

# JVP, UNITARY STATE OF SRI LANKA & EELAM TAMILS

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The National People's Power (NPP), a coalition of political parties and organisations led by the Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) was launched on the 14th of July 2019 in Colombo.<sup>1</sup>

On 17th August 2020 JVPs leader Anura Kumara Disanayake (AKD) was quoted in a Colombo news outlet, revealing his party's ambition to capture state power in Sri Lanka and to save the state from economic collapse. He proclaims that the JVP "...strives to establish a stable economy that is independent and unbiased. Which is why we have decided to continue contesting under the compass sign from the NPP in every election going forward."<sup>2</sup>

As the former government under the presidency of Gotabaya Rajapakse with several family members in high post increasingly became unpopular amongst the Sinhala populace, Sinhala discontent against the regime grew during 2022.

Similarly, the U.S and its allies seemed to also want a change of the regime, assumingly to support a more stable regime in control of the unitary state of Sri Lanka and who held more political legitimacy among the Sinhala masses.

The principle here is that for external powers to utilise the strategic potentials of the island territories, they need first a unitary state, and second a politically stable regime in power of the unitary state.

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1. Dailymirror, 14 July 2019 "National People's power launched" <https://www.dailymirror.lk/print/caption-story/National-People%E2%80%99s-Power-launched/110-171119>

2. Hannan, Sara. 2020 "Jvp continue politics under NPP" in *The Morning* 17 August 2020 <https://www.themorning.lk/articles/95273>

The latter is dependent on wielding political legitimacy amongst the Sinhala populations which in turn is related to appeasing the Sinhala Buddhist clergy and chauvinist forces.

It is in these intersections that Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism and imperialism finds their symbiosis.

This can be traced to the creation of the unitary state in 1833 under the aegis of British imperialism to secure strategic and economic interests in South Asia and the Indian Ocean.

Subsequent to the establishment of the unitary state, was the development by British colonial officials and orientalist of a historical narrative in which the island was intricately aligned with Sinhala Buddhist civilisation, and in which Tamils were presented as usurpers and invaders from South-India.

The British understood that in order to consolidate political legitimacy for their unitary state project, it was paramount to promote the Buddhist religion. Their efforts stimulated Sinhala chauvinism and supremacy against the Tamils and non-Sinhala speakers.

British codified history of Sri Lanka was imbued with Sinhala supremacy and anti-Tamil sentiments and has ever since coloured various streams of the Sinhala national consciousness.

It is within the contours of such an imperialist orientalist production one finds JVPs adherence to a particular vision of a glorious Sinhala Buddhist past.

Similarly, they uphold another historical product of the British empire, as well as an object of U.S imperialist strategic ambitions in the Indian ocean, the unitary state of Sri Lanka.

On the 14th of May 2022 US ambassador to Sri Lanka, Julie Chung met AKD and ‘discussed the current political and economic situation in the country’.<sup>3</sup>

The Aragalaya, a popular protest movement among the Sinhala populations against the Gotabhaya regime began in mid-March 2022. The JVP and the NPP played a significant role in it.

Eventually, Gotabhaya Rajapakse resigned as the president of Sri Lanka on July 14th of 2022. Some few days before on July 8th, 2022, U.S ambassador Julie Chung was quoted by the Island during an event at the Jefferson House in Colombo “To me the JVP is a significant party. They have a growing presence. They resonate with the public during recent times”.

She continued praising the JVP and the then ongoing protest:

“I know that there had been a lot of rhetoric in the past. I thought it is my duty to really connect with the JVP leadership as person to person, not just as a party to the US Government. It was a really refreshing and honest conversation. We probably do not agree with everything, but I told them to speak to us directly if they have any concern about the US policy, investment projects or any programme here. So that we could get away from misinformation and disinformation...I think we have a good understanding.

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3. Daily Mirror, 14 May 2022. “US Ambassador meets AKD” [https://www.dailymirror.lk/caption\\_story/US-Ambassador-meets-AKD/110-237038](https://www.dailymirror.lk/caption_story/US-Ambassador-meets-AKD/110-237038)

They are a growing political party and their ideas are accepted by the public...”<sup>4</sup>

Following the resignation of Gotabhaya, Ranil Wickremesinghe, a traditional favourite for Washington amongst the plethora of U.S friendly Sinhala political elites, became the new head of state. His cabinet was constituted by members of Mahinda Rajapakse's SLPP as well as from the UNP and SLFP.

