

Sri Lankan government to expand repressive police apparatus

N. Ranges
19 June 2025

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People's Power (JVP/NPP) government has announced a plan to recruit 10,000 legally retired military personnel under the age of 45 into the police force for a period of five years as an auxiliary force.

This measure is being taken under the guise of addressing “shortages” in the police and “strengthening public security.” Public Security Minister Ananda Wijepala revealed the plan on June 9 during the opening ceremony of the Superintendent of Police office at Thambuththegam in North Central Province. A cabinet paper is being drafted, the minister said.

The minister further outlined plans to recruit 5,000 new officers on a permanent basis to the lower ranks of the police and to provide promotions across various ranks to strengthen the service.

Acting Inspector General Priyantha Weerasuriya claims there is a “chronic shortage,” stating that 22,000 vacancies exist. The the auxiliary force and the new recruits are to be added to the police, which already has more than 90,000 officers, according to the police website.

It is not just a matter of numbers—the JVP/NPP government is bolstering a huge state repressive apparatus.

Many of the retired military personnel have combat experience from the 26-year anti-Tamil communal war since 1983 against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Incorporating them into the police marks a further step in the militarization of the state apparatus, aimed at violently suppressing any opposition by the working class and oppressed masses.

Significantly, the government has also announced the creation of over 14,000 Public Safety Committees across all village officer divisions, set to be operational by June 20.

Media reports on May 24, citing Minister Wijepala's remarks, explained those committees will act to “strengthen police-community relations, promote peace and local security, combat crime and drug-related activities, and encourage interfaith harmony and social cohesion.”

These committees will have a designated police officer and civilian members. The civilian members include retired public servants, former police and military officers, and youth representatives. They will receive appointment letters for a term of three years. It is not clear whether they will be paid a salary.

The officers-in-charge (OICs) of local police stations will be tasked with monthly progress reviews. Higher officers—assistant superintendents of police overseeing the area police divisions—will conduct bi-monthly reviews.

This means these so-called Civil Safety Committees (CSC) are to be institutionalized as a force operating under the police.

During the war, then Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse, set up similar committees in 2008, which provided intelligence to the police. The committees lapsed after the end of the war in May 2009, but Rajapakse sought to revive them in 2011 without much success. Subsequent governments made similar short-lived attempts.

Now the JVP/NPP government is keen to re-establish a form of public safety committees and ensure they function properly by institutionalizing them.

The lead article in the *Island* on June 1 explained that the normal procedure for establishing such committees had changed significantly. Citing a senior police officer, applications were previously invited and displayed publicly before appointments were made.

“But now, a new directive says two members from

the ‘Clean Sri Lanka’ project should be included on each committee. These appointees have turned out to be JVP members in almost all areas,” the officer stated. Clean Sri Lanka is one of the government’s projects.

These new committees, however, will become mechanisms for surveillance, intelligence gathering and repression against political opponents and workers engaged in struggle.

The working class and young people must take the government’s bolstering of the police with military personnel and other measures as a serious warning.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and his JVP/NPP government are preparing to implement further harsh measures dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These include the restructuring of state enterprises and the public service that will destroy hundreds of thousands of jobs and slash working conditions. There will also be deeper cuts to public health and education, while opening them up to the private sector among other austerity measures.

The government expects sharp resistance from young people, including students. In the past six months, the ruling JVP/NPP has deployed the police to violently suppress teachers’ protests and student demonstrations.

On December 2, police, including riot police, were deployed to disperse school development officers, who were demanding to be absorbed into the teacher service. Four of the protesters were arrested for allegedly injuring a policeman—an accusation that proved false.

On March 28, allied health science graduates protested in front of the Health Ministry office in Colombo. The action was violently suppressed by the police, and 27 were arrested.

On April 6, in a crackdown on another protest by allied health science graduates at the same place, nine were arrested.

During the presidential and parliamentary elections, the JVP/NPP declared it would repeal the hated Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), which gives extensive powers to the police to arbitrarily arrest people, detain them for long periods, and use confessions—often obtained under torture—as evidence in court.

Abandoning this promise after coming to power, Justice Minister Harshana Nanayakkara said the government has appointed a committee to gather views

on how to draft new anti-terror laws, claiming they are necessary. This committee is just another ploy to hoodwink people.

The ruling JVP/NPP is well aware that it cannot implement further austerity measures democratically. The ruling class is haunted by the April–July mass movement in 2022 in Sri Lanka, when millions of working people rose up against the unbearable burden of the economic crisis imposed by the previous government and forced President Gotabhaya Rajapakse to flee the country and resign.

All capitalist parties support the IMF’s policies and the government’s repressive measures. The silence of the trade union bureaucracy signals its complicity as the government rapidly moves towards police state methods of rule.

We call on workers to form their own action committees in every workplace, independent of all capitalist parties and the trade unions, to fight for their democratic and social rights. Similarly, it is urgent for the rural masses to form action committees in their respective areas.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the building of a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses, based on representatives of the action committees, to coordinate the fight against austerity and state repression and for a workers’ and peasants’ government to implement socialist policies.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact