

A REVIEW OF 18 MONTHS OF THE NPP GOVT : THE SECURITY STATE

PREVAILS

(Sept 2024 - April 2026)

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POLITICAL CONTEXT

Sri Lanka's post-independence promise of democracy and the flourishing of popular sovereignty has been suffocated for decades, under the weight of a security state. What began as a hopeful experiment in democratic government in 1948, promising law and order and equality and protection for all citizens, has since morphed into a securitised state. Despite the end of the 30-year civil war, the complex machinery of surveillance, intimidation, and control remains entrenched and active.

From the 1970s onwards, the state silenced and intimidated its citizens through the frequent use of the Public Security Ordinance, and declarations of emergencies. The Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) became the cornerstone of authoritarian governance in 1979. Thousands of people have been detained under this law without charge. Many political prisoners languished in detention for years, often over a decade, without being charged for a specific crime.

In the name of protecting “national security,” successive governments crushed dissent and militarized governance. Surveillance networks extended into universities, workplaces, and even villages. Journalists who dared to speak truth to power were intimidated, abducted/disappeared, or killed. Activists and civil society organisations were branded “traitors” or “terrorist supporters”. Protests were banned or brutally dispersed. Torture, extra-judicial killings, and police impunity became normalised.¹

Members of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) were once vilified and targeted by the state and have borne the full brunt of its repression. Thousands of young people were killed in the insurrections that spanned the 1970's and 1980's. Mass killings, disappearances, and inhumane torture were common during this period. Ironically, this party is now in government and is upholding this legislation.

The NPP government took office riding on a wave of public hope—campaigning on an anti-corruption platform and promising a political renaissance rooted in transparency, justice, and

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¹ Amnesty International - *Sri Lanka: Old ghosts in new garb: Sri Lanka's return to fear* - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa37/3659/2021/en/>

people-centered governance. With the 2024 elections a “new hope” was expected by the people as the National People’s Power (NPP) promised a “renaissance” - break from the politics of fear and corruption, and commitment to a people’s democracy rooted in justice, dignity, and freedom.

September 2025 marks the first year since President Anura Kumar Dissanayake of the National People’s Power (NPP) assumed office. The NPP won the General Elections decisively November 2024, securing an overwhelming, two-thirds majority in Parliament. This election was a turning point in the country's political landscape, with minority communities in the North and East also voting for the government. The electorate delivered a clear and resounding message to the traditional political establishment: the public was weary of elite-driven governance, corruption and abuse of office. The election was widely regarded as a direct outcome of the historic people's uprising in 2022. The NPP pledged to rebuild the country - repeal repressive laws such as the PTA, free political prisoners, uphold the right to dissent and establish a flourishing democracy.

Thus far, their progress has been disappointing. Most election promises have not been delivered and repressive patterns of law enforcement applied by previous Governments continue. The people who have suffered decades of state violence are watching, still expecting to witness a political transformation. They expect more than a few superficial or piecemeal reforms. The people were hopeful that the elections will lead to a revolutionary shift in the way State power is exercised. It is time for their representatives to honour their commitments.

OVERVIEW

The NPP government has yet to make full use of its popular mandate or its two-thirds majority to deliver on several key promises.

Election promises

A singular example is the failure to repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA)—a longstanding demand from victims, victim families and human rights advocates. The PTA has not been repealed, and it has been used against approximately 70² individuals to date.

Furthermore, the NPP Government’s election promise to release all political prisoners, has yet to be fulfilled. Ten Tamil political prisoners have been incarcerated for 10-15 years. One such PTA detainee who was acquitted after 15 years in 2024, was re-arrested under the PTA by the NPP government last year, detained for 90 days and then released again without charge.

A third major commitment of the NPP government was to abolish the Executive Presidency. It was criticized for enabling authoritarianism. This promise remains unfulfilled, and there is no clear indication of any intent to reform the constitution.

² Comprehensive report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka* - <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session60/advance-version/a-hrc-60-21-auv.pdf>

While in opposition the NPP promised to renegotiate the agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). However, the government now appears to be following the neo-liberal path charted by former President Ranil Wickremesinghe embracing the IMF's conditions - austerity measures that include steep tax burdens on the working class, wage reductions, electricity tariff hikes, and the privatisation of State-Owned Enterprises.

