

Sri Lankan president blames Iran, not the US, for global fuel crisis

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18 March 2026

President Anura Kumara Disanayake held a “special briefing” for selected media at the Presidential Secretariat on March 17 to speak on the impact on Sri Lanka of the continuing US-Israeli war on Iran. He warned of economic fallout but said the government would do everything to manage the situation. He urged people not to panic and called on journalists to help maintain calm.

Disanayake’s comments, however, have once again exposed his government’s phony facade of “neutrality” in relation to the illegal US-Israeli war against Iran. “[T]he nature of this war is such that all parties involved have carefully chosen their own limits and targets... [including] disrupting,” he said.

By talking about “all parties involved,” by refusing to name names, Disanayake is covering up for the fascist Trump administration by putting the aggressors—the US and Israel—on the same plane as the victim, Iran. His government has refused to even condemn US imperialism for waging a barbaric war of aggression that is in flagrant breach of international law.

In the next breath, the president made absolutely clear whose side his government is on. He declared that “actions such as blocking the Strait of Hormuz, attacking oil storage facilities, targeting oil transport vessels and striking ports have led to a crisis of international-scale in the energy market.”

Who is he accusing? Iran, of course, for its retaliatory actions against the relentless US and Israeli attacks, and those countries throughout the region that accommodate the US bases from which its warplanes are launched and warships resupplied.

With the war in its third week, the economic shock waves are spreading with Iran’s closure of the Strait of Hormuz with oil prices shooting up above \$100 a

barrel. In Sri Lanka, petrol prices have risen by about 8 percent, imposing greater burdens on working people who are already suffering the impact of IMF-enforced austerity measures.

The Sri Lankan government is already resorting to measures including petrol rationing that revive memories of 2022 when Sri Lanka defaulted on foreign debt, causing huge price rises and shortages, including of fuel. The resulting social crisis led to a mass uprising and the collapse of the government, with President Gotabhaya Rajapakse fleeing the country.

Queues outside fuel stations have re-emerged with police deployed to maintain control. As took place in 2022, the government has reintroduced a QR-code based fuel rationing system. Colombo has shifted LPG imports to the United States.

The government has also announced “a public holiday” every Wednesday until further notice for certain public services and schools to curb energy use, exempting essential services. Work-from-home options are also under consideration, the president indicated.

The Sri Lankan government’s position closely mirrors India’s stance. Colombo’s official statements follow a similar pattern—expressing “deep concern” over threats to regional stability while urging “maximum restraint” and “de-escalation”—formulations that only cover up the criminality of US imperialism and Israel.

The Sri Lankan navy did come to the aid of the Iranian frigate IRIS Dena that was sunk by a torpedo fired by a US submarine off its southern coast, killing at least 108 sailors. The navy rescued 32 survivors. Colombo later allowed a second Iranian naval vessel, IRIS Bushehr, carrying 208 crew members, to dock after initially denying entry.

The government did not condemn the US sinking of

the unarmed IRIS Dena in international waters. Moreover, while authorities and pro-government media portrayed the rescue as a humanitarian act, a report by Reuters, citing a US State Department cable, indicated that the Sri Lankan government had acceded to Washington's demands not to allow the crew members to return to Iran.

At the same time, the government continues its hypocritical posturing of "neutrality." On March 11, it declined to join some 130 UN members that co-sponsored a UN Security Council resolution condemning Iran's "egregious attacks" on its regional neighbours. It only did so because the resolution was too blatantly pro-US in character.

India and the US were among the co-sponsors of the Bahrain-led resolution, which condemned "in the strongest terms" Iran's attacks against Gulf states that house US military bases while failing to even mention the continuing barrages of bombs and missiles initiated by the US and Israel against Iran.

During the Monday media briefing, a journalist from state-owned ITN TV fed Dissanayake what was obviously a question prepared in advance: Can the government maintain its "non-aligned policy" in the present situation? Delighted with the question, Dissanayake said: "I think that is the stand we have to maintain whatever difficult situation... [A]s a country we maintain this neutrality."

Such political duplicity is of course not uncommon in the Colombo political establishment—double-talk about "neutrality" to cover up support for an illegal war of aggression. But it should be recalled, that the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)-led government was treated as "leftist" and even "Marxist" in the international press when it came to power for the first time in 2024.

The JVP, of which Dissanayake is a leading member, has a long political pedigree of socialistic and anti-imperialist phrase-mongering going back to its founding on the basis of an eclectic admixture of Maoism, Castroism and the "armed struggle." All of that has been progressively junked over the decades as the JVP has strived for office.

Particularly since the 2022 mass uprising, the JVP leaders cultivated close relations with imperialist powers, especially with the US. After meeting with Dissanayake in May 2022 in the midst of the political upheaval, the US ambassador in Colombo, Julie Chung,

spoke publicly in positive terms about the JVP as a party that was "resonating with the people."

In power, the Dissanayake government has been faithfully implementing the stringent IMF austerity policies in full and deepening military ties with US imperialism as it wages naked acts of aggression in the Middle East and Latin America in preparation for war against China.

It is urgent that the working class in Sri Lanka and internationally consolidate a unified anti-war movement based on socialist principles against the war drive led by US imperialism that is plunging the world towards a global conflagration. In Sri Lanka that includes a political struggle at home against the bogus "neutral" posturing of the Dissanayake government that tacitly lines up with US imperialism and is imposing new burdens resulting from the Iran war on workers and the rural masses.



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