

Profile of Ranil Wickremesinghe

Personal Information

- **Full Name:** Ranil Wickremesinghe
- **Date of Birth:** March 24, 1949
- **Age:** 75
- **Nationality:** Sri Lankan
- **Education:** Royal College, Colombo; University of Ceylon (Bachelor of Laws); Ceylon Law College
- **Profession:** Attorney at Law
- **Spouse:** Maithree Wickremesinghe (an academic and Professor at the University of Kelaniya)
- **Symbol:** Gas Cylinder
- **Political Status:** Running as an Independent candidate in the 2024 Presidential Election
- **Residency:** Colombo, Sri Lanka

Political Background and Career

- **Current Position:** President of Sri Lanka (since July 21, 2022)
- **Prime Minister:** Served six terms (1993–1994, 2001–2004, 2015–2018, 2018–2019, and twice in 2022)
- **Ministerial Roles:**
 - **Minister of Defence:** (2022–present)
 - **Minister of Finance:** (2022–present)
 - **Minister of Technology:** (2022–present)
 - **Minister of Women, Child Affairs, and Social Empowerment:** (2022–present)
 - **Minister of Industry:** (1989–1993)
 - **Minister of Education:** (1980–1989)
- **Leader of the Opposition:** (1994–2001, 2004–2015)
- **Political Party History:**

- Long-standing leader of the **United National Party (UNP)** before running as an Independent in 2024.
- **Parliamentary Service:**
 - Member of Parliament for Colombo District (1977–2020)
 - National List Member of Parliament (2021–2022)

2024 Presidential Election

- **Election Status:** Running as an Independent, diverging from his traditional party, UNP.
- **Campaign Focus:** Emphasizes economic recovery, national unity, good governance, and social development.
- **Election Symbol:** As an Independent, he might select a unique symbol closer to the election, which is not yet officially declared.
- **Support and Endorsements:** May attract support across party lines given his independent status and focus on broader national issues.

Election Promises and Policies

- **Economic Recovery:**
 - Aims to address the ongoing economic crisis through comprehensive reforms.
- **Good Governance:**
 - Focuses on transparency, fighting corruption, and institutional reform.
- **National Unity:**
 - Advocates for reconciliation among Sri Lanka's diverse ethnic and religious groups.
- **Social Welfare:**
 - Pledges to improve healthcare, education, and social services for all citizens.

Political Achievements

- **Economic Liberalization:**
 - Advocated for liberal economic policies and international trade relations during his tenure.
- **Institutional Reforms:**

- Worked on strengthening democratic institutions and governance structures in Sri Lanka.
- **Infrastructure Development:**
 - Played a role in the development of special economic zones and infrastructure projects.

Controversies and Criticisms

- **Batalanda Allegations:**
 - Faced accusations related to human rights abuses during the late 1980s, but no criminal charges were pursued.
- **2018 Constitutional Crisis:**
 - His controversial removal and reinstatement as Prime Minister in 2018 were significant political events.
- **Handling of Economic Crisis:**
 - Criticized by some for his approach to the country's economic challenges as President.

Personal and Family Life

- **Family:**
 - Comes from a politically influential family in Sri Lanka.
- **Spouse's Involvement:**
 - Maithree Wickremesinghe is a well-known academic in gender studies and an advocate for women's rights.

Visual Representation

- **Appearance:** Ranil Wickremesinghe is known for his formal attire, typically seen in a suit and tie, reflecting his long-standing political career.
- **Election Symbol:** Yet to be officially declared due to his independent status in this election.

Color and Branding

- **Color Scheme:**

- Traditionally associated with the green color of the UNP; however, as an independent candidate, his campaign might use a different branding strategy for the 2024 election.

Additional Context on Ranil Wickremesinghe

Independent Candidacy Shift

- **Significance:** Ranil's decision to run as an Independent for the 2024 election is a major departure from his long-standing association with the United National Party (UNP). It signals a move to appeal to a broader electorate beyond traditional party lines.

Economic Focus

- **Stance on Economic Crisis:** Ranil emphasizes comprehensive economic reforms, international trade, and stabilization policies to navigate the current economic turmoil in Sri Lanka.
- **Past Economic Strategies:** Known for advocating market liberalization, trade openness, and attracting foreign investment during his previous terms.