Anticipating public resistance to these deeply unpopular policies, the government has delayed repealing the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), plans to introduce a new anti-terror law and designate certain public services as “essential services” (a tactic infamously used by President Jayawardene to crush strikes). These actions point to a troubling readiness to rely on repression to stifle dissent and democratic right to peaceful protest.

Thus, the security state remains intact: journalists and activists, especially in the north and east, are still subjected to surveillance, harassment, and intimidation. Police brutality persists as a structural feature of law enforcement, with no meaningful efforts made to deter or punish errant officers. Families of Tamil victims in the North and East, make continuous demands of justice and accountability in relation to the 30-year ethnic conflict, and the charges of war crimes committed in the last phase of the war. This Government obtained a resounding endorsement from the North and East, presenting it with a golden opportunity to reconcile the deep divisions in the country. However, it seems to have adopted the same nationalist positions of previous governments, guaranteeing absolute protection to the “war heroes”. This approach does not promise transformational politics.

Shift from Left to Right and from Non-alignment to Politicking

Though rooted in Leftist/Socialist ideology, the JVP/NPP government's rapid slide into populist politics has left them caught between needs to assuage the interests of their cadres, their voter base, and big business conglomerates. They must also navigate dangerous geopolitical waters stalked by India, the USA, and China. These geo-political pressures may have led to the government to adopt a weak stance³ on the Israeli actions in Gaza, now widely and internationally condemned as a genocide.⁴ The government has shifted from Sri Lanka's history of solidarity with the Palestinian people and its recognition of the Palestinian struggle and justifies its “neutrality” by not amplifying the assertions of genocide on grounds of real-politick. It aims to placate the USA while it faces President Trump's high tariffs, and it must ensure the wellbeing of the thousands of Sri Lankan workers currently employed in Israel. In light of this, the government has opened Sri Lanka's doors to Israeli tourists, including Israeli Defence Force (IDF) soldiers on vacation, granting them free visas, turning a blind eye even as many overstay their visas, run businesses⁵, and build Chabad Houses across the country without following regulatory procedures. Sri Lanka's police and Special Task Forces (STF), funded with public

³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Sri Lanka is deeply concerned over the deteriorating situation in Gaza* - <https://mfa.gov.lk/en/sri-lanka-is-deeply-concerned/>

⁴ United Nations - *Israel has committed genocide in the Gaza Strip, UN Commission finds* - <https://www.obcbr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/israel-has-committed-genocide-gaza-strip-un-commission-finds>

⁵ Newswire, *Is Arugambay in Tel Aviv and not Sri Lanka?* - https://web.facebook.com/newswireLK/posts/i-thought-arugam-bay-was-in-sri-lanka-but-it-looks-like-its-in-tel-aviv-israel-w/1303804245089296/?_rdc=1&_rdr

money are being used to provide security⁶ to these places of worship which were apparently erected without following the procedures required for establishing places of worship. This has caused resentment among other religious institutions.⁷

Recently, a group of local journalists were sent on a media training⁸ to Israel. It was fully sponsored by the Israeli Government, and it included senior journalists from State media, and members of Buddhist extremist groups. Upon their return these journalists have been flooding mainstream, and social media, with pro-Israel op-ed pieces, and their writings also included Islamophobic rhetoric and hate speech⁹. However, no action has been taken against these persons by the Government.

A 22-year-old Muslim activist, Mohamed Rusdi¹⁰, was detained in March 2025, under a 90-day detention order simply for pasting stickers in a mall, opposing Israel's actions in Gaza. Another Muslim youth, Mohamed Suhail¹¹, an aviation student from Mawanella, was arrested in October 2024 for sharing an emoji of a sword pointing at an Israeli flag. He was detained for nine months, with no formal charges having been filed, and the police presented no evidence to support his detention. He was subsequently acquitted in September 2025.

The government's actions have shifted from Sri Lanka's historic position of expressing international solidarity towards the Palestinian cause and the two-state solution endorsed by the United Nations. It is now veering off the path of a non-aligned foreign policy, and appears to be submitting to imperialist interests. The government has begun to mirror the very systems it vowed to dismantle. It has adopted repressive tactics to stifle dissent, cracked-down on peaceful protests, workers' strikes, and labour actions, misuses state resources and institutions and prioritised corporate profit over addressing the grievances of the working class.

