

French police arrest dozens of Sri Lankan Tamils

Raids target LTTE

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13 April 2007

French police have arrested several dozen suspected supporters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in a series of raids launched in the Paris area beginning April 1. Computers, correspondence files, documents, literature and large amounts of cash were also seized in the crackdown.

The police targeted establishments controlled by the LTTE—which has waged an armed campaign for a separate Tamil state in the north and east of Sri Lanka for more than two decades. These included the Tamil Coordinating Committee (TCC) as well as shops, vehicles and the residences of suspected LTTE activists. The TCC is the acknowledged front organisation of the LTTE in France.

While a substantial number of those arrested were detained for just a few hours and released after being interrogated, others have remained in custody. Nineteen appeared in court on April 5. After that, according to press reports, 14 people were kept in custody, among them, leading personnel of the LTTE, including the LTTE branch chief in Paris, Nadaraja Matheenthiran, alias Parithi, the political chief for Europe, Duraisamy Aravindhan, alias Metha, and the LTTE France finance secretary, Thuraisamy Jeyamoorthy, alias Sinna Jeyan.

The crackdown began on April 1 with a dawn raid in which 39 people were arrested. It was followed on April 2, 3 and 4 with raids in broad day light, designed to intimidate the public. The police cordoned off specific areas of Paris like the Gare du Nord and the La Chapelle, where Tamil businesses were searched, and owners, employees and even customers were interrogated. Materials connected to the LTTE such as papers, magazines, CDs videos and books were seized. During these actions, alleged members of the fundraising network of the LTTE in France were interviewed, photographed and videotaped.

The raids have been conducted by forces of the “Antiterrorist Directorate” (SDAT) on the basis of a judicial order issued by magistrate Jean-Louis Bruguière, the main antiterrorist judge in France. Bruguière has been given unprecedented authority to investigate cases deemed to involve “terrorism” and has been working in close collaboration with successive governments.

The LTTE has been under close surveillance for a number of

years based on Judge Bruguière’s orders. The French government launched a preliminary investigation in February 2006. The organization has been proscribed and under investigation since May 2006, after it was officially banned by the European Union.

Bruguière had talks in Sri Lanka in 2003 with senior officials in the judiciary. He gave a lecture on the LTTE in Colombo to an audience of army officers and local diplomats at the Sri Lankan Institute of International Relations.

The official justification given for the raids, in the very scarce reports which have appeared in the French media, is that the LTTE had been extorting funds from the Tamil community in France using methods of thuggery and racketeering or, according to the official documents, “extortion, physical violence, illegal confinement.”

On April 5, French anti-terror judges filed preliminary charges against some of those arrested, accusing them of extortion, financing terrorism and “criminal association with a terrorist enterprise,” a charge that permits the conviction of suspects on terrorism charges without any evidence of actual involvement in acts of terrorism. It carries a maximum prison sentence of 10 years.

The latest French anti-terrorist legislation, passed by Parliament in 2005, permits the arbitrary arrest and detention (first for 120 days, but with indefinite and unlimited extensions) of anyone suspected of being vaguely associated with “terrorism.”

The LTTE has so far not been accused of carrying out or preparing any “acts of terrorism” in France. Neither was there any mention by the police of a terrorist threat of any sort.

According to press reports, the SDAT has been working with other anti-terrorist agencies including those of the US, Britain, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Canada and Australia. Newspaper reports also name the FBI and Scotland Yard as providing expert knowledge to the SDAT. Nevertheless, it is the first time that the French authorities have moved against the LTTE in such an open manner. After the LTTE was banned by the British government in February 2001, its operations were partially shifted to France, which became the centre of their

operations in Europe.

The latest crackdown appears to be part of an international operation aimed at neutralising the LTTE's operations worldwide, but especially in Europe. Since the LTTE carried out an air attack on a location in Colombo on March 25, there is reason to believe that the Sri Lankan government has been intensifying its efforts to cut off the LTTE's funding in order to prevent the organization from purchasing arms.

