

LTTE suicide bomber kills another prominent political opponent in Sri Lanka

Our own correspondent
2 August 1999

The vice president of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and leading TULF parliamentarian in Sri Lanka, Dr. Neelan Thiruchelvam, was killed July 29 in Colombo by a suicide bomber. The attack was ordered by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the separatist group which has been waging a 15-year war against the Sri Lankan regime in the North and East of the island.

The MP was on his way to his office from home when the suicide bomber walked to his car—stopped at a traffic jam—leaned at the side where Thiruchelvam was seated in the back seat and detonated the bomb strapped to the bomber's body. Thiruchelvam and his assassin were instantly killed and six others, including five police security personnel travelling in a separate vehicle, were injured from the blast.

This assassination was carried out amidst tightened security measures by the state forces in Colombo during the last two weeks, with an increased number of police and army checkpoints and search operations rounding up Tamils in the city. The government and the security establishment were expecting LTTE attacks in the city in July, the month of the infamous "Black July" in 1983, when the Sri Lankan United National Party (UNP) government mobilised racist goons to kill hundreds of Tamils, injure thousands and destroy their properties throughout the southern part of the country. Since then, the month of July has been an occasion for the LTTE to launch various types of murderous attacks in the South as part of their campaign for a separate state.

Dr. Thiruchelvam was the sixth TULF parliamentarian killed by the LTTE. In 1989 TULF leader A. Amirthalingam and another MP, V. Yogeswaran, were killed by a gunman inside the house of Amirthalingam. In later years another three more TULF MPs—V. Dharmalingam, M. Alalasundaram and

Thangadurai, were killed. Last year the LTTE assassinated the TULF mayor of Jaffna, the capital of the Northern Province, Sarojani Yogeswaran, the widow of the slain MP. Then her successor, Mayor Sivapalan, was also killed by a remote-controlled bomb blast, along with some army and police chiefs in Jaffna, while they were holding a conference.

During the past few months the LTTE has increased its attacks and death threats against its political opponents. Last June the LTTE issued a warning, which read: "The members of other Tamil political organisations must convert to normal life or join us." It was reported that individual letters also were sent by the LTTE to some Tamil and Muslim parliamentarians demanding they stop their political work.

The TULF, a moderate Tamil bourgeois party, is seeking a compromise solution for the Tamil national question with the Colombo government in which they expect a devolution of powers to the northern and eastern provinces, enabling them to participate in the administration. This party supports the Peoples' Alliance (PA) government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga in the hope that the devolution package promised by the PA will be implemented. The government recently announced that the package of political proposals to devolve powers would be presented in August.

At present, Tamil bourgeois organisations, including the TULF, are marginalised among the Tamil masses. But the LTTE's serious concern is that in a situation where the Tamil masses have become weary of its military actions, and opposition is growing against its oppressive actions, other political organisations will be able to take political advantage. The LTTE is trying to intimidate rival organisations.

Last year the LTTE arrested four members of the

Socialist Equality Party (SEP) but later released them in response to a powerful international campaign waged by the *World Socialist Web Site* demanding their release.

The latest assassination is a reflection of the LTTE's desperation and shows the reactionary nature of its political program of separatism. It has faced military setbacks in recent years and is losing its grip on the Tamil masses. In Wanni and other areas the LTTE's campaign to recruit youth, even children as young as 10 years old, and to give compulsory military training for all "able-bodied persons" has met with popular resistance.

Self-appointed as the "sole representative of the Tamil people", the LTTE wants to have a separate state or some other arrangement that will be to its advantage. While carrying out assassinations to eliminate domestic political opponents, the LTTE seeks to bring international mediators to help prepare a deal with the Colombo regime.

The LTTE's assassination of Thiruchelvam has provided an opportunity for a whole coterie of reactionary politicians and regimes, nationally and internationally, to shed crocodile tears about democratic and human rights.

The first among them to issue a statement was none other than the president of Sri Lanka, Chandrika Kumaratunga, under whose regime the war against the Tamils has intensified to a new height. She said: "On this sad occasion I extend my heartfelt condolences, and the condolences of our party, our government and of all those who value democracy, human decency and peace in this country." She ignored the fact that all those who value democracy, human decency and peace are opposed to the war waged by her regime that tramples upon the democratic rights of Tamils and brings death, detention and torture to tens of thousands.

The Indian government, on behalf of its ruling class which, for its own reasons, financed, trained and armed the petty-bourgeois Tamil groups, including the LTTE, also issued a statement, which said: "We were shocked to learn this morning of the brutal killing of Dr. Neelan Thiruchelvam, a member of the Sri Lankan parliament, an eminent lawyer and a distinguished leader of the Tamil United Liberation Front. He had dedicated his life to finding peaceful, constitutional and democratic solutions to different issues. India strongly condemns

the killing. This was an act of wanton terrorism."

This hypocrisy of the ruling classes is most vividly expressed by the US administration, which openly supported the Kosovo Liberation Army's struggle for an ethnically segregated separate state and used it as a pretext to bomb Serbia, killing thousands of civilians. Expressing US condolences at the killing of Thiruchelvam, the statement issued in the name of State Department spokesman Phillip T. Decker said: "The attack appears to be the work of the terrorist LTTE.... We designated the LTTE as a foreign terrorist organisation in 1997.

"The United States has always supported, and continues to support, a peaceful resolution to the conflict through negotiations among all parties. We believe the government of Sri Lanka has put forward realistic and sincere proposals for constitutional reforms that could help towards this end."



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