some critics argue that the JVP's hardline socialist policies are out of step with modern economic realities, making it difficult for the party to attract a broader base of support.

Moreover, Dissanayake's opposition to foreign investment and globalization has drawn criticism from business groups and economists, who argue that Sri Lanka needs more foreign capital and open markets to grow its economy.

Personal Life

Anura Kumara Dissanayake maintains a relatively private personal life. He is married to Dr. Varuni Dissanayake, a university lecturer, and they have two children. Despite his high-profile political career, Dissanayake is known for leading a simple lifestyle, aligning with the socialist ideals he advocates for.

Legacy and Future Prospects

As of today, Anura Kumara Disanayake continues to play a central role in Sri Lanka's opposition politics. His leadership of the JVP and the NPP has revitalized the left in Sri Lankan politics, and his focus on anti-corruption, social justice, and workers' rights resonates with a growing number of disillusioned voters. While the road to national leadership remains challenging for Disanayake, he is likely to remain a key figure in Sri Lankan politics for the foreseeable future.

His ability to expand the JVP's reach and build alliances with other opposition parties will be crucial in determining his political future and the future of the leftist movement in Sri Lanka.