Anti-Corruption Drive

The Government promised to root out corruption and also hold accountable those guilty of corruption. However, they are accused of engaging in political theatrics by targeting easy, high-profile figures for arrest rather than putting in place serious measures to ensure accountability. A key example is the arrest of the former President, Ranil Wickremesinghe. He faces numerous serious allegations, including for overseeing the notorious Batalanda Torture Camp, and the Bond Scam. However, the Government chose to pursue a weak charge of using state resources to cover

⁶ Daily Mirror, *Heightened security for Chabad houses* - <https://www.dailymirror.lk/caption-story/Heightened-security-for-Chabad-houses/110-294547>

⁷ Groundviews, Bishop Duleep de Chickera - *From Toe Hold to Freehold: Zionist Occupation Strategies* - <https://groundviews.org/2025/07/31/from-toe-hold-to-freehold-zionist-occupation-strategies/>

⁸ Newswire, *Israel takes Sri Lankan journalists on study tour to educate on current situation* - <https://www.newswire.lk/2025/09/05/israel-takes-sri-lankan-journalists-on-study-tour-to-educate-on-current-situation/>

⁹ Daily FT, *Israel and the undermining of pluralist Sri Lanka* - <https://www.ft.lk/opinion/Israel-and-the-undermining-of-pluralist-Sri-Lanka/14-781162>

¹⁰ The Sunday Times, *Pasting anti-Israeli stickers: HRCSL rules TID arrest unlawful* - <https://www.sundaytimes.lk/250615/news/pasting-anti-israeli-stickers-hrcsl-rules-tid-arrest-unlawful-601377.html>

¹¹ Daily Mirror, *Student held under PTA for nine months to be produced in court* - <https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking-news/Student-held-under-PTA-for-nine-months-to-be-produced-in-court/108-313746>

personal travel that failed to hold-up to scrutiny, thereby compelling his release.¹² This inadvertently turned the former President, Ranil Wickremesinghe into a martyr. Similar patterns can be seen in the arrests of former MPs, Rathana Thero,¹³ Nimal Lanza,¹⁴ and more recently Manusha Nanayakkara.¹⁵ While these arrests are positive steps, the charges must be grounded in law. In Mr Wickremesinghe's case, they were viewed as flimsy and lacked proper legal grounding. The handling of these cases suggests that the Government may be more interested in gaining some political mileage and diverting attention from the ongoing grievances of the general public rather than demonstrating serious intent to deliver justice and accountability.

Patronage Politics

Recently, the President attended a highly publicised event organised in Bandarawela, to distribute over 2000 confirmation letters to potential beneficiaries of the Indian Housing Project. These letters were not valid land or house title deeds. The necessary lands required for the houses have not been allocated or even identified as yet. This was a long-overdue show of intent that some of the housing needs of some members of the Malaiyaha community will be addressed shortly. However, activists were critical of this spectacle,¹⁶ used as an opportunity for political publicity, and presenting the Malaiyaha community receiving a gift, rather than a long-overdue right to housing. It masked the historic systematic discrimination (from citizenship, to franchise, housing, education, health and wages,) heaped on this community, through the failures and discriminatory practices of successive governments.

Budget – is it aligned to the promises?

The NPP government's budget for (2025-26) commits over Rs 455 billion into the Ministry of Defence — which is a high figure given that the country ceased fighting a war more than 15 years ago. The country needs investment in social transformation. The state is doubling down on its promise to de-militarise. With plans to recruit 5,000 new policemen, and the intensification of its “war on drugs,” the government is expanding, not shrinking its coercive reach. This militarised approach to the drug problem detracts from it being addressed as a social problem. The NPP too is normalizing surveillance and repression as permanent tools of governance. These measures are not about improving public safety. It's about reinforcing a security state that treats citizens as potential threats.

