

# Police murder in Rambukkana exposes Sri Lanka's Tamil National Alliance

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On April 19, Sri Lankan police forces opened fire on a crowd of protesters at Rambukkana demanding affordable fuel. Chaminda Lakshan, a 40-year-old father of two, was shot dead in broad daylight, in front of hundreds of people, and 27 were injured. This crime against the Sri Lankan workers exposes not only the Sinhalese-majority government of President Gotabaya Rajapakse but also the Tamil National Alliance (TNA).

For most of the last month, as mass protests mounted against surging food and gas prices and for the ouster of the Rajapakse clan, the TNA was deafeningly silent. Then, on April 11, the president's brother, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse, demanded that protesters go home, or otherwise Sri Lanka would be "once again slipping into a time as dark as that in our history." Given the regime's massacre of tens of thousands of Sinhalese youth in the 1980s, and of Tamil civilians and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fighters in 2009, it was an unambiguous threat of murder.

Two days later, TNA leader M. A. Sumanthiran finally broke his party's silence on the protests to announce that it was in close, behind-the-scenes talks with the Rajapakse clan and the entire Sri Lankan political establishment. Despite the Rajapakse cabal's mass murder of Tamil civilians at the end of the civil war in 2009, Sumanthiran made no warnings about the threat of violence. Instead, he explained that he was discussing with Rajapakse how to end the protests, stating:

Former President Sirisena spoke to me, and former President Madam Chandrika [Bandaranaike Kumaratunga] spoke to me in the morning. Other leaders are talking to me. I have been involved in many of the ongoing

negotiations to try to bring stability to the political situation. My advice to the current prime minister, Mahinda Rajapakse, yesterday was that if the government itself takes steps to abolish the executive presidency, we can move forward. I personally told him my opinion.

Six days after Sumanthiran boasted of his secret talks with the Rajapakse cabal, Rajapakse's police opened fire at Rambukkana. Saminda Lakshan's wife, R.N. Priyanganee, fearlessly identified the uniformed government killers, telling the *Ceylon Mirror*: "My husband was shot. This is not going to be the last death, and many more will be shot. They are uniformed, star-studded murderers."

There is no question about the deliberate character of the police massacre, and the fact that it was ordered from top levels in the state machine. Anuradha Rajapakse testified at the official inquiry into the shooting that a senior police officer in uniform with two stars and the royal emblem ordered: "Do not shoot high, shoot to kill." But the officer who ordered the murder has not yet been publicly identified, arrested, or charged.

The massacre in Rambukkana raises the most serious questions about the TNA's role. What did the TNA know? When Sumanthiran spoke personally to Rajapakse, did he discuss Rajapakse's threat of deadly violence? Did Sumanthiran discuss plans for police killings with Rajapakse? Or did he calculate that, given mass hatred of the Rajapakse clan for its 2009 slaughter of Tamils, he could better cover up his dirty dealings with Rajapakse by not discussing them in detail, so he could claim afterwards that he did not know?

The TNA reacted to the police murder of Lakshan

with a cynical Tweet, stating: “We condemn unreservedly the police shooting in Rambukkana yesterday that resulted in unfortunate deaths. An immediate independent inquiry must be held, and the Minister for Internal Security must resign forthwith.”

This begs the question: if the TNA is proposing to remove of the interior minister, why does it not call to throw out of the entire Rajapakse cabal that is leading the repression of the protests?

The TNA is working to politically shield the Rajapakse government from explosive mass anger over its murder of Lakshan, while engaging in back-channel talks with Rajapakse himself, and the entire ruling establishment in Colombo. While it cynically poses as a friend of the Tamil people, it defends the Rajapakse cabal and the executive presidency that is at the heart of the unitary capitalist state in Sri Lanka. Its claim to oppose the executive presidency is a political fraud.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP), the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), has called for the abolition of the executive presidency via the unification and political mobilisation of the working class. Every passing day gives more evidence that the criminality of the executive presidency and unitary state is not caused by one or another law or individual. It flows from the social order and can only be overthrown by fundamental, revolutionary change.

Rajapakse has handed over the task of securing fuel transports to Army Commander Shavendra Silva. This officer has already been accused of human rights abuses and war crimes against the Tamil people in the final stages of the civil war in 2009. Silva’s role was so notorious that even Washington felt obliged to impose a travel ban on Silva, who has also played a leading role in suppressing protests against the regime’s malign indifference to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The TNA, speaking for a narrow layer of Tamil capitalists and upper middle class forces, are terrified of mass anti-government protests demanding affordable food and energy for the workers. Since the end of Sri Lanka’s 1983-2009 civil war and the defeat of the LTTE put them back under the control of the Sri Lankan authorities in Colombo, they have ever more closely relied on the executive presidency to defend their class privileges.

Today—desperate to save their personal fortunes and

privileges even as masses of Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim workers face hunger and impoverishment—the TNA is calling to resolve the crisis with International Monetary Fund (IMF) austerity measures. This means massive cuts to public sector jobs, wages, and pensions; privatisation of state-owned corporations; slashing social programs; and deep cuts to public education and health. Yet Sumanthiran has boasted that he personally told Rajapakse: “Talk to the IMF immediately.”

Workers of all backgrounds, Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim, are uniting in struggle because they reject the demands of the banks and the IMF. The surging cost of living cannot be tolerated, the Rajapakse cabal must be toppled, and socially-created wealth overseen by the democratic control of the working class over the economy, leading to the formation of a government consisting of workers organisations.

The struggle to organise workers for such a struggle requires a repudiation of Tamil-nationalist groups like the TNA, and a turn to the socialist policies advanced by the SEP.



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