Anura Kumara Dissanayake and Julie Chung met again on October 19th, 2023.<sup>5</sup>

Prior to and after the regime change in the summer of 2022, we have witnessed Anura Kumara Dissanayake's, the JVPs, and the NPPs increasing interlocution with the US ambassador Julie Chung.

Similarly, the coalition signalled that they wanted to engage the IMF if they were to form a government in the future. On this note, they met officials of the IMF on the 18th of January 2024.<sup>6</sup>

Few days after the meeting the JVP economic affairs spokesperson, Sunil Handunneththi told the Sunday Times, that despite having some differences regarding the form of the IMF loan-packages to Sri

4. Indrajith, Saman. 2022. US Ambassador speaks glowingly of JVP” *The Island*, 08 Juni 2022 <https://island.lk/us-ambassador-speaks-glowingly-of-jvp/>

5. DailyFT, 20 October 2023. “US Ambassador meets AKD” <https://www.ft.lk/news/US-Ambassador-meets-AKD/56-754280>

6. DailyFT. 18 January 2024. “IMF delegation meets with NPP leaders” <https://www.ft.lk/news/IMF-delegation-meets-with-NPP-leaders/56-757527>

Lanka, “We told the IMF delegation to have talks with us even if there are differences between us in the future”.<sup>7</sup>

During 2023 AKD went alongside NPP delegates to the U.S on a multi-city tour to launch their election campaign. The NPP and JVP also went on several tours in Canada and Europe to promote their electoral bid. During the U.S tour the JVP minister of parliament for Gampaha, Vijitha Herath rebuked criticism launched from certain brands of Sinhala nationalists

“We maintain relationships with all countries. There cannot be any justification in questioning our right to meet the US Ambassador in Colombo Julie Chung. We had meetings with Ambassador Chung before President Gotabaya Rajapaksa’s ouster and after.”<sup>8</sup>

As part of these processes there were meetings organized aimed at Tamil-speaking audiences, reflecting the JVPs interest to approach and mobilise Eelam-Tamils. Hill country Tamils, and Muslims under the NPP banner. ADK toured Canada in March 2024 in meetings

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7. Sunday Times, January 21, 2024. “JVP wants to deal with the IMF in the future despite differences” <https://www.sundaytimes.lk/240121/news/jvp-wants-to-deal-with-imf-in-the-future-despite-differences-546022.html>

8. Ferdinando, Shamindra. 2023. “JVP says it has right to maintain relations with US” *The Island*, 07 November 2023 <https://island.lk/jvp-says-it-has-right-to-maintain-relations-with-us/>

organised by its Canada branch aimed at the Eelam-Tamil and Muslim diaspora communities.<sup>9</sup>

In June 2024 the JVP organized a meeting in the Norwegian capital aimed at the Eelam-Tamil community there. Similar events were organised in London. Such attempts should remind Eelam-Tamils of the previous regime change project embarked upon by the US to oust a Mahinda Rajapakse who had outlived his purposefulness for Washington.

Similarly, to consolidate the unitary state of Sri Lanka, its strategic benefactor, the US, needs a government headed by a political actor who commands popular support and legitimacy amongst the Sinhala populace.

Ranil Wickremesinghe involved in the affairs of the state for over four decades have himself suffered political unpopularity, including during the 'Aragalaya' protests. In light of such he might not prove to be the one the US needs to consolidate the unitary state apparatuses at the time of its greatest economic peril.

On 5th of February 2024, the NPP leadership also went on a five-day official visit to India on the invitations of the New Delhi establishment. There they met Indian Minister for External Affairs, S. Jaishankar.

Prior to the official visit, in December 2023, AKD in an interview with The Hindu disclosed the re-rapprochement with the Indian establishment “

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9. DailyFT , 22. March 2024. “AKD to meet Tamil and Muslim diaspora in Canada” <https://www.ft.lk/news/AKD-to-meet-Tamil-and-Muslim-diaspora-in-Canada/56-759787>



“We do know that India, who is our closest neighbour, 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.”<sup>10</sup>

Despite their traditional polemics against U.S imperialism and Indian expansionism, the JVP is fashioning itself to appease the U.S and Indian establishments to attract their backing to secure state power in Colombo.

Perhaps this is a logical perusal for a Janus-faced self-proclaimed Marxists party whom for the past three decades have supported and engaged the Sri Lankan state and its ruling elites against the struggles of the Eelam-Tamil nation.

