

Businessman launches Hindu-supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party in Sri Lanka

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A press conference held in the Jaffna Media Center on Saturday, March 6, announced the formation of the “Sri Lanka Bharatiya Janata Party” (SLBJP), a party aiming to work with India’s violently anti-communist and anti-Muslim, Hindu-supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

This party was formed amid growing class tensions as the bourgeoisie pursues a herd immunity policy on the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions in the Indian Ocean region between China and Washington’s main regional ally, India. India and China are waging a fierce struggle for economic and strategic influence in Sri Lanka. The formation of this party is a warning that factions within the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie are preparing an escalation of communal and political violence aimed at the working class.

The SLBJP was formed after the Indian government called for the formation of precisely such a party. In February, Tripura Chief Minister, Biplab Deb said Indian Home Minister Amit Shah would form BJP governments not only in India but also in neighboring countries like Sri Lanka and Nepal. He also said that the BJP would back attempts by its Sri Lankan supporters to found a BJP in Sri Lanka. His remarks drew condemnation from ruling circles in Nepal and Sri Lanka.

This weekend, there was no founding conference or founding statements issued, but the March 6 press conference announced that the SLBJP is led by Colombo-based businessman V. Muthusamy. Its secretary is M. Indrajith and its treasurer V. Dilan. Until yesterday, they were politically little known to the public.

At the 27-minute press conference announcing the formation of the party, not a word was said about the Indian or Sri Lankan governments’ malign neglect of

the spread of the coronavirus or about the military regime that Sri Lankan President Gotabhaya Rajapakse is building. Rather, Muthusamy pointed to the explosive political crisis emerging in Sri Lanka. Tamil nationalist parties that have closely worked with the Sri Lankan regime in Colombo have been discredited by their complicity in supporting herd immunity, austerity and police-state policies.

Muthusamy demagogically asserted that his party aims to fill the political void left by the crisis of the Tamil nationalist parties. He said, “There are many parties representing the Tamil people in Sri Lanka. However, they deny the fundamental rights of the Tamil people. At the same time, they act with their personal interests in mind. That is why among the Tamil people, these parties are unable to survive. We are launching this for the educational development of Tamil students and to promote the sports sector. I think we can start in Jaffna.”

He added that “a political party is needed” to speak directly with the Sri Lankan government about issues in the SLBJP’s program. “I can meet with anyone on behalf of that party,” he said.

Several journalists at the conference asked why Muthusamy would use the name of a party already established in a neighboring country.

These questions followed warnings from Sri Lankan officials against founding the BJP in Sri Lanka. Before the SLBJP’s launch, Nimal PUNCHIHewa, chairman of the Sri Lanka Electoral Commission, had already responded to Deb’s comments on founding the BJP in Sri Lanka by warning that such a party would be illegal, “Any Sri Lankan political party or group is allowed to have external relations with any party or group abroad. But our electoral laws do not allow foreign political parties to operate here.”

Muthusamy and Indrajith responded to reporters' questions at the interview by trying to maintain the ludicrous pretense that Sri Lanka's BJP has nothing to do with India's BJP. However, they also signaled that they have and will maintain close political ties with the Indian government.

They declared that "Indian parties are not new in Sri Lanka. The Congress Party and the Communist Party are also present here." They added, "We will not betray the nation; we will not fight against the Sri Lankan government on behalf of India. ... Service is our goal, not a struggle, and we will not participate in any struggle."

Muthusamy denied that his initiative to found the SLBJP was in response to Deb's statement, with the chief minister of Tripura saying, "The report just arrived. We launched this initiative six months ago."

At the same time, the SLBJP's founders made clear their acceptance of the BJP's Hindu-supremacist, anti-working class program, hailing India's BJP Prime Minister Narendra Modi and refusing to rule out Indian state involvement in their party. Asked what he would do if evidence emerged of future Indian involvement in his party, Muthusamy cynically responded, "Let's just change the name."

Asked about his party's political activities, Indrajith commented, "Initially, I had no intention of getting involved in politics." While declaring that education and sports were the SLBJP's priorities, he also hailed Modi and stressed that the SLBJP enjoys the political support of the BJP in India. "Modi's name is on everyone's mind," he said. "The BJP has in no way opposed the creation of a party in the name of the BJP."

The SLBJP's founding combines bitter hostility to the working class with close alignment on the intrigues and war threats of Washington and New Delhi against China. It comes after years of mounting class struggles across Sri Lanka, in which Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim workers joined hands in strikes and protests. Now, as the SLBJP is founded, a strike wave is developing across tea plantation areas in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan Tamil nationalists, including Tamil National Party leader K. Shivajilingam and several members of the Tamil National Alliance, previously indicated their support for the founding of the BJP in Sri Lanka. Shivajilingam went so far as to suggest, as he endorsed calls to found a Sri Lankan BJP, that US

and Indian troops could then invade and occupy northern Sri Lanka. This points to the close connection between anti-Chinese agitation by the Sri Lankan ruling establishment and its hostility to the working class.

Speaking about the Indian government, Maruthapandi Rameswaran, member of Parliament of the Ceylon Workers' Congress, recently said, "It is good for you when the government [of India] builds 14,000 houses for you, vaccinates, builds hospitals, gives people gardens. Two or three years ago, they said, 'we are going to give everything to China.' Now no such thing will happen."

In India, at the Tamil Nadu BJP youth conference in Salem, Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh warned China, "We will not give up an inch of this land as long as my body is alive." He also boasted that India built 27,000 new houses for war-affected people and that Modi was the first Indian prime minister to visit Jaffna since 2015. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi will work with dedication to ensure that Tamils in Sri Lanka live in peace, equality and dignity."

In fact, the BJP has responded to mounting strikes, farmers protests and protests against its anti-Muslim laws with brutal and bloody repression.



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