After President Mahinda Rajapakse took power in November 2005, the Sri Lankan government has been responsible for the collapse of the ceasefire agreement of 2002. This has resulted in the escalation of the brutal oppression of the Tamils. Rajapakse initiated an international campaign to isolate the LTTE as a terrorist organisation. In April 2006, the Canadian government banned the LTTE, and a month later, the EU proscribed the LTTE as a terrorist outfit. The Paris crackdown serves this international campaign of the Sri Lankan Government.

The Sri Lankan government is composed of a coalition of Sinhala chauvinist parties, including the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) and the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU). The Sri Lankan army launched a brutal offensive in 2006, putting entire areas of the north and east of Sri Lanka under military control. It has also been targeting Tamils all around the country, killing, arresting and torturing people of Tamil origin indiscriminately, accusing them without proof of being members of the Tamil Tigers.

The LTTE responded to the Paris raids and arrests by circulating a petition to be signed by donors to the LTTE, stating that they had donated voluntarily. It also announced a demonstration at 2 p.m. on April 9 at the Trocadéro in Paris to protest against the crackdown. LTTE supporters from all over Europe were called on to participate. This demonstration was initially authorised by the Paris prefecture but was subsequently banned. The police closed down the metro station to prevent people getting to the rally.

Despite the ban, 400 to 500 people gathered at the Eiffel Tower park, opposite the Trocadéro. They ignored police requests to disperse. Anthony Russel, a Green party councillor for the Paris suburb of La Courneuve, came, reportedly at the behest of the police, to address the crowd and convince them to leave quietly and to organise a rally at a later date.

The LTTE is a political organisation with a separatist perspective, based on ethnicity and communalism. The WSWs opposes this programme and fights in Sri Lanka for the unity of the Sinhala and Tamil masses. Although it disagrees with the LTTE's nationalist and separatist perspective, it defends the organization's democratic right to hold a political demonstration against these state attacks.

The methods of the LTTE are undoubtedly thuggish, but the accusations by the French authorities are clearly politically motivated. They have been made to serve the interests of the Sri Lankan government and its army, which are engaged in a

systematic campaign of mass assassination of their political opponents and innocent people. This government has been engaged in a bloody war against the Tamil separatists for nearly three decades and practises state terrorism on a far larger scale than the LTTE.

The army and its paramilitary supporters are at present attempting to terrorise entire sections of the population of Sri Lanka. They are engaged in the indiscriminate kidnapping and killing of Tamils, regardless of their political opinions, throughout Sri Lanka.

Anybody who is opposed to the Sri Lankan military's war against the Tamils is targeted for suppression and physical elimination, as has been experienced by the Socialist Equality Party, the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, itself. Last August, a sympathiser of the SEP and well known opponent of the war and of the LTTE was murdered in his house. More recently one of the members of the SEP in the Jaffna area disappeared after passing a military check point.

The LTTE, to our knowledge, has not so far issued any official statement, either in France or in Sri Lanka, concerning the arrests of their members and Tamil residents in France, despite the fact that the raids are common knowledge, not just in Sri Lanka and in France, but throughout the Tamil community worldwide.

The timing and the methods of the Paris raid indicate that it serves several purposes. It is part of an international crackdown on the LTTE and serves the interests of the government in Colombo. It gives support to the brutal war against the Tamils conducted by the Sinhala chauvinist government in Colombo, a war which also enjoys the support of the Bush administration.

Another probable motive for the raids is to boost Judge Bruguière's and former minister of the interior Nicolas Sarkozy's anti-terror credentials. Sarkozy is running for president for the ruling Gaullist UMP (Union for a Peoples Movement). Bruguière, who is due to retire in a few months time, announced two weeks ago that he was going to be a candidate in the legislative elections, in the department of Lot et Garonne, also for the UMP.



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