The JVP have neither at any instances protested the historical trajectory of national oppression and genocide faced by the Eelam-Tamils, let alone stood in solidarity with an oppressed nation fighting for its inalienable and indivisible right to self-determination.

Furthermore, despite their ritualistic invocations of Lenin and Marx, the JVP has consistently either wittingly or unwittingly neglected the cardinal thesis of Lenin on the rights of nations and the Marxist-Leninist principles of right to self-determination of nations and in particular oppressed nations.

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10. Srinivasan, Meera. 2024. “Sri Lanka’s JVP-led alliance invited for talks in Delhi for the first time”, *The Hindu* 04 February 2024 <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/sri-lankas-jvp-led-alliance-invited-for-talks-in-delhi-for-the-first-time/article67811919.ece>

Is it the prevalence of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism that sustains an intransigence amongst the JVP leadership against accepting and applying the Marxist-Leninist theory regarding the Eelam-Tamil national question and their national liberation struggle?

Lenin warned that the failure to support an oppressed nation's inalienable right to self-determination with a bogus argument that it was bourgeoisie-led meant in practice a support for the chauvinism of the oppressor nation. He exemplifies this by analysing Rosa Luxemburg and other associated Marxists rejection of the Polish right to self-determination and secession in the early 1900's with the argument that it was led by the Polish national bourgeoisie.

“If, in our political agitation, we fail to advance and advocate the slogan of the right to secession, we shall play into the hands, not only of the bourgeoisie, but also of the feudal landlords and the absolutism of the oppressor nation. ...When, in her anxiety not to “assist” the nationalist bourgeoisie of Poland, Rosa Luxemburg rejects the right to secession in the programme of the Marxists in Russia, she is in fact assisting the Great-Russian Black Hundreds. She is in fact assisting opportunist tolerance of the privileges (and worse than privileges) of the Great Russians.”<sup>11</sup>

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11. V.I Lenin. 1914 “The Right of Nations to Self-Determination” in Lenin's Collected Works: Progress Publishers 1972, Moscow: Volume 20. Pp. 293-454

Since emerging from the underground and registering as a political party in 1994 and since supporting the then President Chandrika Kumaratunga's war against the LTTE under the blue lotus campaign, they have consistently engaged the parliamentary politics of an oppressive state in service of imperialism whilst aligning with Sinhala chauvinist forces.

Whereas the Marxist-Leninist traditions prescribe an armed struggle to crush a bourgeoisie-capitalist state in service of imperialism, the JVP has for decades tried to reform it and capture state power.

Hence Marxists rhetoric for the JVP seems to be employed for the sake of semantics whilst advocating Sinhala chauvinism, logical inconsistencies and opportunistic practices to capture state power.

From its formation in 1965 to the adventurous rebellion of 1971 against the state, the JVP was limited in its interaction with Eelam-Tamil revolutionaries in the Tamil homeland. As a social force it represented the aspirations and grievances of the Sinhala rural masses.

The JVP went underground following the crack down on their first insurrection, before briefly registering as a political party in the early 1980s.

A few years later they were banned by J.R. Jayewardene.

Lionel Bopage, a leader of the JVP during and after the first insurrection, reflects in an article upon the JVPs engagement with Eelam-Tamils in this period. He wrote that JVP leaders imprisoned in jails throughout the island, especially in the Tamil homeland such as at

Hammond Hill off the coast of the Jaffna peninsula, came into contact with imprisoned Eelam-Tamil revolutionaries.<sup>12</sup>

Eelam-Tamils associated with the Ceylon Communist Party -Beijing wing who were drifting towards the national liberation struggle made initial contacts with the JVP leadership in 1970.

Their efforts however, to request the JVP to support the then Eelam-Tamil demand of federalism, was unsuccessful.

In one incident Eelam Tamil poet V.I.S Jayapalan and his associates visited Rohana Wijeyaweera.<sup>13</sup>

When questioned, Rohana Wijeyaweera did not answer to whether he would accept the Eelam-Tamil national question and the then demand of federalism. He delegated the task of responding to another JVP leader, S.U Bandara.

The general response from the JVP leaders at the time was that once communism was achieved by the JVP, then they would deliver a political solution through a commune-based system.

They demanded that the Eelam-Tamils should mobilise under the JVP in an abstract class struggle against the state. However, the question of national oppression, colonisation of the Tamil Eelam homeland as well as the Eelam-Tamil right to self-determination was ostensibly ignored.

