

May Day 2026

# South Asia, the Iran war and the bankruptcy of bourgeois nationalism

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*This speech was delivered by Deepal Jayasekera, General Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka), and Dilaxshan Mahalingam, a leader of the IYSSE (Sri Lanka), at the 2026 May Day Online Rally, organized by the WSWs and the International Committee of the Fourth International.*

Comrades and friends,

We bring revolutionary May Day greetings from the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the IYSSE in Sri Lanka. We deliver this speech jointly in Sinhala and Tamil as an expression of our fight for the unity of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers, against the communal divisions on which the Sri Lankan ruling class has relied for nearly eight decades.

South Asia is being dragged into World War III. The criminal US-Israeli war on Iran, the US-NATO war on Russia in Ukraine and the war preparations against China are component parts of a single drive of imperialism. With our comrades of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), we fight to mobilise workers and youth across South Asia in an internationalist movement of the working class—to stop the war and end the capitalist system that produces it.

The war has stripped away every pretence of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People's Power (JVP/NPP) government in Sri Lanka. On the eve of its election in late 2024, the SEP warned that the JVP/NPP would continue the pro-imperialist policy of the Wickremesinghe government. Every word of that warning has been confirmed.

President Anura Kumara Disanayake claims his government has taken a “neutral and humanitarian” position. He points to the Sri Lankan Navy's rescue of sailors from the Iranian naval ship IRIS Dena, after it

was attacked by a US submarine in the Indian Ocean off Southern Sri Lanka, killing more than 100 sailors, and to the seizure of a second Iranian vessel, the IRIS Bushehr, whose sailors were held at the Welisara Naval Camp.

These claims are a fraud. According to a U.S. State Department cable cited by Reuters, the JVP/NPP government acted on the two ships in line with secret discussions with US and Israeli diplomats, under conditions set by Washington. Disanayake himself admitted on March 5 that he had coordinated with what he called “relevant embassies”—those of the United States and Israel. The government has issued no criticism of the US attack. Its foreign ministry has not even named the aggressors. This is not neutrality; it is complicity.

The war is now devastating the working class of Sri Lanka. Since February 28, fuel prices have risen by 26 to 33 percent, bus fares by 12 percent, kerosene—the fuel of the poorest—by 30 percent. The Ceylon Electricity Board has demanded a tariff hike of at least 13 percent. The government has reimposed the QR-code fuel rationing of the 2022 crisis and declared every Wednesday a public-sector holiday to conserve diesel. The Kiel Institute estimates a 15 percent rise in food prices. Some 36 percent of fertiliser imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz. The JVP/NPP has loaded the economic burden of the war onto the working class, deepening the IMF austerity of Wickremesinghe.

What of the official opposition? The Samagi Jana Balawegaya of Sajith Premadasa has called on parliament to condemn “both sides”—equating the aggressors, US imperialism and Israel, with Iran's retaliation against US bases. This is not opposition but

political cover. Premadasa and his colleagues, in the Wickremesinghe-led UNP governments, integrated Colombo into the US offensive against China.

The Tamil bourgeois parties have been still more silent. Where they have spoken, they have spoken for the war. On March 6, Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi parliamentarian Sivagnanam Shriritharan told parliament that if the decades-long war by Colombo against the Tamil people in the north and east was a “humanitarian operation,” then the US war on Iran is “also just.” Communal nationalism, Sinhala or Tamil, ends in subordination to imperialism.

The Modi government in India has lined up no less openly with Washington. The IRIS Dena was attacked while returning from an international naval exercise in Visakhapatnam, hosted by India itself. The Modi government said nothing. On the eve of the war, Modi visited Israel and embraced Netanyahu. India is now a frontline state of the US drive to war against China.

But the Indian working class has begun to answer. From April 10, tens of thousands of industrial workers in the National Capital Region around Delhi launched strikes against war-driven price hikes. The Modi government responded with mass police repression, arresting hundreds and branding the workers “Naxal” and “Pakistan-linked.” The Stalinist unions, the CITU and AITUC, are scrambling to bring the strikes under bureaucratic control. From the Philippines to Northern Ireland, similar struggles are erupting. The international working class is entering the political stage.

The Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) plays the role of the pseudo-left in Sri Lanka, diverting this opposition back into the bourgeois state. At a press conference on March 5, FSP leader Duminda Nagamuwa told the JVP/NPP government: “Don’t take the side of either the US or China. Both are sitting on two sides of the same seesaw. We advise the government to follow a non-aligned position.” With these words, the FSP places US imperialism, which is waging a war of extermination, on the same level as China, which is not an imperialist power but the principal target of that war drive. This is not anti-imperialism. It is its opposite. The FSP exists to tie the working class to the JVP/NPP, and through it, to imperialism.

Against this entire political establishment, the SEP and the IYSSE fight for the political independence of the working class. The unity we proclaim today by

speaking in Sinhala and Tamil is the unity the working class must build in struggle—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers in Sri Lanka, together with workers across South Asia, against the ruling class of every nation and the imperialist powers behind them.

We call on every worker and young person watching this rally to join the SEP and the IYSSE, to study the program of the ICFI and to build rank-and-file committees as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

Long live international socialism. Long live the Fourth International.



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