

Sri Lankan government revives terror campaign against Tamils

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The Sri Lankan government of President Mahinda Rajapakse has instigated a military crackdown against the Tamil population in the Northern Province, which recalls the terror campaigns waged during the country's 26-year civil war. The repression has included house-to-house searches, interrogations and arrests of alleged "suspects." As its pretext, the government alleges that two ex-operatives of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)—which was militarily shattered in May 2009—are attempting to revive the organisation.

The police and military are terrorising every district of Northern Province, including Vavuniya, Mannar, Kilinochchi and Jaffna—areas that were devastated during the war. Rounded-up people were ordered to remain in playgrounds or other open spaces, or confine themselves to their houses, until they were interrogated.

A number of incidents have been reported over the past two weeks. Suthanthirapuram and Iruttamadu, two villages in Mullaithivu, were searched. In Vavuniya, villages such as Poonthottam, Annanagar, Marambaikulam, Karupanichchakulam and Katharsinnakulam were invaded by hundreds of uniformed soldiers and plainclothes agents. People were allowed to leave their workplaces only after their national identity cards were checked. In Vavuniya, youth who had been detained at the end of the war on suspicion of LTTE links were rounded up, taken to the local military headquarters ground and warned not to harbour the suspects.

On March 22, more than 300 youth in the Jaffna district town of Vaddukodai were taken to a paddy field and questioned. Kanthilion, a youth from Mannar district, was arrested by the police terrorist investigation division (TID). In another operation in two villages in the Vadamarachchi region of Jaffna,

two men, Thurairajah, 20, and Jeyaramesh, were taken into custody.

The campaign of terror and intimidation began on March 12, after the TID published a photo of an alleged "LTTE fugitive," K. P. Selvanayagam, alias "Gopi," and requested that the public provide information about him. The next day, the TID declared it received information that Selvanayagam went to human-rights activist Balendran Jeyakumari's house in Dharmapuram, Kilinochchi district. Hundreds of police and army soldiers surrounded the area.

Police claim that when two TID officers entered the house, the suspect shot and wounded one of them before escaping. Jeyakumari and her teenage daughter were arrested by the TID. Jeyakumari has been imprisoned in a southern detention camp under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) for 18 days, while her daughter Vibhooshika has been placed under the care of the Child Protection Bureau.

On March 16, the TID used the PTA's sweeping powers to arrest two more human-rights activists, Ruky Fernando and Catholic priest Praveen Mahesen. In the face of outraged protests locally and internationally, a court released them but under blatantly anti-democratic conditions, including a ban on travelling abroad and speaking to Sri Lankan or foreign media.

A one million rupee reward (\$US7,650) has been announced for information about the alleged LTTE suspects. The military raided the home of Selvanayagam's mother on March 24, arresting her and another woman on spurious allegations that they were withholding information on his whereabouts.

Police have now put up posters of the alleged LTTE members in Eastern Province, indicating that the crackdown will be extended to that area as well.

The police claim to have discovered a cache of arms

in Kilinochchi. Military spokesman Ruwan Wanigasooriya told the media there were “handbills calling for the revival of the LTTE” and the formation of “a separate state.” He declared: “According to information we have at present, there is evidence that Gopi is the leader of that gang. But, we cannot say exactly.”

The military-police operation in the north coincided with the submission of the US-sponsored resolution to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) session in Geneva, alleging human rights violations by the Rajapakse government and Sri Lankan security forces during the final stages of the civil war. The US and European powers backed the war against the LTTE by successive Colombo governments. They are now cynically pushing for investigations of war crimes to pursue their own objective of compelling Rajapakse’s regime to distance itself from China.

Rajapakse’s government is asserting that the LTTE is re-forming, in order to justify the ongoing military occupation of the island’s north and east. Its immediate concern is to win next Saturday’s Western and Southern Provincial Council elections, by whipping up communalism and fears of a renewed war. Rajapakse’s real target, however, is the working class as a whole—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim alike.

Rajapakse and his government are sitting on a social volcano. Over the past month, working people and youth have come out against attacks on their living standards and democratic rights. On February 18, thousands of people in Wanathamulla, a suburb of the capital Colombo, demonstrated against housing evictions and the abduction of a local resident by suspected police goons. On March 16, the government deployed police and army commandoes to break up a protest by villagers in Hanwella, a town on the outskirts of Colombo, against the industrial pollution of their drinking water.

On March 20, a march by thousands of university students in Colombo was dispersed by police using tear gas and water cannons. The following day, hundreds of road construction workers on a highway project near Colombo went on strike and demonstrated, demanding changes to unsafe working conditions that have resulted in the death of three men.

As the Sri Lankan economy deteriorates amid the global slump, the government is preparing to intensify

austerity measures dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which will lead to deeper attacks on the social conditions, wages and jobs of the working class. Last week, the treasury announced it would stop dispensing gratuity payments to government employees who retire from service. On March 24, tens of thousands of fishermen started a protest campaign against the ending of subsidies.

The Rajapakse government’s only answer to the rising social tensions is to seek to divide the working class and oppressed along communal lines. While using the military and police to terrorise the Tamil population in the north, it has tacitly encouraged Buddhist extremist organisations, such as the fascistic Bodu Bala Sena (BBS—Buddhist Power Force), Sinhala Ravaya and Ravana Balakaya (Ravana Force), to wage sectarian campaigns against Muslims and Christians in Colombo and the south.



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