

# Sri Lankan government exploits terror attack in US

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Sri Lanka's ruling elite has cynically tried to exploit the terror attack in the US on September 11 for their own purposes, while expressing full support for all future military action by the Bush administration.

In a message to US President George W. Bush on behalf of the People's Alliance (PA) government, President Chandrika Kumaratunga condemned the attack on New York and Washington and said that it highlighted "the paramount necessity for concerted action by the international community for the suppression of terrorism".

Kumaratunga's remarks were not tempered by any real concern for the victims of the terrorist atrocity, but were aimed at securing more support from the Bush administration for the Sri Lankan government's drawn-out war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which is fighting for a separate Tamil state. The US currently provides logistic training to selected Sri Lankan armed forces personnel and has characterised the LTTE as a terrorist organisation.

Referring to the LTTE's attack on Sri Lanka's international airport on July 24, Kumaratunga said the situation in the US required the "redoubling of efforts in combating terrorism" and emphasised that her government was committed to "support all international initiatives".

On September 15, the state-owned *Daily News* published an article claiming that the LTTE were distributing leaflets in Jaffna, the capital of Sri Lanka's war torn northeast province, supporting the attack on New York and Washington. The leaflet was alleged to have said that the attack was "a good warning to a superpower like America" and would help all "freedom fighters". The LTTE immediately denied the report and issued a statement accusing the government and its ally, the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), of

attempting to take advantage of the "phenomenal tragedy faced by the American people".

It is unlikely that the LTTE would have published such a leaflet, particularly since it has been attempting to win political support from the US and Europe. The most probable source of the *Daily News* article is the EPDP, with the knowledge of the PA, as part of a desperate attempt to provoke US wrath against the LTTE.

Last week's *Sunday Times* editorial called on US and western powers to "spearhead a war against terrorism wherever it occurs in the world..." but voiced some pessimism over whether the West would support Sri Lanka's war against the LTTE. The newspaper's defence correspondent revealed, however, that moves towards a "global crackdown on terrorism had produced euphoria within a considerable section of the defence establishment", which believed it would be a "great blow to the Tiger guerillas (LTTE)."

Some media commentators criticised the US-led war against Iraq and Yugoslavia and American policy in the Middle East, pointing to previous relations between the US and Osama bin Laden and the Taliban regime. But most concluded by endorsing any future US military response. The *Island*, one of Sri Lanka's English language dailies, was typical. It declared that the terrorist attack on the US was the "beginning of the first war of the new millennium" and gave full support to the Bush administration. It made no attempt to probe what such a war would mean for the oppressed masses of the region.

Some sections of Sri Lankan big business, hard-pressed by the ongoing war against the LTTE and hammered by the downturn in the world economy, have voiced doubts about further economic fallout in the aftermath of September 11. Business analysts have

warned about the long-term impact on the Sri Lankan economy, and particularly the garment industry, whose main export market is the US. On Wednesday, United Arab Emirates airlines ended all flights to Colombo as international insurance companies imposed hefty surcharges on airlines originating from the Middle East. Several airlines had already drastically reduced the number of flights to Sri Lanka in response to the LTTE terrorist attack on Colombo airport last July. Under conditions where the employment of Sri Lankan nationals in the Middle East and South East Asia is the major source of Sri Lanka's foreign exchange earnings, travel companies and recruiting agencies are warning that reduced flights will impact severely on their businesses.

The Sinhala chauvinist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP or People's Liberation Front) responded to the attacks in the US by urging the Bush administration to set an example for other world leaders to follow. A JVP political committee statement issued on September 12 condemned the terror attacks and called on the US to end its support for Israel and "eradicate terrorism in countries such as Sri Lanka". This move, it declared, would be "a prelude [for the US] to win the support of people throughout the whole world."

"The US," it continued, "could become a good world leader without any effort." This cringing call is in line with the JVP's racist politics and its recent appeals to the US and other imperialist countries to ban the LTTE. The Sinhala Urumaya (Sinhala Heritage), another Sinhala racist organisation, was even more explicit. Its statement declared: "Sinhala Urumaya expects the US to lead the world to bust world terrorism."

The Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), a radical petty bourgeois group that falsely claims to be socialist and is affiliated to the international Pabloite movement, has a consistent record of politically endorsing terrorism. A statement signed by NSSP leader Vickramabahu Karunaratne did not attempt to condemn the terrorist attack but welcomed it: "[I]n this stage of information technology even small groups of people, if highly motivated, can make a massive blow at its selected enemy..."

In a display of callous indifference to the murder of thousands of innocent civilians, Karunaratne claimed that the attack demonstrated that "[t]he image of modern capitalism as a system that is beyond challenge

from the oppressed and the discarded is gone for ever." Five years ago the NSSP likewise justified an LTTE terror attack on the Sri Lankan Central Bank, which killed several workers, as an "expression of legitimate hatred of the Tamil people" against the Colombo regime's war in the north and east of the country.

As for ordinary people throughout Sri Lanka, on the day the terrorist attacks took place they remained glued to television and radio broadcasts, in a mood of shock and horror. Widespread discussions followed on what the response of the Bush administration would be and its impact on the region, which could become an arena of conflagration at any moment.



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