Sustainable Development

¹² Al Jazeera, *Sri Lanka's ex-President Wickremesinghe granted bail in embezzlement case* - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/26/sri-lankas-ex-president-wickremesinghe-granted-bail-in-embezzlement-case>

¹³ News First - *Rathana Thero Gets Bail; Slapped With Travel Ban* - <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2025/09/12/rathana-thero-gets-bail-slapped-with-travel-ban>

¹⁴ Lanka News Web - *Ex-MP Nimal Lanza Released on Bail Following Long-Standing Assault Allegations* - <https://lankanewsweb.net/archives/125751/ex-mp-nimal-lanza-released-on-bail-following-long-standing-assault-allegations/>

¹⁵ The Sunday Times - *Manusha Nanayakkara released on bail* - <https://sundaytimes.lk/online/news-online/Manusha-Nanayakkara-released-on-bail/2-1150486>

¹⁶ B. Gowthaman (long-time activist, policy advisor and researcher on Malaiyaha Tamil rights) - <https://web.facebook.com/share/p/1EB5MoG3T6/>

Whilst the Government expressed commitment towards increasing the generation of renewable energy, it has not linked it to sustainable and inclusive development goals. The government has not engaged with local communities, community leaders, activists and environmentalists to garner support, consent or buy-in for these initiatives. Consequently, the government's recent initiatives to promote wind power have been contested, as they are not seen as initiatives promoting green energy, and are criticised as "Greenwashing" exercises.

PERPETUATION OF THE SECURITY STATE

Police Brutality

Police brutality in Sri Lanka has reached a crisis point. The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka has noted this. In the last five years, at least 79 people have been killed either in police custody or during "confrontations."¹⁷ These are not isolated incidents—they constitute a pattern of state-sanctioned violence, disproportionately targeting the poor, the marginalized, and ethnic minorities, especially the Tamil community.¹⁸

In the case of Nandakumar Illankeshwaran, a Tamil youth from Nellyadi, Jaffna, came forward in February 2025 with horrifying claims of torture and fabricated charges by the local police.¹⁹ Sathsara Nimesh, just 26 years old, died after being detained at Welikada Police Station—his mother found his trousers dumped in a trash can, and alleged brutal police assault.²⁰ Samitha Dilshan²¹, died shortly after being released by the Wadduwa Police; his family claims he was brutally beaten whilst in custody. Similarly, in another case of 'mistaken identity', a young man, Lahiru Madusanka²², was arrested from his home, taken to the police station to take a statement over a shooting incident. He was brutally assaulted whilst at the station. There were more such cases from the North and East. Both Sivanesarasa Rinosan²³ and Sabaratnam Naguleswaran²⁴ were

¹⁷ Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, *General Guidelines and Recommendations No. 1 of 2025 to Sri Lanka Police on Preventing Custodial and Encounter Deaths* - <https://www.hrsl.lk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/General-Guidelines-and-Recommendations-No-01-of-2025.pdf#:~:text=Based%20on%20the%20complaints%20received%20by%20the,deaths%20due%20to%20encounters%20with%20the%20police>

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, *"We Live in Constant Fear" - Lack of Accountability for Police Abuse in Sri Lanka* - <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/10/23/we-live-constant-fear/lack-accountability-police-abuse-sri-lanka>

¹⁹ Tamil Guardian, *Sri Lankan police torture Tamil youth in Nellyadi, Human Rights Commission launches inquiry* - <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/young-man-alleges-police-torture-nellyadi-files-human-rights-complaint>

²⁰ News First, *Mother Claims Police Brutality in Son's Custodial Death* - <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2025/04/03/mother-claims-police-brutality-in-son-s-custodial-death>

²¹ Sunday Observer, *The tragic end of Samitha Dilshan* - https://www.sundayobserver.lk/2025/02/16/news-features/45253/the-tragic-end-of-samitha-dilshan/?fbclid=IwY2xjawPumeZleHRuA2FlbQIxMA BicmlkETFRNU0zQ2txRFAYWldxTjd1c3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODIwMDg5MgABHt3fKqRSZfjUk87hx4uMG3g9ixgxmSap2uxzVt74xhcg5VQpQpJH1nY Yvf1A_aem_fLqXnDJrWPo8x-7240CR3A

²² Ada Derana, *සැකකරුවෙකු යැයි සිතා පොලීසිය පුද්ගලයෙකුට පහර දීලා* - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKnmb0xtYLc>

²³ The Leader, *කාලගුණ ආපදා අස්සේ පොලීසි කුඩුවේ මරණයක්* - <https://theleader.lk/news/37395-2025-12-11-04-35-47>

²⁴ Post by victim's brother - <https://web.facebook.com/100022400842121/posts/2078737092882965/?rclid=xyxjvfrRV4LpwpJn#>

arrested and brutally assaulted whilst in custody, with both succumbing to their injuries shortly after. In the case of Sivaramalingam Darson,²⁵ he was arrested and detained in the Jaffna Prison, and beaten mercilessly. He was hospitalised and has been in a coma since November 2025. Medically, he was declared to be brain dead.

