

Leader of Sri Lanka's opposition JVP party visits India

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Anura Kumara Disanayake, leader of Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and its parliamentary front, the National People's Power (NPP), travelled to India on Monday for an official five-day visit. He was accompanied by MP and JVP propaganda secretary Vijitha Herath, NPP secretary Dr. Nihal Abeyasinghe and Professor Anil Jayantha.

The trip signifies a further rightward shift by the pro-imperialist NPP/JVP as part of its effort to develop relations with reactionary regimes throughout the region and internationally.

New Delhi invited Disanayake in the wake of an opinion poll by the Sri Lankan Institute of Health Policy indicating that 50 percent would vote for him in a presidential election. According to the poll, Disanayake is considerably ahead of other possible candidates, including President Ranil Wickremesinghe and opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya leader Sajith Premadasa. The presidential election is due in late September or early October.

Referring to the Indian tour, sections of the media claim that the JVP had changed from a "die-hard Marxist line" to "flexible Marxism," or made similar comments. Others noted the JVP's anti-Indian chauvinism; the organisation having previously denounced Indian-origin estate workers as a "fifth column instrument of Indian expansionism."

The JVP was never a Marxist party but emerged in the 1960s as a radical nationalist movement based on a toxic mixture of Sinhala populism and Maoist and Castroite peasant guerrillism. Recruiting disaffected Sinhala youth in the island's south, its "armed struggles" resulted in one bloody disaster after another.

The JVP's lurch to the right in the 1980s accelerated following the signing of the 1987 Indo-Lankan Accord under which India sent "peace-keepers" to the island's north to disarm the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The JVP denounced the Accord on a chauvinist basis claiming India was planning to divide the country and waged a violent campaign of thuggery and assassination against it. The government seized on the JVP violence to wage a brutal campaign against social unrest among unemployed rural youth, murdering some 60,000.

The JVP leadership reassembled in 1994 and, with the backing of a section of the ruling class, largely dropped its empty socialist phrasemongers and transformed itself into a parliamentary party that supported the brutal communal war against the LTTE and assisted in containing the rising opposition among workers, poor and youth.

Discredited by its support for the war and its participation in or political support for various bourgeois governments, the JVP established the NPP in 2015 as a parliamentary front. The NPP largely consists of academics, professionals, some artists, small businessmen, retired military officers and the JVP's affiliated organisations. The JVP/NPP has cultivated close relations with diplomats in Colombo from all imperialist countries, including the US, as well as India, the major regional power.

The far-right Bharatiya Janatha Party government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi decided to invite Disanayake on a five-day tour to make clear that whoever is elected the next Sri Lankan president, they must follow an "India First" policy—i.e., line up with New Delhi's geo-strategic and economic interests.

In the recent Maldives elections, the pro-Chinese Mohamed Muizzu was elected president, ousting the pro-Indian president, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih. In this context, India, which has developed considerable influence in Sri Lanka following the island's unprecedented economic crisis, is keen to maintain and strengthen its relations.

The Modi government scheduled a series of meetings between Disanayake and senior government figures, including External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra, and a section of big business.

After his meeting with Disanayake, Jaishankar noted in his X/Twitter account: "A good discussion on our bilateral relationship and the mutual benefits from its further deepening." The media also reported that the minister stressed that New Delhi, with its neighbourhood first and SAGAR [Security, Growth for All in the Region] policies, will continue to be a "reliable and trusted partner to Sri Lanka."

While little is known about what Disanayake discussed with Jaishankar and other senior Indian officials, the JVP leader declared in an interview with the *Hindu* on December 9: "We do know that India, who is our closest neighbor, has become a major political and economic centre. So, when we take economic and political decisions, we will always care about how it will impact India."

In other words, Disanayake had already made clear his willingness to side with New Delhi, a major ally of US imperialism and actively involved in Washington's military buildup for war against China. Last year, Sri Lankan President Wickremesinghe signed a "Joint Vision" statement with the Modi

government, enhancing its investments, providing financial assistance and indicating their close defence ties.

On Wednesday, Indian officials arranged for Dissanayake to visit Ahmadabad, the Gujarat capital, to meet the state chief minister and local big-business figures, and watch a presentation on the “Gujarat Model.”

Lankatruth, a JVP website, published an article describing the Gujarat model, as a “market-led” economic reform program. In fact, the Gujarat model is a brutal development policy to boost big business profits through the fire-sale privatisation of state-owned ventures to business tycoons. Gautam Adani, now the richest man in India, was one of those who benefitted from this “market-led” model.

In 2002, one year after Modi was elected Gujarat chief minister, he and his gang of Hindu fundamentalist politicians provoked anti-Muslim riots throughout the state, resulting in the massacre of about 2,000 Muslims. Using various autocratic powers Modi began implementing the Gujarat model, viciously suppressing workers’ strikes and other resistance to these attacks. Following his election as Indian prime minister in 2014, Modi ruthlessly moved to implement the same “market-led” policies throughout the country.

The JVP and its NPP parliamentary front have previously hailed the economic policies adopted by Singapore and Vietnam as models to “develop” Sri Lanka. In essence, all these models are directed at fattening the profits of big business by intensifying the exploitation of all working people. Whatever its final form, these are the foundations of the program Dissanayake is preparing to impose in Sri Lanka.

For its part, the NPP/JVP has published reports and social media posts hailing Dissanayake’s Indian visit and his high-level discussions as proof of his party’s international recognition and certainty that it will win the presidential election.

Anger among Sri Lankan workers and the poor is at boiling point over the Wickremesinghe government’s austerity measures and the associated rise in poverty, hunger, malnutrition and the collapse of public health and other essential services.

While the NPP/JVP is cynically attempting to exploit this rising mass opposition to win the presidential election and establish its own regime, it will implement the same savage policies no less ruthlessly than Wickremesinghe. Like all other opposition parties, the JVP is committed to the IMF’s demands.

Last month, IMF officials led by its Sri Lanka mission chief Peter Bruere visited the JVP’s head office and met with leaders. Neither the IMF mission nor JVP leaders have revealed anything about their discussions.

On January 8, Dissanayake appeared on Siyatha TV presenting the NPP’s pro-capitalist economic program. Following the show, he was asked whether an NPP government would seize the wealth of the rich. Dissanayake angrily rejected the question, praising Sri Lanka’s LOLC Group, one of Sri Lanka’s largest conglomerate corporations and its investment in South Africa.

Dissanayake went on to commend Sri Lankan companies who have invested in India and Bangladesh, saying, “These entrepreneurs are making us proud.” The task of a future NPP government, he said, would be to encourage such companies,

providing them with modern technological knowledge and finding markets for them.

Dissanayake’s constantly repeated message to working people has been that Sri Lanka must be rebuilt: “We have to change our lifestyle for a brief period. If we want to come out from this crisis, we must do it. We will be forced to take painful actions.” In line with this profit-driven, “market-led” agenda, the JVP is preparing its trade unions to impose the required austerity measures and police the working class.

Addressing an All-Ceylon Port Workers General Union in early November, senior JVP union leader Wasantha Samarasinghe declared: “There will be an operation process uniting minister of ports and all trade unions... Workers have a responsibility of developing good productivity for the country.” In plain language this means the trade unions will work with the state to boost output and witch hunt all workers resisting these policies.

Since early last year the JVP has been mobilising retired military officers and lower-rank soldiers into a “Tri Forces Collective” which has held conferences in all districts, apart from the North and the East where Tamils are the majority. Dissanayake has announced that Aruna Jayasekera, a retired major general and former commander of the Eastern Province, would be appointed defence minister in a future NPP government.

The JVP’s establishment of this sort of paramilitary force is unprecedented for any Sri Lankan capitalist party. It is a sharp warning to the working class and the poor that Dissanayake, like President Wickremesinghe and all sections of the Sri Lankan ruling class are preparing for dictatorial forms of rule.

All these developments emphasise the urgency for workers and youth to fight for the program advanced by Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and to join its ranks.

In opposition all capitalist parties, including the JVP and its NPP parliamentary front, the SEP, the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, has advanced a revolutionary Marxist perspective for workers and youth. Its program is based on Leon Trotsky’s theory of Permanent Revolution that guided the 1917 October Revolution in Russia.

We have called for the building of independent action committees of workers in every workplace and major economic centres to mobilise the working class as an revolutionary force and win to its side the oppressed rural masses in a unified struggle against the capitalist onslaught.

These action committees need to fight for a democratic and socialist congress of workers and the rural masses as the means to mobilise workers and the poor to bring down the Wickremesinghe regime. This will open the way for the coming to power of a workers’ and peasants’ government and the implementation of socialist and internationalist policies.



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