Governance and Institutional Reform

- **Commitment to Democracy:** Advocates for democratic principles, transparency, and anti-corruption measures.
- **Reform Agenda:** Plans to introduce reforms aimed at strengthening governance structures and ensuring effective law and order.

National Reconciliation

- **Unity and Diversity:** Aims to address the ethnic and religious divisions in Sri Lanka, fostering national unity through reconciliation and inclusive policies.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Focused on healing past conflicts and ensuring equitable development for all communities.

Social Development

- **Welfare Initiatives:** Plans to improve public services, including healthcare, education, and social welfare programs, aiming to reduce inequality and improve quality of life.
- **Human Rights Advocacy:** Promotes human rights, including gender equality, freedom of expression, and minority rights.

Challenges and Controversies

- **Public Perception:** Faces mixed reactions due to his involvement in past political crises and decisions during times of economic hardship.

- **Policy Criticisms:** His economic liberalization policies have been both praised for modernization and criticized for exacerbating inequality.

Visual and Symbolic Representation

- **Campaign Visuals:** Expected to use a distinct branding strategy to differentiate himself from traditional party politics, possibly incorporating new colors and symbols.
- **Election Symbol:** Yet to be officially declared but is crucial to his independent campaign's visual identity.

Political Beginnings:

- In the 1970s, Ranil Wickremesinghe began his political career when Sri Lanka was undergoing significant social and economic changes. He started as the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, a role that placed him at the forefront of international diplomacy. During this time, Sri Lanka was navigating its post-independence identity, balancing relationships with Western and non-aligned nations. Ranil's early involvement in foreign affairs provided him with insights into international politics, laying the foundation for his future policy-making strategies.
- His early political roles also coincided with a period of internal change in Sri Lanka, including economic development and social reform. As a young politician, Ranil was part of a generation that sought to modernize Sri Lanka's political and economic landscape. His experience in foreign affairs broadened his perspective, helping him understand the global implications of domestic policies. This experience proved valuable as he later took on higher roles, including Prime Minister, where his focus on liberal economic policies and international trade can be traced back to his early political engagements.

UNP Leadership:

- Ranil Wickremesinghe became the leader of the United National Party (UNP) in 1994, taking on the challenge of revitalizing a party with a rich history dating back to Sri Lanka's independence. At the time, the UNP was facing declining popularity and internal divisions. As leader, Ranil focused on rebuilding the party's image, promoting liberal economic policies, and strengthening democratic institutions. He sought to position the UNP as a modern political force, appealing to urban and rural voters alike, and aimed to bridge the gap between traditional values and contemporary political challenges.
- Under Ranil's leadership, the UNP emphasized market-oriented reforms, international trade, and foreign investment. He steered the party toward policies that supported private sector growth, globalization, and economic liberalization, differentiating the UNP from its political rivals. His approach often sparked debate, especially in a country grappling with economic disparities and social issues. Despite criticism, Ranil remained committed to his vision of a liberal economy, arguing that integrating Sri Lanka into the global market was essential for national progress.

- Ranil also sought to enhance the party's stance on national unity and reconciliation. During his tenure, he advocated for peaceful resolutions to the ethnic conflict, most notably through peace talks with the LTTE in the early 2000s. These efforts aimed to end decades of civil war, though they were met with mixed reactions both within the UNP and the broader population. His leadership during this period was marked by a delicate balancing act—promoting peace while addressing security concerns and managing political opposition.
- Through various electoral successes and setbacks, Ranil's leadership shaped the UNP's evolution. He maintained a focus on democratic governance, pushing for reforms to strengthen the rule of law and safeguard civil liberties. Despite facing internal and external challenges, his tenure as the UNP leader solidified his reputation as a key figure in Sri Lankan politics, influencing the party's direction for decades and laying the groundwork for many of the country's political and economic policies.