In yet another horrific case of extra judicial killing, two alleged underworld gunmen were arrested by the Police in Kotahena in February this year. A video²⁶ taken by the Police was leaked and went viral on social media, showing the two men, barely conscious, with their hands tied behind their backs. It was evident they had been brutally assaulted. Shortly after the social media publicity, the media reported that the two men had been shot dead, whilst attempting to escape. It was evident in the video that they did not constitute a threat as they were unarmed and after their beatings they could barely raise their heads.

The police are notorious for arresting underworld figures while searching for hidden arms. These arrests often end with their killing in a “shoot-out” as they attempt to escape. This case is an indication that little has changed with law enforcement procedures.

These incidents are not isolated and they reflect a culture of impunity. There are many complaints of torture, arbitrary arrests, and degrading treatment that have been documented but they are largely ignored or covered up. Tamil communities in the North and East continue to be disproportionately targeted, and the repressive Prevention of Terrorism Act is still weaponized against them despite calls for its repeal.

PTA Arrests and Detention and Long-term Political Prisoners

Despite pre-election pledges made by President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and members of the Government, to repeal the PTA, the law remains fully in force—and has been used by the President from its early days in office.

In Jaffna, Manoharan Kajendroopan²⁷ was arrested late 2024 under the PTA for uploading a photo of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran to Facebook. These indicate how the PTA is being used to police memory, restrict dissent, and punish people for voicing their opinions.

Today there remain 10 remaining long-term Tamil political prisoners, all of whom have been in custody for 15 years, and two have served almost 30 years, having been arrested when they were just 19 years old in 1996. Two of them have been in remand for 15+ years, and are still awaiting sentencing as their trials have been ongoing for 14+ years.

Over 15 years have passed since the war ended and all 10 of these prisoners have served between 15 and 30 years in prison. The JVP themselves, were recipients of a General Amnesty in 1977, and now in government they should be sensitive to this issue, and make the significant political decision

²⁵ Keeran, *A GRAVE HUMAN RIGHTS OUTRAGE: A Jaffna Remand Prisoner Has Been in a Coma for Over 25 Days* - <https://x.com/itskeeran/status/1997026294429896955>

²⁶ Hiru News, *Kotahena shooting: Two suspects shot dead by police (Video)* - <https://www.hirunews.lk/en/397629/kotahena-shooting-two-suspects-shot-dead-by-police-video>

²⁷ Tamil Guardian, *Sri Lanka arrests Tamil man under PTA for Facebook post* - <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-arrests-tamil-man-under-pta-facebook-post>

to release these political prisoners. This was also promised in their Election Manifesto and on their campaign platforms

The government should order an immediate **moratorium on the use of the PTA, withdraw the proposed PSTA, release the 10 long-term Tamil political prisoners. It must enact a repeal of the PTA and expressly commit that it will not replace it with another anti - terror law. Detentions under the PTA must be addressed through fast-tracked reviews and resolved. Thus, all of the other detainees held under the PTA should be either charged under existing laws such as the Penal Code, or released with immediate effect. Compensation should be given to all PTA detainees who are acquitted of all charges. The courts should further consider the gross injustice committed against these people, some of whom were detained without charges for decades.**

According to statistics²⁸ provided by the NPP Government to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights this year, there have been 49 arrests under the PTA, between January and May 23rd, 2025, and 38 PTA arrests over the course of the full year of 2024. The Government claims that most of the PTA arrests are of members of the underworld, as there is no other existing law that allows for indefinite detention and this is required to resolve these cases. However, civil society asserts that the use of the PTA cannot be justified under any circumstances. If the Government requires a law to arrest members of organised crime, they should enact a specific law for these purposes.

