

Suicide bombing at crowded station in Sri Lankan capital

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A suicide bombing at Fort Railway Station in Colombo claimed the lives of 14 people and injured about 100 on Sunday afternoon, the eve of official celebrations marking 60 years of Sri Lankan independence. The blast is one of a series of bombings that have taken place over the past week as the government has continued to escalate the war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The government and security forces immediately blamed the LTTE. According to police, a female suicide bomber blew herself up near a train that was about to leave for Ambepussa. The LTTE has not claimed responsibility but is most likely to have carried out the attack. Suicide bombings have been a hallmark of the organisation.

The victims included Sinhalese and Tamils. Most were ordinary commuters, leaving or boarding trains. The dead included two schoolgirls. Seven boys from D.S. Senanayake College's baseball team were also killed, as was the team coach.

The injured were rushed to Colombo National Hospital by three-wheeler taxis and private vehicles. Fort Station was closed for several hours and train services suspended. Security forces cordoned off the area and conducted extensive search operations in areas around the station.

Whoever carried out the bombing, this indiscriminate killing of innocent civilians must be condemned. The LTTE has in the past deliberately targetted Sinhala civilians. In 1996, a massive blast at the Central Bank in Colombo killed nearly 100 employees and injured more than 1,000. In 1998, the bombing of a bus outside Fort Station killed 38 people and seriously injured more than 250 civilians, including a large number of women and children.

The LTTE routinely blames the "Sinhala nation" for the military's aerial and artillery bombardments that kill innocent Tamils, but ordinary Sinhalese workers, farmers, housewives and schoolchildren are not responsible for the crimes of the Colombo government. The slaughter of innocent civilians only deepens the communal divisions stirred up by successive Colombo governments and divides the working class, the only social force capable of putting an end to the oppression of all working people—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim alike.

The latest bombing plays directly into the hands of President Mahinda Rajapakse who plunged the island back to war in 2006 and formally tore up the 2002 ceasefire last month. The government will only use the latest atrocity to justify its bogus "war against terrorism" and intensify its repression, particularly against Tamils and anyone opposed to the war. Hundreds of people were rounded up and interrogated following the Sunday bombing.

Two other bombings were probably the work of the LTTE. Last Saturday morning, a parcel bomb exploded on a passenger bus at Dambulla town, killing 20 people, mainly women, and injuring 70. Most of the victims were from rural areas and were involved in a Buddhist religious pilgrimage. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

On Monday afternoon, a claymore bomb struck a passenger bus near Welioya, which is on the frontline of the war in the northeast. A military base and a training camp for an allied Tamil paramilitary are located in the town. Twelve people, including two soldiers, were killed. Most of the dead were Sinhalese farmers. The pro-LTTE *Tamilnet* reported the "ambush", indicating that the LTTE was most likely responsible.

Rajapakse denounced the Dambulla blast as the “latest act of savagery by the LTTE”. It showed, he said, “the reality of the struggle we have to face to eliminate terrorism from our country.” His government, however, is primarily responsible for the communal war and the countless acts of terrorism that have been perpetrated by the Sri Lankan military.

An estimated 7,000 people have died since the army began its offensives into LTTE-held territory in July 2006. Hundreds of people have been killed or “disappeared” by shadowy death squads linked to the military and allied paramilitary groups. The security forces have rounded up hundreds more who are being held in indefinite detention without trial as “terrorist suspects”.

Prior to the Fort Station bombing on Sunday, a bus was blown up with a claymore mine on January 28 on the Madhu-Palampiddy road in northern district of Mannar. At least 18 civilians, including 12 schoolchildren, were killed. While the army has denied any responsibility, the attack took place inside LTTE-controlled territory and the victims were Tamils. The Catholic bishop of Mannar, Joseph Rayappu, blamed the atrocity on the military, which is known to operate deep-penetration units behind LTTE lines.

The crimes of the Sri Lankan military do not, however, justify indiscriminate attacks on civilians. The use of such methods by the LTTE is a measure of its desperation and political bankruptcy. Having been driven from its strongholds in the East over the past 18 months, the separatist movement is now under attack in the North. The LTTE’s supply lines have become increasingly tenuous after the navy sunk most of its cargo vessels last year.

With its back to the wall, the LTTE is reduced to making futile appeals to the “international community” to haul the Colombo government into line. Most recently LTTE political wing leader, B. Nadesan, appealed to the UN to recognise “Tamil sovereignty as a constructive approach to end the unending five decades long, large-scale, and serious rights violations against the Tamil people”. He pleaded that the LTTE had “demonstrated its readiness to cooperate with the international community.”

From the outset, the LTTE represented the interests of the Tamil bourgeoisie, not the Tamil masses. Its perspective was to secure the backing of one or more of

the major powers to establish a separate capitalist statelet in the North and East of the island. Under pressure from the US and other sponsors of the international peace process, the LTTE abandoned its demand for a Tamil Eelam in 2002 and entered negotiations for a powersharing arrangement with the Colombo government.

The Rajapakse government, however, has torn up the ceasefire with the tacit support of the “international community”. The US and other powers backed the “peace process”, not out of concern for the Sri Lankan people, but as the means for ending a war that threatened their economic and strategic interests throughout the region. Now, however, they are gambling that Rajapakse can militarily defeat the LTTE.

In response to the latest bombings, the US embassy in Colombo issued a statement hypocritically condemning the LTTE. At the same time, American officials maintain a studied silence on the criminal activities of the Sri Lankan military, which receives training, equipment and other forms of assistance from the Pentagon.



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