

Sri Lankan president warns against any attempt to destabilise his government

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3 March 2025

Addressing the Sri Lankan parliament on Friday, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake warned that his Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People's Power (JVP/NPP) government will stop any attempt to topple it. The remarks were made during an almost hour-long speech in a parliamentary committee debate on the 2025 budget.

Dissanayake referred to previous methods of changing the government in response to an economic or internal crisis and the collapse of national security such as in “the recent past, when the masses came into the streets.” No opposition, he said, would get any such opportunity in the future and would not be able to topple this government.

Although Dissanayake appeared to be replying to the opposition parties, the real target of his remarks was the working class and the rural poor and its rising anger over his government's broken promises and attacks on social conditions. His reference to “the recent past,” was to the April–July 2022 mass uprising and national strikes that brought down President Gotabaya Rajapakse and his government.

Dissanayake's JVP/NPP, along with all the other opposition parties—Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), the then ruling party Sri Lanka Podujana Party (SLPP), United National Party and the Tamil parties—were hostile to and fearful of the mass uprising.

Addressing parliament on April 7, 2022, Dissanayake warned that the mass protests and strikes were pushing the country towards “anarchy” and called on the opposition and the ruling SLPP to introduce policies to suppress the nationwide movement. For four months the JVP/NPP, in coordination with the SJB, the trade union bureaucracies and the fake-left Frontline Socialist Party, played a leading role in derailing the anti-government uprising.

Dissanayake's real fear is the working class. He came to power last year following strikes and protests in 2023 against President Ranil Wickremesinghe, who replaced Rajapakse. Disenchanted with Dissanayake's ruthless implementation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) demands, the working class is now starting to come into conflict with the new regime.

The Government Medical Officers Association has threatened to strike tomorrow in opposition to cuts in allowances in the 2025 budget with other health workers planning national demonstrations in March over the same issue. Other public sector workers, including development officers and educators, have denounced the budget's small pay rise, an “increase” formulated according to IMF demands that fails to match the rising cost of living.

Dissanayake began his speech by jubilantly declaring that “the IMF will come up with very good news soon”—a reference to the likely release of the \$US334 million fourth instalment of the \$3 billion bailout loan.

Announcing the instalment, the IMF praised Colombo for following its demands. IMF deputy managing director Kenji Okamura warned, however, that the Sri Lankan economy “is still vulnerable... [and] there is no room for policy errors,” meaning its austerity measures must be fully imposed.

These include the restructuring and privatisation of state-owned enterprises, the axing of hundreds of thousands of jobs, increased taxes on essential goods and services, cuts in government funding for subsidies, and a miniscule pay rise.

Dissanayake's speech was in response to claims by opposition MPs that the country faced “national security threats,” following the shooting death on February 19 of an underworld gangster by another gang leader during courtroom proceedings.

NPP government ministers and MPs assured parliament that national security had not collapsed, and that the government was strengthening the state. Agitation on “national security” is always used by the ruling class to build up the state apparatus against working people.

The issue also provided a diversion for the opposition and the government to cover up the real social issues faced by millions of working people and the oppressed—unemployment, poverty, and the high cost of living—which have drastically worsened.

A large portion of Dissanayake’s speech involved allegations that some sections of society were working to “destabilise” the country. He claimed to have recent information that five criminal gangs were believed to be operating from one centre and trying to destabilise the government.

The government will probe and reveal the truth, he declared, and would take all the necessary measures to “defeat and eliminate” the underworld gangs. Such measures will be the pretext for boosting security forces and the police and directed against workers and the rural poor.

Dissanayake said the budget allocated 1,000 million rupees (\$US3.3 million) for police stations and the recruitment of 10,000 new personnel. Army, air force and navy soldiers and the police will also be given more sophisticated and up-to-date weapons, technology and training.

The parliament was also told that the budget includes a substantial salary hike—ranging from 27 to 33 percent—for military personnel. Public Security Minister Ananda Wijepala also revealed that the basic monthly salary of a police constable will increase from 29,540 to 44,293 rupees this year, with additional raises planned for 2026 and 2027. Further salary increments will be paid to the inspector general of police and other higher-ranking officials.

These increases are in complete contrast to the meagre pay rises for state employees. The lowest grade will only be receiving a net monthly increase of 8,250 rupees in three yearly instalments, with slightly more for higher grades.

Dissanayake told parliament that his government would replace the Prevention of Terrorism Act with a powerful anti-terrorist and anti-extremist law. A new legal framework and the bolstering of the police and

armed forces was necessary, he said, to address organised crime and deal with racist and extremist tendencies.

His government, Dissanayake cynically declared, would not allow racism and extremism to take root. All this is from a leader of the JVP, a reactionary political formation that embraced petty bourgeois guerillaism and Sinhala patriotism from its inception, supported the brutal 26-year communal war by successive governments against the Tamil minority, and has vowed to protect the Sinhala language and ensure Buddhism remains enshrined in the country’s constitution.

Dissanayake’s speech implied that the JVP/NPP had won a mandate in the presidential and general elections to do as it wished. “We did not come to parliament through conspiracy,” he declared, implying that any opposition to its IMF-dictated austerity program was anti-democratic.

Like his predecessors, Dissanayake’s will leverage the powers of the executive presidency and all the existing anti-democratic laws against any insurgent movement of the working class.

While the SJB and other opposition formations make occasional criticisms of the IMF-dictated measures, this is to politically derail the masses. Notorious for scuttling workers’ struggles, the trade union bureaucracies are once again calling for protests and promoting false illusions that the government can be pressured to grant concessions.

The working class and rural masses must reject these lies, organise independently through the formation of their own action committees and develop a coordinated struggle against the government’s social attacks.

This must be connected to the holding of a Democratic and Socialist Congress with democratically-elected delegates from these action committees and aligned with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to fight for a workers’ and peasants’ government to implement socialist policies.



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