Peace Efforts:

- As Prime Minister in the early 2000s, Ranil Wickremesinghe initiated significant peace efforts to resolve Sri Lanka's long-standing ethnic conflict with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). He entered into negotiations with the LTTE, leading to a ceasefire agreement in 2002. This ceasefire was a breakthrough, as it brought a temporary halt to decades of civil war, raising hopes for a lasting political solution. The peace process was facilitated by international actors, including Norway, which played a mediating role.
- Ranil's strategy was built on dialogue and compromise, emphasizing the need for a political solution over a military one. He believed that sustainable peace could be achieved through power-sharing arrangements and development initiatives in conflict-affected regions. The peace talks under his administration addressed key issues such as devolution of power, minority rights, and reconstruction of war-torn areas. These efforts sought to foster trust between the government and the LTTE, involving various stakeholders in the peace-building process.
- Despite initial optimism, the peace process faced significant challenges. There was considerable resistance from political opponents and nationalist factions within Sri Lanka who viewed the negotiations as conceding too much to the LTTE. The ceasefire also faced violations, with both sides accusing each other of undermining the agreement. Additionally, the peace efforts struggled to address deeper historical grievances and differing political aspirations between the Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority. These tensions eventually led to the collapse of the peace talks and a return to hostilities.
- Ranil's peace efforts remain a complex chapter in Sri Lanka's history. While the ceasefire and negotiations represented a bold attempt to end the conflict, they also highlighted the deep-seated divisions and the challenges of achieving peace in a polarized society. His approach to resolving the ethnic conflict through diplomacy and political reform has been both praised for its vision and criticized for its limitations, reflecting the difficulties of addressing one of the most challenging issues in Sri Lanka's modern history.

Reforms:

- Ranil Wickremesinghe's reform agenda focused on modernizing Sri Lanka's economy, pushing for economic liberalization as a pathway to growth and integration into the global market. He advocated for free-market policies, reducing state intervention to attract foreign investment, and promoting private sector development. His reforms aimed at opening up trade, encouraging exports, and improving infrastructure to make Sri Lanka a competitive player in the international economy.
- In education, Ranil emphasized the need to align Sri Lanka's educational system with global standards. His government worked on policies to enhance access to quality education, incorporating technology and vocational training to create a skilled workforce. These initiatives aimed to address unemployment and drive innovation, preparing Sri Lanka for a knowledge-based economy.
- Legal reforms were another cornerstone of his modernization efforts. Ranil aimed to strengthen the rule of law, improve judicial efficiency, and create a more conducive environment for business. This included efforts to streamline regulations, protect property rights, and ensure a transparent legal framework that would boost investor confidence and economic stability.
- Despite these efforts, his liberalization policies faced criticism for potentially increasing inequality and favoring urban over rural populations. While some viewed his reforms as necessary for economic progress, others argued they did not adequately address the social disparities in Sri Lankan society. Nonetheless, Ranil's push for modernization has had a lasting impact, shaping the country's economic landscape and laying the groundwork for future policy debates.

Foreign Policy:

- Ranil Wickremesinghe's foreign policy was characterized by efforts to strengthen ties with Western countries and regional partners, fostering international cooperation and trade. He recognized the importance of integrating Sri Lanka into the global economy, and under his leadership, the country sought to attract foreign investment and boost exports. He aimed to align Sri Lanka's economic policies with international standards, fostering relationships with countries like the United States, European Union members, and key Asian economies.
- Ranil also prioritized strategic partnerships within the region. He engaged with neighboring countries like India, emphasizing bilateral cooperation on economic, security, and regional stability matters. His approach aimed to balance Sri Lanka's relationships in a complex geopolitical landscape, particularly in the Indian Ocean region, by maintaining diplomatic relations with global powers.
- Moreover, his foreign policy emphasized the importance of international support for domestic peace and economic development. During the peace negotiations with the LTTE, he sought the involvement of international mediators and donors, believing that global engagement was crucial for lasting peace. His administration welcomed international aid and expertise to aid Sri Lanka's post-conflict recovery and development efforts.

- While these policies attracted foreign investment and economic opportunities, they also sparked debate within Sri Lanka. Some viewed his foreign policy as overly aligned with Western interests, potentially compromising Sri Lanka's sovereignty. Despite the controversies, Ranil's foreign policy approach helped shape Sri Lanka's position in the global arena, balancing the need for economic development with strategic diplomatic relations.