

Sri Lankan police violently suppress protest against the killing of George Floyd

Our reporters
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Sri Lankan riot police brutally attacked a demonstration in central Colombo on Tuesday over the US police murder of George Floyd. The protest, which was organised by the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), was to be held outside the US embassy.

A day earlier, police obtained a court order banning the event, arguing that those attending would be breaking the government's COVID-19 quarantine laws. The police claim was made even as the Sri Lankan government continues to insist that the pandemic is under control, that all activities can resume as normal and that all employees must be compelled to return to work.

On Tuesday, the police intervened to forcefully disperse protesters before they reached the US embassy at Kollupitiya in Colombo. Police also manhandled and arrested FSP propaganda secretary Duminda Nagamuwa and several others.

Later, about 100 FSP protesters marched to the nearby Lipton roundabout and carried out a silent rally, holding placards denouncing Floyd's murder and demanding the immediate release of party members from police custody.

While FSP leader Kumar Gunaratnam was addressing the media, armed police assaulted the protesters with batons and forcibly dragged them into a police vehicle. Gunaratnam and several other FSP leaders were also arrested. Western Province Senior Deputy Inspector General of Police Deshabandu Tennakoon personally supervised the attacks.

The FSP has reported that 53 members of the party, including its top leadership, have been arrested. They were bailed out later that evening, after being brought before a magistrate.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP), notwithstanding its political differences with this pseudo-left group,

strongly condemns the police attack on the FSP by President Gotabhaya Rajapakse's government and demands the dropping of all charges.

The anti-democratic and violent assault on those protesting the police murder of George Floyd is a clear message from the Sri Lankan government that it will not tolerate any demonstration against it by workers, young people and the poor.

Gotabhaya Rajapakse became president last year by whipping up Sinhala chauvinist groups and other right-wing forces following the Easter Sunday bombing by Islamic extremist terrorists.

After coming to power, Rajapakse began rapidly militarising his administration, appointing serving and retired generals to key government and state positions and then seizing on the COVID-19 pandemic to further consolidate dictatorial forms of rule. Last week, Rajapakse established a military dominated "taskforce" with far-reaching powers, answerable only to him.

Police media spokesperson Jaliya Senaratne told the press that those arrested would be prosecuted for violating a court order and breaking quarantine regulations.

On Tuesday evening, the US ambassador in Colombo, Alaina Teplitz, issued a statement declaring that the embassy did not ask police to prevent the event, but justified the police actions, claiming they were in accordance with Sri Lanka's quarantine laws.

The US "appreciate[s] the efforts undertaken by the government of Sri Lanka and local law enforcement to keep diplomatic personnel and facilities in the country safe and their continued efforts to curb the spread of COVID-19 by requiring masks."

Teplitz then added: "Rights to peaceful assembly and free speech are cornerstones of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—rights the US supports

even when difficult for us.”

Teplitz’s cynical statement was made as US police were violently suppressing protestors and President Donald Trump was urging the military to be mobilized in a direct attack on democratic rights and a step towards dictatorship.



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