

Sri Lankan police arrest scores of Tamil youth

Subash Somachandran, S. Jayanth
11 May 2016

The Sri Lankan government has unleashed a major crackdown against Tamil youth in the country's war-ravaged north and east. Since March, more than 23 Tamils have been detained under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). Most of those arrested were allegedly former members of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE), which was militarily defeated in 2009.

May 18 marks the seventh anniversary of the end of the 26-year communalist war, during which hundreds of Tamils were arrested, disappeared and murdered by Sri Lankan security forces and associated paramilitaries. Around 200,000 people were killed during the conflict. The UN estimated that tens of thousands of Tamil civilians perished during the final weeks of military assaults in 2009.

Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe falsely claim they have established a "democratic environment" in the country's north and east. In fact, the military occupation is deepening in these areas. Residents face ongoing repression and dire poverty.

The pretext for the latest round of arrests was the police discovery of an alleged LTTE suicide jacket and explosives in Chavakachcheri, near Jaffna. The police immediately arrested and detained a suspect, Edward Julian, alias Rames.

Following this incident, the Terrorist Investigation Department (TID) began making arrests and abductions in Jaffna, Vavuniya, Kilinochchi, Mannar, Chavakachcheri and Nelliady areas in the north and Trincomalee and Batticaloa in the east. These included:

* Rasadurai Jayanthan, 32, abducted in a "white-van" operation from Chavakachcheri on April 10 and is currently incarcerated at Boossa prison in the south. Unidentified "white van" abductions were used by Sri

Lankan intelligence, police and paramilitaries to disappear and murder hundreds of people during the war.

Jayanthan's mother told the media two people arrived on motorbikes and began interrogating her son and searching their home. She said a white van pulled up outside the dwelling. "They handcuffed my son and took him in that van. When I asked the reason they told me to ask him [Jayanthan]." She later learnt that he had been taken to Boossa prison.

* Srisivamurthi Kanapathipillai, 26, alias Nagulan, was arrested by the TID at his home garden at Neerveli in Jaffna on April 26.

* On the same day, Kalaiarasan, alias Arivalagan, an alleged former LTTE intelligence officer, was abducted at Trincomalee in the east. Police later claimed he had been arrested.

* Kirushnapillai Kalainesan (42), or Praba, another alleged former LTTE intelligence officer, was arrested by TID at his home in eastern Batticaloa on May 2. According to his wife, several unidentified persons recently visited their home seeking information. He refused to cooperate after they refused to confirm their identity.

* V.S. Sivakaran, secretary of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (Tamil Federal Party) Northern Province Youth Organisation, was detained by the TID in Mannar in late April. He was later released on bail. Police claim he was arrested because he "helped" two ex-LTTE cadres flee Sri Lanka.

Police also detained a Tamil youth from Jaffna for allegedly listening to an LTTE song and two fishermen were abducted in a white van in Vadamarachchi in Jaffna.

Many of those recently arrested were previously imprisoned at the end of the war. They were among the

hundreds of thousands incarcerated in military detention centres near Vavuniya. Around 12,000 youth accused of being LTTE members were held in several so-called rehabilitation centres.

While the former government of President Mahinda Rajapakse, which came under mass opposition and international criticism, eventually released most of the detainees, they remain under continuous surveillance by the military, police and intelligence agencies.

Currently, about 200 Tamil and Sinhala political prisoners are held without charge in Sri Lankan jails, some for many years.

During last year's elections President Sirisena and Prime Minister Wickremesinghe promised to release all political prisoners. As soon as they came to power they changed their tune, declaring there were no political prisoners in Sri Lanka, only "terrorists" who had committed crimes.

The Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government's latest round of arrests and the revival of anti-Tamil communalism, are being justified by claims that "LTTE terrorism is reviving." On April 30, Wickremesinghe told a Colombo meeting the government would "not allow terrorism to raise its head again" and the government would replace the PTA with British-style anti-terror laws.

A group of opposition MPs led by former President Rajapakse have denounced the government, claiming it created the conditions for a so-called reemergence of LTTE "terrorism."

Rajapakse called on the government "not to hide the truth [about the suicide jacket found by the police] from the people." Last week, former External Affairs Minister G. L. Peiris accused Colombo of reducing Rajapakse's security while the LTTE was "reviving."

The opposition Tamil National Alliance (TNA), a front of Tamil bourgeois parties, has backed the police and military crackdown in the north and east, while politely raising concerns about how the arrests occurred. The TNA is propping up the Washington-backed Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government and fully supports US geo-political aims and interests in the Indian Ocean.

TNA parliamentarian M.A. Sumanthiran told *Ceylon Today* that the techniques used to arrest former LTTE cadres would "allow anti-social elements to adopt the same methods... like what happened in the past with

'white van abductions'." This, Sumanthiran warned, would "create a free-for-all situation." He emphasised that "the TNA was not interfering in the defence or the security issues in the country."

The state repression in Sri Lanka's north and east and the whipping up of anti-Tamil communalism by the government and the opposition are attacks on the working class and the poor, Sinhala and Tamil alike. The crackdown coincides with the Sri Lankan government's agreement to impose another round of International Monetary Fund (IMF)-dictated austerity measures.

The Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government and all the parties of the Sri Lankan political establishment are nervous that the imposition of the IMF cuts could provoke unified mass action by workers across the island. The promotion of anti-Tamil communalism is a time-worn method to try and divide and weaken the working class.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact