

# Sri Lankans demonstrate in Australia to demand President Rajapakse resigns

Our reporters  
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Hundreds of Sri Lankans protested in Australia's east coast state capitals on Sunday to call for the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapakse and his government. The rallies followed similar demonstrations the previous weekend.

Organised via social media, about 700 rallied in Sydney's Martin Place, 150 at Reddcliff Place in Brisbane and over 70 in Dandenong, in Melbourne's southeastern suburbs. Socialist Equality Party campaigners distributed hundreds of copies of an April 7 statement by the Sri Lankan SEP.

The Sydney rally included recent migrants from Sri Lanka, as well as numbers raised in Australia but whose parents hailed from the island. Whole families came, with participants ranging in age from their teens to their 70s.

Homemade banners and chants included abolition of the executive presidency, denunciations of all 225 parliamentarians and calls for the wealth hoarded by the political elite to be returned to the population.

**Dayam**, 38-year-old IT worker who moved to Australia in 2015 with his wife, explained the desperate situation facing millions of Sri Lankans. "They don't have medicine, food, basic needs and certainly not luxury items like the politicians have.

"I want to say to Rajapakse, the majority of the people voted for you because they thought you would develop the country, but you can't even meet their basic needs. So the message is clear and it is spreading around the world: just resign.

"The majority who are gathered here think that if those people are still in power then the country is never going to go in the right direction. They divide the country with racism, which is unacceptable. I call it Rajapaksaism because it's like a religion, it's that bad!

"I don't think anyone here or in Sri Lanka has a race at this point, we are all just Sri Lankan. Religion is your personal decision. This is about the bad class that is running the country versus the good. The things they have done are beyond human.

"The civil war started by declaring Sinhalese the national

language and it divided the country starting a 30-year ethnic war. All the political parties that have governed the country for 74 years haven't taken it in the right direction. They have split the country on race or religion—Muslim vs Sinhalese, or Sinhalese vs Tamil—it's divide and rule. This is the time to change into a true democracy."

**Tristan**, who has family in Sri Lanka, said: "You see a lot of corruption not only in Sri Lanka but all across Asia. It's good to see people gathering in all the major cities demanding that fairness is brought into the situation. We need people to step up because we see governments taking advantage...

"The [Rajapakse] government that came in deceived the people. I've seen a statistic that 95 percent of the country's economy is spent on interest on loans, which leaves 5 percent for everything else. It's good to see people gathering together. It shows the power of the people and is a bit of a warning to other governments who are doing the same thing.

Asked about the SEP's call for the working class to mobilise and fight for a socialist program Tristan replied: "Personally I don't have too much experience in socialism but I think it's a good idea because the government is taking advantage of the people.

"The working class definitely needs to take advantage and intervene because the present government doesn't look like they are leaving any time soon, despite all the protests. We need as much international pressure from the people to get them going and give power back to the working class."

**Pasan**, an IT worker, said: "The corruption has been going on for many years, but it has reached a breaking point. People are suffering endlessly there. It's time for a big change in a peaceful way.

"My family in Sri Lanka have said it's very difficult to meet even their basic needs. The food prices are sky high. To find something like gas for essential cooking can take hours. There are power cuts for eight hours or more a day, sometimes stretching into the night. Water and everything is disrupted. What started very slowly through corruption has pushed people to the edge.

“People work their daily jobs to provide for their families, but they can’t afford to get by. How can they live without reliable electricity? How can they get to work if there’s no petrol or diesel?”

“The opposition is not going to help either. All of them are trying to divide the people and get the most power out of the situation for themselves. The new generation are very intelligent and smart. They do not want to go down the traditional ways of violence. They just want the corrupted politicians to give back the money they have laundered out from Sri Lanka.

“The people will rise up through this revolution against all the politicians who have been there for the past thirty or forty years. They are so entrenched in the system. They have extracted all the resources for their own families. They have used all of these international loans to boost their own fortunes, not to invest in the country and develop it.

“The people don’t want them anymore. People are coming together, whether they are Christians, Buddhists, Muslims.”

In Dandenong, **Pramodi**, an IT worker, who moved from Sri Lanka four years ago to study in Australia said she came to the rally because the Rajapakse government is “destroying my country.” She was with a group of friends and brought a placard that said, “Give the stolen money back and get lost.”

Pramodi explained that her family and millions of Sri Lankans were suffering from lack of food, power, and other essentials. President Rajapakse, she said, “is taking money from other countries, but he doesn’t repay them and so this adds more debts. We don’t know what is happening with the money he is getting from other countries but it’s not going to the people.”

**Sam**, a qualified engineer, insisted that he was “politically neutral” but then said: “It’s mainly the current government that we’re really disappointed in but we’re also thinking about the whole system. Whoever comes in gives false promises and they never deliver. They all make deals with all the parties, and they just try to survive in power. That is all they do and so four or five years go by, and another government comes, and they do the same. And the country is going downwards.”

“My brother in Sri Lanka manages a transport system and so he must stay in the queue for two, sometimes three days, to get fuel for his vehicles. That fuel lasts for two days or three days but after that he doesn’t know what is going to happen.”

In Brisbane, **Suda**, an educator, said: “I’ve always opposed President Rajapakse’s behaviour. His government has taken all our money out of the country, which is why all these protesters have showed up. This is the most corrupt government that we have seen in Sri Lankan history.

“Lots of people are struggling back in Sri Lanka because they don’t have fuel and electricity. Now they have a shortage of food and are in a very difficult situation at the moment due to low incomes and very high food and utility prices.”

Suda agreed with the demands set out by the SEP in Sri Lanka, including the abolition of the anti-democratic executive presidency, and that working people should not have to pay with their livelihoods for the crimes of the rich.

Referring to the \$8.6 billion debt owed to the International Monetary Fund, he said: “Rajapakse and his government are the ones who put Sri Lanka in debt, so we should get the money from them. The people shouldn’t pay for it, because it’s not their fault; this is because of what Rajapakse did.

“I also agree that attempts are being made to divide people on the basis of religion. The people in power created that problem and it is how they came to power in the first place.”

Suda was critical of the opposition parties. “I don’t think they’re puppets of the current regime, but that they just ask some ridiculous questions. We should be calling for Rajapakse to resign, but the opposition has other ideas. They’re diverting the objectives of the people.”

**Ruwarthi**, who is looking after her elderly mother and father, said her family was experiencing appalling conditions due to food shortages and soaring fuel prices. “Everyone in the government and the Sri Lankan parliament is corrupt and should step down,” she said.

“Working people should not have to pay for the stupidity of the rich. People in other countries should fight against similar conditions. We are in this situation because the right people aren’t in power. If there’s a proper system, ordinary people should be in power.”

**Ranley**, a worker, explained: “I am opposed to the corruption that exists in the entirety of the Sri Lankan government. They have stolen money from the people. The Rajapakse family, in particular, has fleeced the country.”

Asked whether workers should accept debts incurred by their country’s capitalists, Ranley declared: “No! I agree that working people shouldn’t pay any of it. Those loans were taken out to pay for white elephant projects that did nothing for the people.”



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