

India: Tamil Nadu chief minister tries to exploit issue of Sri Lankan Tamils

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16 May 2016

Jayaram Jayalalithaa, the chief minister of South Indian state of Tamil Nadu, has invoked the issue of the Sri Lankan Tamils during her party's campaign for today's state assembly elections to boost her electoral fortunes. She was seeking to exploit widespread anger among Tamils in South India over the fate of Sri Lankan Tamils under the oppressive policies of successive governments in Colombo.

The election manifesto issued by Jayalalithaa's ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) called for "appropriate action against those responsible for the genocide of Sri Lankan Tamils and further actions including Sri Lankan Tamils to live with full freedom and dignity." She also called for action to achieve a separate Tamil state in Sri Lanka and for the Indian central government "to grant dual citizenship right for Sri Lankan Tamils who have been living inside and outside of camps for many years in Tamil Nadu".

In an election rally in Tiruchirappalli last month, Jayalalithaa said that her party would take "continuous steps" to create a separate Eelam in Sri Lanka.

Jayalalithaa's and her AIADMK's promises on Sri Lankan Tamils have nothing to do with any concern about the fate of island Tamils at the hands of successive Colombo governments and Sri Lankan Tamil refugees living in Tamil Nadu.

It is a fraud aiming to throw dust in eyes of workers and the poor in Tamil Nadu, as her record in office makes clear. Jayalalithaa has served as chief minister of Tamil Nadu in three terms—in 1991-1996, 2001-2006 and 2011 up to now.

Yet the vast majority of the tens of thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils who had to flee to India due to the anti-Tamil communal pogroms of July 1983 and the quarter-century-long Sri Lankan civil war that followed still

live in Tamil Nadu under abysmal conditions. They face continuous harassment from Indian intelligence. Jayalalithaa's AIADMK or its rival DMK, which have shared state office in Tamil Nadu between them, failed to improve conditions of Sri Lankan refugees.

Jayalalithaa is particularly notorious for her public backing for successive Colombo governments' reactionary war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). She is well known for her hostility to the oppressed Tamil masses in Sri Lanka and India.

After the 1991 assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, then the leader and prime ministerial candidate of the Congress, the traditional ruling party of the Indian bourgeoisie, by the LTTE, she demanded the central government ban the LTTE. She used draconian anti-terrorist acts, like the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act (TADA) and Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), against LTTE sympathizers and her political opponents in Tamil Nadu.

Jayalalithaa continued to support the anti-Tamil racist war in Sri Lanka after President Mahinda Rajapakse resumed it in 2006. Even during the final phase of war, where thousands of people died and hundreds of thousands of innocent Tamils were displaced, she cynically justified Tamil civilian casualties, claiming that civilian deaths are "inevitable in a war."

A few weeks before the military defeat of the LTTE in May 2009, Jayalalithaa changed her tune and became a "defender" of Sri Lankan Tamils. At an election rally, she declared: "We will fight to attain that independent, separate Eelam. Till today, I have never said that a separate Eelam is the only solution. I have spoken about a political solution, this and that. But, now I emphatically say a separate Eelam is the only

permanent solution to the Sri Lankan conflict.”

Having continued to support the anti-Tamil war in Sri Lanka, Jayalalithaa made this call for a separate Tamil Eelam at the 11th hour, only to whip up communalism in Tamil Nadu to boost her electoral fortunes. She is also doing this today.

The LTTE’s political wing leader B. Nadesan welcomed Jayalalithaa’s demagogic speech and hailed the AIADMK-led alliance in Tamil Nadu as “friends” of Tamil Eelam.

A few days later, the entire LTTE leadership including Nadesan were massacred by the Rajapakse government’s military in Mullivaikkal in Sri Lanka. After the Indian parliamentary elections in 2009, Jayalalithaa dropped the issue of Tamils in Sri Lanka, throwing everything in the dustbin.

She is now trying to retrieve the issue from the dustbin where she had put it, in time for another cynical electoral manoeuvre. One can safely predict that, as in the past, she will drop it once the elections are over.

Jayalalithaa does not support a separate Tamil state in Sri Lanka, fearing that it would encourage scores of similar ethnic and religious separatist movements in India—where dozens of minorities face racial oppression, including Kashmir and Northeast India. It would threaten to undermine the Indian bourgeois state, which Jayalalithaa has defended for decades.

It must also be stressed is that demand for a separate Tamil Eelam does not carry any progressive content. Such a state would be ruled by the Tamil bourgeoisie, under which Tamil workers would be subjected to brutal exploitation by global and local Tamil capital. The democratic rights of Tamil workers and youth will be secured not in such a state, but only in a Sri Lanka-Eelam Socialist Republic, established through a unified revolutionary movement of Sinhala and Tamil workers in Sri Lanka, as a part of Union of Socialist Republics of South Asia.

Jayalalithaa is advocating Tamil Eelam under conditions where her AIADMK government confronts growing social anger of the working peoples in Tamil Nadu.

The vast majority of the population is struggling to survive on less than US\$2 per day. Food prices and unemployment are unprecedentedly mounting across India. Last October and November, tens of thousands of workers and rural poor suffered devastation due to

floods in the state capital, Chennai, as well as other parts of Tamil Nadu, creating enormous anger against Jayalalithaa’s government. These conditions drove her to cynically exploit the plight of Sri Lankan Tamils to whip up Tamil communalism in an attempt to get votes based on empty promises.



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