12. Bopage, Lionel.2009. "The JVP campaign among the Tamils 1977 - 1982" in *Groundviews* <https://groundviews.org/2009/12/17/feature-article-the-jvp-3-campaign-among-the-tamils-1977-1982/>

13. Jayapalan, Athithan. 2018 "V.I.S Jayapalan" in *Global Rights International Magazine, June 2018 Issue*

The Eelam-Tamil revolutionaries stressed the fact that a Marxist analysis of Sri Lanka without accounting for the national oppression and genocide against the Eelam-Tamils through the apparatuses of the unitary state, would be made a laughingstock amongst the Eelam Tamil masses as they collectively lived under such material conditions.

During the late 1970's and early 1980s Lionel Bopage however, advocated a position that the Eelam Tamil had the right to self-determination. But at the same time, he upheld the unitary state in so far as he denied the Eelam-Tamils the right to separate and form an independent state.

Despite such a contradiction he got expelled or rather forced to resign from the JVP due his position towards rationalising the Eelam-Tamil right to 'internal' self-determination.

The JVP leadership despite urges from within their ranks to engage the LTTE and the Eelam-Tamil national question, silenced such requests.

The prevalence of Sinhala chauvinism amidst them also inhibited the logical rationalisation of the Eelam-Tamil national liberation struggle.

Unfortunately, even Lionel Bopage, has recently endorsed the NPP and have even returned to the island in order to campaign for a U.S endorsed political force vying to secure state power and stabilise the unitary state.

Speaking to a Sinhala Youtube channel, Lionel Bopage explained the JVP position he advocated and how the JVP succumbed to Sinhala nationalist and chauvinist forces after the 1982 election .

"We came to a consensus, in policy number 2, that we would oppose autocratic centralisation as well as autocratic secession....What it meant was that the right

to self-determination of the Tamil people, that they have the right to decide on measures that will be taken that will affect their future. It was a democratic measure. We continued with this policy until 1982, after the election the situation changed, as the number of vote comrade Rohana got was pretty devastating. There was a trend within the JVP which attributed this defeat to the policy with regarding to the national question which we adapted with the acceptance of the right to self- determination. They attributed this to that Sinhala people did not vote for the JVP because of the position towards self-determination." <sup>14</sup>

When asked to compare earlier JVP position towards the Eelam-Tamils and the position they advocate today as part of the NPP, Bopage says:

"What they advocate is a different position. Today they are accepting that Tamil people have specific problems just because they are Tamils. They also accept that the 13th amendment, which was brought up without people's consent, as a way of addressing the concerns of the Tamil people, that they will maintain those aspects until they adopt a new constitution. When they adopt a new constitution and when they do adopt a new constitution, they say they have

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14. Kalya Perera 2024. Lionel Bopage speaks on the presidential election 2024. 14 September 2024 <https://youtu.be/K9IVXaojP2M>

to address those issues, prior to that they have never mentioned those sorts of things. So, by accepting those issues they will make the demand of separation and whatever other things, disappear".

Lionel Bopage in the interview advocates a position taken by the U.S regarding containing and neutralizing the Eelam-Tamil political struggle for self-determination and sovereignty.

According to the veteran activist Viraj Mendis, there has been an important student leader of the JVP who eventually took the position to recognise the Eelam-Tamil right to self-determination and secession in 1989.

Unfortunately, before he was able to connect with the Eelam-Tamils and the LTTE, he was abducted and killed by the armed forces of the Sri Lankan state.

His 'nom du guerre' within the JVP was Gayan and he was a leader for the Students for Human Rights, a JVP initiated group.

His efforts were reflected in the fact that during the summer of 1989 JVP propaganda was directed against the Indian Peace Keeping Army (IPKF) and the EPRLF and not the LTTE.

There was a recognition within the JVP that due to the then material reality, the targets of their political attacks should be EPRLF rather than the LTTE as they both had two common enemies in their armed struggle, the state and the IPKF. But this was not done in a principled and supporting way in terms of elaborating a party position in support of the Eelam Tamil national liberation struggle spearheaded by the LTTE.

In conversations with Viraj Mendis, it was mentioned that Gayan's position towards the Eelam-Tamil struggle and the LTTE, despite his assassination, had continuity within the ranks of the JVP. This cul-

minated eventually in the formation of a group of activists connected with the Hiru newspaper, a news outlet associated with the JVP.

