

New Sri Lankan president visits India on his first overseas trip

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Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Disanayake, leader of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna-led (JVP) National People's Power (NPP), elected on September 21, visited India from December 15 to 17. This was his first overseas trip since assuming office and involved top level discussions with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as well as his national security adviser and ministers for finance and external affairs.

Disanayake's selection of India to visit first is to signal his government's commitment to continue the foreign policy of his predecessor, Ranil Wickremesinghe, in integrating Colombo into the US-led preparations for war against China. India is the major strategic partner of the US in South Asia.

Disanayake's visit took place under conditions of global geopolitical tensions and conflict that mark the opening of a third world war. The US and its NATO allies are already engaged in a rapidly escalating war against Russia in Ukraine. At the same time, Washington is backing Israel in its genocidal war in Gaza that is already expanding into Lebanon and Syria, directed primarily against Iran, and ramping up its provocations, economic war and military build-up throughout the Indo-Pacific against China.

Given the JVP's decades-long virulent anti-Indian chauvinist record since its origin in the late 1960s, Disanayake's moves for closer ties with New Delhi underscore a significant shift.

The JVP emerged as a petty bourgeois radical nationalist movement, based on Sinhalese rural youth with a political ideology that was a toxic mixture of Maoist and Castroist peasant guerrillaism and Sinhala populism. It denounced Tamil-speaking Indian-origin plantation workers as a "fifth column of Indian expansionism."

During its rightward degeneration in the 1980s, the

JVP denounced the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord, which brought so-called Indian peacekeeping troops to the island's North and East to disarm separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), on a chauvinist basis, declaring it would split the nation. It waged a murderous, fascist campaign against the Accord.

Like similar organisations internationally, the JVP transformed itself in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, abandoned the "armed struggle" and integrated into the political establishment in the 1990s. It was an aggressive supporter of Colombo's protracted communal war against the LTTE, and criticised the government for seeking closer ties with New Delhi as the "subordination of Sri Lanka's national interests" to India.

In the past decade, however, the JVP has forged far closer ties with the ruling elites, including business and the military, through the formation of the NPP and has adjusted its foreign policy accordingly. Amid the 2022 mass uprising that compelled President Gotabaya Rajapakse to flee the country, JVP leaders met with Julie Chung, US ambassador in Colombo, who publicly declared that the JVP was "a significant party" that resonated with the public.

In early February, Disanayake made a five-day visit to India as an official guest of the Modi government, where he reassured New Delhi that, if elected to power, he would do nothing to undermine India's national interests. Now in office, his visit this month was aimed at reaffirming his commitment to line up with India, and thus the US, against China.

Disanayake is also desperate for economic aid amid the island's ongoing economic crisis, which forced its default on foreign debt in 2022 and led to the protracted mass protests. He relies heavily on the \$3 billion International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan negotiated by

the previous government and is committed to implementing its terms in full.

A key component of Dissanayake's talks with Modi in New Delhi was energy cooperation, which, while assisting Sri Lanka economically, will also make the island far more dependent on India. India plans to supply LNG to Sri Lanka's power plants and connect the countries' power grids. The two leaders also agreed to build a petroleum pipeline with participation from the United Arab Emirates, further integrating their energy infrastructures.

Sri Lanka's growing economic dependence on India and the US, which holds the dominant position in the IMF, also strongly influences its strategic alignment with the same powers.

During his visit to New Delhi, Dissanayake assured the Modi government that Sri Lanka would not allow its territory to be used in ways "detrimental to India's security or regional stability, committing to a free and secure Indian Ocean." Strategically located across vital sea lanes in the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka is a focal point in the intensifying geopolitical rivalry.

India's security concerns, especially regarding China's growing presence in Sri Lanka, were heightened by the 2017 lease of the Hambantota Port to China and the presence of Chinese research vessels. During Dissanayake's visit, Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri stressed the importance of maintaining Sri Lanka's commitment to banning Chinese research vessels from docking in its ports, which is set to expire on December 31.

On December 20, Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Herath said Colombo was working to formulate a national policy on foreign research ship visits. Echoing Dissanayake, he reassured India that Sri Lanka would not allow any activities that threaten its security.

During Dissanayake's visit to India, the two countries agreed to expedite a bilateral security cooperation deal, which will include joint military exercises, maritime surveillance, defence dialogues and exchanges. This marks a significant step towards closely integrating Sri Lanka into India's strategic agenda, mainly targeting China.

Dissanayake's assurances to India continue the trajectory set by previous President Ranil Wickremesinghe, who in July 2023 signed a "Joint Vision" agreement with India, deepening their

economic and strategic ties. Wickremesinghe has issued a public statement hailing this month's Dissanayake-Modi talks.

China is attempting to counter Sri Lanka's shift towards India and the US. A Chinese delegation led by senior official Qin Boyong visited Colombo from December 16–19. On December 18, Chinese officials indicated their intention to resume maritime research in the Indian Ocean once the ban on Chinese research ships expires. Nevertheless, despite its considerable economic clout, China's influence in Colombo is waning under the pressure of US imperialism and its partners, particularly India.

The working class in Sri Lanka and South Asia has no interest in being drawn into a catastrophic global conflict, as the US seeks to maintain its dominance through aggression against rivals Russia, China and any other major power that threatens its interests. Sri Lankan workers need to join with their class brothers and sisters in India and around the world on a revolutionary socialist and anti-war program to put an end to the capitalist profit system: the source of imperialist war.



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