

Sri Lankan president addresses public rallies: A bid to stem falling popular support

Wasantha Rupasinghe
16 September 2026

In a desperate attempt to boost its diminishing popular support, the ruling Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna-led National People's Power (JVP/NPP) in Sri Lanka has carried out public rallies across the country, beginning on September 6 to mark its second year in power.

The government's plan over September and October is to stage two rallies in each district attended by President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, where he will speak "directly to the people regarding his government's achievements over the past two years and explain its objective going forward." The first meetings were held in Bulathsinhala and Beruwala in Kalutara District, in Western Province.

In Bulathsinhala, Dissanayake declared that his election as president in September 2024 marked the complete defeat of "the political camps that had governed our country alternatively for a long period of time." He boasted that, at the 2024 general election, "people gave us a strong government with the highest number of elected Members of Parliament and the highest number of votes."

The president claimed that his "people-centred government" represented "people's power," adding, "It was the people who elected this government; it is the people who will take this government forward; and it is the people who will protect this government."

In fact, Dissanayake's government does not represent the interests of the vast majority of working people at all, but is ruthlessly defending those of the capitalist class and global capital. Having jettisoned all past "socialist" pretensions, the JVP/NPP is imposing the IMF's austerity demands—higher taxes, price hikes and privatization—on workers and the rural poor whose votes he is courting. His claim that "the people will protect this government" inverts reality: his government is preparing the state machinery and his party's own goon squads to crush the popular opposition he knows is coming.

The president then declared that it was corruption that

sent the country into bankruptcy. "We stopped every cent that should come to the Treasury from being diverted through other routes, closed all those illicit routes and strengthened the Treasury," he bragged.

Dissanayake's anti-corruption pose covers up the real root cause of the miserable conditions confronting the working people—the deepening crisis of global capitalism of which Sri Lanka is an acute expression. But the Treasury was "emptied" not by corrupt individuals but by the demands of global finance capital, whose austerity program his government now enforces with zeal. "Strengthening the Treasury" means maximizing revenue for debt repayment and capitalist profit, not for the welfare of the working class.

Dissanayake has boasted about these policies, stating in 2025 that his government was "able to record the highest government revenue as a percentage of GDP, 16.7 percent, in 30 years" and "the lowest budget deficit since 1957." He presents these as triumphs of fiscal hygiene. In fact, the figures are the precise indicators demanded by the IMF agreed by Dissanayake's predecessor Ranil Wickremesinghe. The JVP/NPP government pledged to implement "in full" within days of taking office, jettisoning its election promise to renegotiate the agreement.

The figures are not measures of the people's wellbeing but measures of the burden shifted onto working people. At the same time, the government has criminalized strikes through essential-services orders and introduced the Protection of the State from Terrorism Act, which represents a further expansion of repressive powers.

Dissanayake did not say anything about poverty and deteriorating living standards after his two years in power. The World Bank estimates poverty at nearly 22 percent, with another 10 percent living just above the poverty line. The World Food Program reports that 39 percent of households have inadequate diets, while nearly one-third

of children under five suffer from malnutrition.

Workers face growing economic pressure, with public-sector real wages declining by 33 percent since 2022. In the private sector, 92 percent of formal employees earn less than 100,000 rupees (\$305) a month, according to EPF data cited by economist Nishan de Mel. Essential prices continue rising, with wheat flour increasing 9 percent to 207 rupees per kilogram and inflation reaching 8 percent. Sri Lanka ranks 120th of 130 countries in purchasing-power-adjusted minimum wages.

The handful of welfare measures Dissanayake lists—doubling Mahapola scholarships for university students, fertiliser subsidies, disability allowances—are trivial against this backdrop.

The central focus of the speech, however, was a rant against the “black state”—“black politics,” a “black economy” and “black law”—which puts Sri Lanka’s crisis down to corruption, criminality and moral decay. His government, Dissanayake declared, would “bring necessary constitutional amendment [to punish the corrupt] without fear.”

Dissanayake’s pledge to “destroy this black state” seeks to divert popular anger from the global capitalist crisis by portraying the capitalist state as a neutral institution that simply needs to be cleansed of corruption. It is also the means to prop up the government by destroying rival politicians and parties.

Over the past two years, the government has also arrested rival politicians, including former President Wickremesinghe and Namal Rajapakse, an opposition politician, on corruption allegations. These arrests demonstrate its attempt to divert attention from attacks on workers’ social and democratic rights, and a move to strengthen its hand to take on the working class.

Dissanayake boasts that two years have passed “without a single tear-gas attack” and “even the tear gas in police stocks has now expired.” But the absence of tear gas does not mean the absence of repression, which the government is already employing and will increasingly rely on as workers begin to take action independently of the treacherous trade unions.

The president also tried to portray his government as anti-communal, declaring that during the first two years of the NPP government, there was not a “single police complaint relating to a racist conflict... We have completely defeated that racist black politics and established national unity.”

The JVP has been steeped in Sinhala chauvinist policies from its very outset and was in the forefront of backing

the protracted anti-Tamil communal war that began in 1983. Its reactionary communal politics are evident in the government’s move to formally register the Tissa Viharaya, a Buddhist temple, illegally built by the military on land seized from 14 displaced Tamil families, ignoring their protests, in the war-ravaged Jaffna district. It has reneged on pledges to return military-held Tamil land, release political prisoners and reveal the fate of the disappeared. Some 100,000 troops still occupy the North and East and the JVP upholds a communal constitution enshrining Buddhism’s priority and Sinhala as the official language.

Behind all of Dissanayake’s rhetoric, the JVP/NPP government is desperate to boost its declining popularity. According to the latest Verité Research “Mood of the Nation” poll (July 2026), the JVP/NPP government’s approval rating has sharply dropped to roughly 50 percent, down from a post-election high of 65 percent in February 2026. This has been visibly expressed in recent protests by railway workers, health workers, paddy farmers, unemployed graduates, university academics, school development officers, teachers and university students.

The working class is coming into struggle against the government’s austerity and police-state repression. But to wage a genuine struggle, workers need to establish their own action committees, independent of the trade unions and all capitalist parties. That also requires a political program that addresses their class interests—the fight for a government of workers and peasants committed to an internationalist perspective and socialist policies.



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