

Sri Lankan regime whips up hysteria over alleged assassination attempt on TNA parliamentarian

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The law-and-order, anti-Tamil hysteria whipped up by the Sri Lankan ruling elite over the alleged assassination attempt against Tamil National Alliance (TNA) parliamentarian M. Sumanthiran has all the hallmarks of a state provocation.

With President Maithripala Sirisena's government increasingly discredited, and protests mounting against its reactionary policies, various figures in the political establishment are warning of a revival of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) from the 1983-2009 Sri Lankan Civil war or even demanding mass arrests. The pretext for this hysteria is an alleged plot to kill Sumanthiran. However, reports of this plot come only from anonymous Sri Lankan security officials and lack any factual substantiation whatsoever.

On January 28, the *Hindu*, an Indian daily, reported that it had received information "on condition of anonymity" from a "well-placed" source in the Sri Lankan government about a failed assassination attempt. On the same day, the *Daily Mirror* ran a comment by Canadian-based journalist D. B. S. Jeyaraj, who cited Terrorism Investigation Department (TID) sources, asserting that the plot was hatched by pro-LTTE forces in the Tamil diaspora.

It emerged later that, 12 days before, the TID had arrested five "rehabilitated" ex-LTTE members. It charged them with planning to assassinate Sumanthiran on December 12 and January 13 at public events in Jaffna. The TID failed to provide any details except that, at the time of their arrest, they were in possession of narcotics.

Remarkably, given the TNA's record of support for President Maithripala Sirisena's US-backed regime, it ignored the warnings about the plot. Sumanthiran said he was informed of the plot by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's office on his way to Jaffna, advising

him to return to Colombo. Nonetheless, Sumanthiran continued on to Jaffna and spoke at the public event where he was supposedly to be killed.

Sumanthiran added that Wickremesinghe and Sirisena contacted him personally to express their concern.

When Sumanthiran spoke on February 1 about the alleged plot, he implicitly dismissed claims that it was organized by ex-LTTE forces and raised the possibility of Sri Lankan state involvement. He told London-based IBC TV, "I am not clear who is behind this plan. They say it is being planned abroad, but who is behind the plan is not known to me. In the past, there were strong suspicions about state intelligence in a few similar incidents."

Sumanthiran also speculated that his role in preparing a draft of a new, US-backed Sri Lankan constitution could have led to attempts to assassinate him. This is a political fraud, however, insofar as the new constitution is not designed to grant democratic rights to the Tamil minority and unify the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim populations, but to fit the foreign policy interests of US imperialism and provide the Colombo regime with additional police and military powers.

US Ambassador Atul Keshap has said that the United States intends to be a partner of the Sri Lankan military and "assist" the government in drafting the new constitution. Since 2015, Development Alternatives Incorporated, believed to be a CIA front company, began "assistance" to the parliament, holding workshops for parliamentary staff on the constitution.

The official hysteria manufactured over the alleged plot against Sumanthiran must be seen in the context of the political crisis that has developed after the 2015 US-backed regime change operation that installed Sirisena as president, and particularly after the election of Trump in the United States.

Two years after taking power, Sirisena's government has met none of its election promises. Instead, IMF-dictated reforms have devastated the population and provoked deep anger among workers and the poor. At the same time, tensions between the United States, China and India are surging. This intensifies political conflicts in the Sri Lankan ruling class, as Washington seeks to use Sri Lanka as a military outpost in the Indian Ocean in its "pivot to Asia" against China.

Sirisena's government and the Sinhala-chauvinist opposition are using the alleged plot to warn of an "LTTE revival." This is intended to justify police state measures against opposition of workers and the poor—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim alike.

Sirisena took office presenting a "100 Day Programme" to abolish the executive presidency and improve living standards through salary increases, pension schemes and other social benefits. None of the problems emerging from the Sri Lankan Civil War have been solved, however, since 2009.

Relatives of missing people and owners of army-occupied lands regularly organise hunger strikes and protests against the government and the TNA, which campaigned for a Sirisena vote. TNA leader R. Sampanthan promised that the Tamil people would obtain a political solution in the framework of a new constitution before the end of 2016.

Moreover, Sampanthan promised an international investigation of Sri Lankan war crimes and the release of political prisoners, as well as to find disappeared people and withdraw the military from occupied private lands. Far from fulfilling any of these promises, the TNA became complicit in the policies of Sirisena and of Washington. The workers and poor sense that the TNA is part of the government, and its leaders refrain from participating in protests, fearing reprisals from the people.

Amid the hysteria over the alleged "LTTE revival," Sirisena is trying to send fresh police forces to repress opposition to the government and the TNA in the North. Already, citing the police murder of two university students in October, thousands of military-style Special Task Force (STF) members were sent to Jaffna. Additional STF were sent allegedly to control criminal youth gangs and drug trafficking.

Patali Champika, the cabinet minister and leader of the racist Jathika Hela Urumaya, demanded the immediate arrest of 12,000 former LTTE members to ensure the "island's security."

Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa said his

government "anticipated the revival of the LTTE," accusing Sirisena of removing military camps and cutting support for military intelligence, and thus undermining national security.

Such demands are part of an anti-Tamil campaign led by the "common opposition," aimed at dividing the working class along communal lines. In reality, military intelligence controls the life of civilians in the Tamil-majority North, and ex-LTTE cadres in particular are continually monitored.

Since 2009, threats of an "LTTE revival" have repeatedly been used to divert class tensions along communal lines. In March 2014, Rajapakse's government arrested 60 people allegedly involved in a regroupment of the LTTE. In April, Major General Udaya Perera informed the Tamil daily *Uthayan* that four suspects were in custody "for resurgence of terrorism" in coordination with diaspora LTTE forces. Later, the military stated that these "LTTE suspects" were killed in a battle involving 2,500 soldiers and 18 armoured vehicles.

Even if LTTE sympathizers outside of Sri Lanka were involved in some sort of plot against Sumanthiran, this would not prove that the Sri Lankan state was not involved. In March 2016, a suicide kit wrapped in a Sinhala newspaper and explosive devices were found in a house in Chavakachcheri. Minister of Foreign Affairs G. L. Peris told the press that these weapons were ready to be dispatched to Colombo for a "terrorist" attack. The TID arrested 11 ex-LTTE "leaders" for planning the attack.

It turned out, however, that the plotters had close state connections. Colombo-based *Lankanews* reported on February 12 that Sri Lankan army intelligence officials residing in Paris stored the weapons in the house with the help of a former LTTE member now living in Paris. The army paid the house owner 200,000 Sri Lankan rupees (US\$1,327) per month for doing so.



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