Recently, the Government has published a draft bill titled the 'Protection of the State from Terrorism Act' (PSTA)²⁹, and called for public recommendations. This call is open till the 28th of February 2026. Many lawyers³⁰ and activists³¹ have reviewed the draft Bill and criticised the PSTA as being potentially more dangerous and far reaching in undermining civil liberties than even the PTA. The PSTA too continues to give the Executive extraordinary power to detain suspects, but under it, the Inspector General of Police (IGP) too can now obtain a Detention Orders. The Attorney General (AG) has been given the power to 'coerce' persons into admitting guilt and accepting punishment without conviction - i.e. being placed in rehabilitation to avoid prolonged imprisonment. The proposed Act also empowers the armed forces and coast guard officials to stop, search, question, enter and search premises or land, and take into custody any document or article. Here too, the definition of 'terrorism' is overly broad, and could be attributed to a wide range of legitimate civic and political actions by citizens, such as protests and strikes etc. **The shift in the NPP/JVP's position from being against anti -terror laws and calling for the repeal**

²⁸ Comprehensive report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka* - <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session60/advance-version/a-hrc-60-21-auv.pdf>

²⁹ Since removed from the MoJ site -

[google.com/url?u=https://www.moj.gov.lk/index.php?option%3Dcom_content%26view%3Darticle%26id%3D769:protection-of-the-state-from-terrorism-bill%26catid%3D23:special-notice%26Itemid%3D241%26lang%3Den&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1778142896607916&usq=A0vVaw3I-InVUE04Yftt3dEgfyGK](https://www.moj.gov.lk/index.php?option%3Dcom_content%26view%3Darticle%26id%3D769:protection-of-the-state-from-terrorism-bill%26catid%3D23:special-notice%26Itemid%3D241%26lang%3Den&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1778142896607916&usq=A0vVaw3I-InVUE04Yftt3dEgfyGK)

³⁰ Ermiza Tegal, *Initial Reactions to the Government's Protection of the State from Terrorism Act* -

<https://groundviews.org/2025/12/18/initial-reactions-to-the-governments-protection-of-the-state-from-terrorism-act-psta/>

³¹ Ruki Fernando, *Security needs vs. potential for abuse* -

<https://www.themorning.lk/articles/dg3qFm4vF2cO45Xj5QUG>

of the PTA while in Opposition, to considering a replacement of the law position is deeply disappointing, and undermines trust in their political positions and election promises.

Historically the PTA has been used as a blunt instrument to enforce political conformity and to silence opposition. It was used aggressively against the Tamils in the lead up to, and during the civil war and even after the war ended decisively it continues to remain, it was used aggressively against the Muslims after the Easter Sunday bombing attacks and against the Marxists during the youth insurrections in the South in the 1970s & 1980s. If the NPP government is committed to a “system change”, it must start delivering on its election promises.

Repression of Protests and the Freedom of Speech

Under the National People’s Power (NPP) government too, the right to protest and strike is assailed. Workers, students, farmers, and local communities who take to the streets are met with tear gas, water cannons, mass arrests, physical violence, legal intimidation, and bans under vague pretexts.

In the case of health workers in February 2025: thousands of nurses, paramedics, lab technicians, midwives and others protested proposed budget cuts³², especially the cutting of their overtime and holiday pay. Their legitimate demands were met not with dialogue or offers of redress, but with threats and suppression. In Mannar, peaceful sit-ins and blockades opposing a wind-power project were violently dispersed by police³³; women and elders among protesters were beaten, dragged on the road. Some protestors were hospitalised. In another incident, more than 500 school development officers³⁴ protested, demanding their recruitment into the teaching service. They claimed they have been teaching in schools for four years. This protest was violently dispersed by the Police, and four officers were even arrested.

Multiple protests by the Inter University Students’ Federation (IUSF), were violently dispersed by the Police, and many students, including the Convenor, were arrested³⁵ and remanded. One protest outside the Health Ministry was particularly problematic, as the protest was dispersed and 27 protestors were arrested³⁶. This was done in the early hours of the morning with no media present, and very few witnesses.

Even dissent among farmers, a constituency that supported the Government in the elections, is being shut down - i.e. a farmer conference critical of government agricultural policy in Hambantota was disrupted by pro-government thugs³⁷.

³² Lanka News Web, *Nursing and Health Sector unions protest budget cuts across Sri Lanka* -

<https://lankanewsweb.net/archives/70111/nursing-and-health-sector-unions-protest-budget-cuts-across-sri-lanka/>

³³ News First, *Protest in Mannar* - <https://web.facebook.com/reel/3585940478203630>

³⁴ News First, සංවර්ධන නිලධාරීන් අධ්‍යාපන අමාත්‍යාංශය ඉදිරිපිට යකා නටයි -

[youtube.com/watch?v=AUuqeqxuQU4&time_continue=118&source_ve_path=Mjm4NTE&embeds_referring_eur_i=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2Fsearch%3Fsc_esv%3Ddc45e1216515a3e4%26rlz%3D1C5CHEA_enL_K988LK989%26sxsrf%3DANbL-n5cRwlRN271Z0fcV5g5ffydN8qTcw%3A1770113](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUuqeqxuQU4&time_continue=118&source_ve_path=Mjm4NTE&embeds_referring_eur_i=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2Fsearch%3Fsc_esv%3Ddc45e1216515a3e4%26rlz%3D1C5CHEA_enL_K988LK989%26sxsrf%3DANbL-n5cRwlRN271Z0fcV5g5ffydN8qTcw%3A1770113)

³⁵ Newswire - <https://web.facebook.com/reel/1096798455545653>

³⁶ Zira Daily, *27 activists including IUSF convener arrested during a protest* - <https://ziradaily.com/news/99378>

³⁷ Daily Mirror, *Farmer conference sabotaged* - <https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking-news/Farmer-conference-sabotaged/108-302234>

Farmers from Mutthu Nagar, who were protesting against their lands being cleared and sold to large companies were chased and assaulted by company thugs, who were allegedly aligned to the Government. The farmers tried to file a complaint regarding this incident to the China Bay Police, but their complaint was not recorded. Instead, six farmers were arrested³⁸, with five of these farmers remanded for one week. Later in the year, six farmers, and another three workers, were arrested once again, whilst they were cultivating their lands. The police also seized the farmers' tractors and motorcycles. These actions demonstrate the entrenched culture of impunity, contempt for the rule of law and a failure of the government to address this.

Following in the footsteps of former President J.R. Jayawardene, who was strongly opposed to trade union actions in 1980, President Dissanayake too responded to protests by CEB workers, by gazetting electricity supply as an essential service. In a further update on this, the President has issued yet another special gazette on January 28th, 2026), declaring 15 services as 'essential services'³⁹. This extraordinary gazette effectively criminalises all strikes and other forms of industrial action by employees across these sectors and could apply to tens of thousands of employees.

Recently, the Sri Lanka Customs detained 360 copies of five books (including three books that are already available in the local market), written by the acclaimed Tamil writer, Theepachelvan Piratheepan. The writer prints his books in India due to the low cost and he is known for writing on the oppression and grievances of the Tamil community.

The Customs Department prevented the release of the books on March 18, 2026, and informed the writer of the fact on March 27. They stated that the books were being held on “suspicion”, and that the Department was awaiting instructions from the Ministry of Defence (MoD), on whether or not to release the books.

It is troubling that literature must be reviewed and censored by the MoD prior to release from the Customs in the post-war era. It appears that the author's Tamil descent has marked him as “suspicious” and has led to the Government's decision to hold these books. It follows that the discriminatory targeting of ethnic minorities continues in Sri Lanka.

Ongoing surveillance and intimidation, particularly in the North and East

Even under the NPP government, activists and journalists—especially in the Tamil-majority North and East, continue to live under a climate of surveillance and harassment, with frequent

³⁸ People's Struggle Movement, පුනරුද්ද ආණ්ඩුව ඉඩම් ඉල්ලු මුත්තු නගර් ජනතාව සිර කරයි! -

<https://web.facebook.com/psmlk/posts/pfbid02L1FSvtRtWb5YPJk1dQnsATpEUt6oP4K7K3GonE7WDxre3qSL9jHVnkgQc6bsMKXlPrdid=pBbE8384kaYfvESu#>

³⁹ Daily Mirror, *Several services declared as essential services* - <https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking-news/Several-services-declared-as-essential-services/108-331741>

interrogations at the hands of Sri Lanka's intelligence and counter-terrorism apparatus (CID, TID / CTID).

Despite promises of a new era of change, it is evident old habits die hard: repressive state power silently tightens dissent and the community remains policed.