They eventually broke out of the JVP and formed as an independent newspaper. The Hiru group continued since 1994 in their efforts to rationalize the LTTE and the Eelam-Tamil people's national liberation struggle among the Sinhala speaking masses.

Bashana Abeyewardena, a crucial actor in the Hiro Group, was involved with the LTTE associated 'Sinhala-Tamil artist festival' held in Colombo in 2003.<sup>15</sup>

The hosting of LTTE members and associates as well as Eelam-Tamil artists and intellectuals in Colombo attracted the ire of the JHU and Sinhala chauvinist, who decided to attack the premises.

The JVP although not part of the attack directly, would later join the JHU in opposing the joint mechanism

to coordinate and distribute international donations as initially agreed upon between the government of Sri Lanka and LTTE in the aftermath of 2004 Tsunami.

The JVP alongside JHU and other Sinhala chauvinist forces vigorously opposed any concession to the LTTE and they by and large opposed the peace processes as they deemed it to pave the way for the 'separation of the country'.

The JVP thus engaged a position aligned with U.S imperialism from the early years of the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) between the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE. Both the U.S and the JVP opposed the Post-Tsunami Management Structure (P-TOMS)

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15. TamilNet 2003. "Mobs attack Sinhala-Tamil Cultural Festival in Colombo. 29 October 2003 <https://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?artid=10278>



between LTTE and GOSL supported then by the European Union (EU) particularly Germany.

The US had also signaled opposition to the P-TOMS by ordering NGOs and humanitarian organisations in the US to not deliver donations through the P-TOMS.

JVP eventually filed a legal case against the P-TOMS and alongside the JHU mobilized protests against it and the LTTE. In 2005 the P-TOMS were scraped. They also mobilised against the Peace Process and against any concession to the Eelam-Tamils, a position similarly espoused by the U.S.

On 19th May 2024, a veteran leader of the JVP, K.D Lal Kantha addressed former members of the Sri Lankan Armed forces in Ratnapura district. Sections of his speech was documented and exposed by the X account of the Journalist for Democracy Sri Lanka.

In his speech he went on record stating that if it were not for JVP and the JHU, the Sri Lankan government would not emerge victorious against the LTTE. He stated that the JVP mobilized the Sinhala masses on behalf of the armed forces to opt for war and a military solution to the enemy, that is the LTTE and the Eelam-Tamils.

“You waged the first struggle, because it was clear who the enemy was. Can you wage a struggle, if the enemy is not clear? You cannot. You took arms to work for that aim. We, as a political movement, mobilised the masses for that aim. There are only two political parties in Sri Lanka, which frankly said that this must be ended through war....Not the SLFP; not the UNP; not the SLPP. Only the JVP and JHU said that we must finish this by war and there is no other solution. You waged the war; we built the ideology for

war. There are only two political movements in Sri Lanka which created the idea that separatist terrorism must be finished off by war....We both waged wars; We waged an ideological war and you did that with weapons.”<sup>16</sup>

Whilst espousing chauvinist intransigence, courting imperialist forces, sporting their contribution to the national oppression of Eelam-Tamils, denying their collective grievances and aspirations, the JVP again attempts opportunistically to woo Eelam-Tamils into their fold.

However, the fact remains that the JVP are engaged in consolidating the very unitary state which implements the structural genocide against Eelam-Tamils and which they themselves twice waged an armed struggle against; reportedly to secure the rights of the Sinhala masses. In doing so they are in what seems to be increasing engagement with the U.S and its allies including India, a strategic partner of the U.S in the region.

One is reminded of the words of Karl Marx from 1870 when discussing the Irish national question and the British working class.

He concisely discerns the ties between the national oppression of an oppressed nation and the class oppression and contradictions within an oppressor nation.

“Ireland is the only pretext the English government has for maintaining a large standing army, which in

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16. JDS. May 20 2024 <https://x.com/JDSLanka/status/1792323782431969380>

case of necessity, as has happened before, can be loosed against the English workers after getting its military training in Ireland. Finally, England today is seeing a repetition of what happened on a gigantic scale in ancient Rome. A nation that enslaves another forges its own chains.”<sup>17</sup>

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17. Marx, Karl. 1870. “Confidential communication on Bakunin” March 28, 1870, (in German) by Marx as the IWMA’s corresponding secretary for Germany, and sent confidentially to Dr. Ludwig Kugelmann <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1870/03/28.htm>