

LTTE front group claims responsibility for Sri Lankan bombings

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The Ellalan Force, a front organisation of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), has claimed responsibility for a series of bomb attacks on buses and trains in southern Sri Lanka in recent weeks. These blasts have killed 34 innocent civilians and injured hundreds, including in Colombo.

The pro-LTTE *Tamilnet* published a report on June 10 quoting a statement issued by the Ellalan Force, declaring: “We want to claim that we are responsible for the bomb attacks on the transport vehicles and other attacks as stern replies to the ... LRRP attacks and aerial bombings of the Sri Lankan government and its Forces.” (The LRRP, or Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol, is the Sri Lankan military’s covert operations unit.)

The bomb attacks underscore the reactionary nature of the LTTE’s separatist perspective. The bombings are not just heinous crimes, targeting innocent civilians, including many children. They also aid the crisis-ridden government of President Mahinda Rajapakse, which confronts mounting discontent among working people, Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim alike. Just as teachers and other workers are striving to wage struggles against escalating inflation and war spending, these blasts provide a useful pretext for the government to justify its brutal war against the Tamil minority, while stirring up communal hatred, especially between Sinhala and Tamil people, to divide the working masses.

Responding to the Ellalan Force statement, the LTTE military spokesman, Irasiah Ilanthirayan, told the BBC Tamil service, *Thamilosai*, that his organisation had no connection with the group. In an interview on May 30, the LTTE’s political leader, B. Nadesan, also denied any responsibility for the recent bombings.

Despite these denials, the Ellalan Force has been active for about a decade on behalf of the LTTE. The front group has carried out several attacks on Tamil civilians in government-controlled areas in the north, accusing them

of being traitors. Ordinary people have been targeted for alleged collaboration with the military or for being political opponents of the LTTE.

Just as the Colombo government has denied responsibility for pro-government militia killings of Tamil civilians, the LTTE has rejected any accusation that it has murdered civilians through proxy groups. However, the LTTE itself also has a long record of attacking ethnic Sinhala workers and peasants. It carried out a devastating suicide bombing at the Sri Lankan Central Bank in 1996, for instance, killing about 91 people and injuring some 1,400.

The Ellalan Force statement, entitled “Stern Warning of Revenge”, reeked of communalism. It threatened the entire Sinhala people: “The Sinhalese must understand the situation clearly and think about why the ‘Ellalan Force’ continues its attacks”. The statement demanded that “Sinhala civilians put pressure on the government to stop the attacks” on Tamil civilians, or more Sinhala people would be killed.

These utterances echo the LTTE’s doctrine that the entire “Sinhala nation” is responsible for the repression of the Tamil population. In fact, the Sinhala workers and rural poor have nothing to do with the anti-Tamil policy of the current or previous Colombo governments, which culminated in the launching of a civil war against the Tamil minority in the 1980s. Since independence in 1948, discrimination against Tamils has been a crucial political weapon of the Sinhala ruling elite, used to divide and undermine any challenge from the working class. As a result of the war, which was resumed by Rajapakse in 2006, working people from all ethnic backgrounds have suffered declining living standards, economic stagnation and deep attacks on democratic rights.

The outlook of the LTTE and its front organisations is based on Tamil-Hindu chauvinism. Just as the Buddhist-Sinhala supremacists in Colombo point to the ancient

glory of the “Sinhala nation” in denigrating the role of Tamils, the Ellalan Force is named after a legendary Tamil king, who ruled from Anuradhapura in north-central province between 235 and 161 BC.

The LTTE’s perspective is to create its own capitalist statelet in the north and east, the so-called “Tamil homeland”, from which it will carry through the exploitation of ordinary Tamil workers. It represents a section of the Tamil bourgeoisie, which is incapable of, and hostile to, any appeal for unity between Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim workers and the poor against the Colombo government. Instead, it resorts to retaliatory attacks on innocent Sinhala civilians.

The resumption of the war has exposed the political bankruptcy of both the LTTE and the government.

Rajapakse was driven to renew the war because the entire Colombo political establishment has been unable to resolve the social tensions generated by its program of opening up the economy to global investors. The government rests on a shaky coalition with more than 100 ministers—the largest number in the world. Sinhala supremacist parties, such as the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), and sections of the military brass and state bureaucracy have strong vested interests in, and are ideologically dependent upon, the decades-long discrimination against the Tamil minority.

However, antiwar sentiment is growing among Sinhala workers in the south because hundreds of casualties have been suffered by the army—whose soldiers are mostly poor peasants—and the government is heaping the economic burden of rising war expenditure on the backs of working people. Rajapakse has cut essential services and subsidies to the poor, amid soaring prices for food, fuel and transport, and struggles to defend living standards and democratic rights are developing across ethnic lines. Just last week, the government closed down public schools for two days to counter a teachers’ protest campaign to demand higher salaries.

After a bomb exploded in a bus carrying workers on June 6, killing 21 people, Rajapakse immediately seized upon the event, calling on the population “to continue to assist the police and security forces in the task of eradicating terrorism from our country”. Such calls have turned into a chorus following subsequent bombings, with Rajapakse and Sinhala chauvinist groups seeking to stampede the population behind the war effort and suppress social unrest.

In 2002, the LTTE signed a ceasefire agreement and

entered a so-called peace process initiated by the former United National Party (UNP) government. Big business and the major powers, including the US and European Union, supported the deal as a means of enlisting the LTTE as a junior partner of the Colombo elite. The LTTE leaders were ready to abandon their guerilla army uniforms and assist in turning Sri Lanka into a “tiger economy”—a euphemism for creating a cheap labour platform for foreign investors.

At the same time, the LTTE maintained a repressive regime in the Tamil areas under its control, in order to suppress political opposition. Rajapakse’s turn to crush the LTTE militarily in 2006, after unilaterally breaching a ceasefire agreement, trashed the LTTE leaders’ hopes of establishing its own pro-business administration in the north and east.

Since the government re-launched the war, the LTTE has lost the eastern areas that were under its control. One factor in its defeats was the breakaway of a section headed by Karuna or V. Muralitharan, the commander of the eastern Amparai-Batticaloa district in 2004. Seeking its own mini-state in the east, this paramilitary group has allied with Colombo’s war offensive.

The LTTE has once again turned to the major powers to support its aim of a separate Tamil Eelam along the same lines as Kosovo. But Washington has no interest in backing such a proposal. The Bush administration’s main goal in South Asia remains to encourage India to become a strategic counterweight against China, and it fears the LTTE’s call for a Tamil state will only destabilise Tamil Nadu and other southern Indian states. In 2006, as a result of US pressure, the European powers and Canada banned the LTTE as a “terrorist” group.

The record of the LTTE demonstrates that ethnic separatism is a dead-end for the Tamil population and for all Sri Lankans. The democratic and social aspirations of the Tamil people can be achieved only through a unified struggle with Sinhala and Muslim workers for the unconditional withdrawal of government forces from the north and east, and the establishment of a unified Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam, as part of the broader fight for socialism in South Asia and internationally.



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