A few recent cases lay bare the pattern. Photojournalist Kanapathipillai Kumanan, who is known for exposing violations in the North and East, and most recently, gave wide coverage to the Chemmani mass grave excavations in the North, was summoned by the CTID in Alampil on 17 August, 2025. He was questioned for nearly seven hours⁴⁰ regarding his social media posts, funding and work—no specific allegation was made against him. Women's rights organiser, Vasuki Vallipuram of Kilinochchi was summoned by CTID⁴¹ in May 2025, and ordered to produce beneficiary records. The investigation did not appear to raise any legitimate public safety concern but aimed to intimidate the activists. In Trincomalee, activist K. Sinthujan⁴² has been summoned repeatedly over Tamil memorialisation events. His political memory and memorialisation work is treated as suspicious and even criminal.

Anjalidevi Navaratnarasa, a woman activist from Trincomalee, was questioned by the police and CTID⁴³ regarding a protest she organised in 2022 against the severe shortage of medicines in the country. Muralitharan Rathnasingam, another activist from Kilinochchi, was summoned⁴⁴ for an inquiry at the TID office in Paranthan, without having received any written notice or further details regarding the reason for the inquiry. He was merely given a call by the Murudankeni Police and told to come to the TID office on a specified date. Activist, K. Nihal Ahmed, did not receive any written summons either. Two men in civilian clothes, known to be from the Akkaraipattu Army Intelligence, came to his office and interrogated him.⁴⁵ The Chairman of their land network too was similarly questioned regarding their work. When Nihal had insisted on being given a reason for his questioning, one officer read out a letter on his phone sent by the Girithale Army Camp, to the Akkaraipattu Army Camp, in which Nihal Ahmed's name and the name of network Chairman had been stated, and instructions were given to question them and report back if they had any connection to "terrorist" or any other crimes. They had taken down information relating to his home address, family information, his schooling, his work and other information regarding his workplace.

⁴⁰ Newswire, *Rights Groups urge end to harassment after journalist harassed by TID* - <https://web.facebook.com/newswireLK/posts/journalist-kanapathipillai-kumanan-says-he-was-interrogated-for-nearly-seven-hou/1321236706679383/?rdc=1&rdc>

⁴¹ Tamil Guardian, *Sri Lanka's CTID summons Tamil women's rights activist for interrogation* -

<https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/ctid-summons-kilinochchi-womens-rights-activist-interrogation>

⁴² Tamil Guardian, *Sri Lanka criminalises Tamil memorialisation as activist summoned again* -

<https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-criminalises-tamil-memorialisation-activist-summoned-again>

⁴³ Lanka Leader, *Elderly Tamil woman questioned by Police for protesting against medicine shortage in 2022* -

<https://lankaleader.lk/news/11116-elderly-tamil-woman-questioned-by-police-for-protesting-against-medicine-shortage-in-2022>

⁴⁴ Interview via phone conversation with the activist.

⁴⁵ Interview via phone conversation with the activist.

Later this year, several members of the Free Palestine Movement (FPM) of Sri Lanka, were subjected to numerous forms of intimidation and harassment⁴⁶. This included a home and vehicle break-in, harassing phone calls, and house visits from security forces. One member of FPM was also summoned to the TID in September, and asked to return to the TID again with her phone.

These are not isolated incidents of suppressed free speech, harassment and intimidation. These practices are structural as they are embedded in the political and administrative culture and are in compliance with a militarised culture. Despite the veneer of peace, activists, members of political parties, journalists, protesting workers and people, and families of the disappeared, are all under close scrutiny—home visits, summons, phone-calls demanding information about funding, staff, international links etc.,

These state actions limit the flourishing of a democratic society. It chills speech, limits memorialisation of the war and loss, isolates victims and survivors and creates a cloud of fear. The promise of “change” and “renaissance” rings hollow when people are under surveillance for simply doing their jobs, remembering their loved ones, or speaking the truth. The NPP government must move from rhetoric to action: lift the veil of surveillance, stop summoning people without charge, and respect freedom of expression and assembly.

People are continuing to exercise their democratic rights by holding the NPP government to account and reviewing their one and a half years in office. People are aware that real change will not come from merely changing faces in Parliament, but rather, from people's courageous and continuous engagement in everyday politics, and a consistent demand for an overhaul of the existing system. It is the people that will ensure that no future governments can normalise authoritarianism under the guise of “stability.”

⁴⁶ Free Palestine Movement - https://web.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10163956245728829&id=706808828&rdid=3T4muByv7cwQug7B#

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