

Rajapakse formally resigns as Sri Lankan president after fleeing to Singapore

Saman Gunadasa**15 July 2022**

Gotabaya Rajapakse's official resignation as Sri Lankan president has been sent to Colombo, and its formal acceptance was announced this morning in the capital. Rajapakse was elected president three years ago with a large majority. He fled to Maldives early Tuesday, following more than three months of massive nationwide protests and three general strikes demanding that he quit as president and that his government resign.

Rajapakse flew into Singapore yesterday afternoon. He emailed his resignation letter last night to Parliamentary Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena. Singapore announced that Rajapakse was on a private visit, indicating that asylum was neither granted nor requested.

The widely despised Ranil Wickremesinghe, who was previously appointed acting president by Rajapakse, immediately instructed the military and police to do "what is necessary to restore order." He has appointed a committee, including Chief of Defence Staff General Shavendra Siva and the heads of military tri-forces and the police, to "prevent the destruction of property and life."

Wickremesinghe imposed a curfew in the Colombo administrative district from noon yesterday until today 5 a.m. This followed his declaration of an island-wide state of emergency and a 24-hour curfew the previous day for the Western Province. These curfews were largely ignored, with thousands of people last night celebrating Rajapakse's resignation.

While Wickremesinghe has wide-ranging powers under the executive presidency to unleash the military against opposition, there are nervous concerns within the ruling class that full-scale violent state repression at this moment will backfire, leading to a further intensification of the anti-government rebellion.

Hindustan Times reported, "Ranil threats military to use force, Sri Lankan army says no to firing on protesters."

US Ambassador to Sri Lanka Julie Chung warned in a tweet yesterday, "We condemn all violence and call for the rule of law to be upheld." She urged all parties to work together to "implement solutions that will bring long-term economic & political stability."

In other words, the military and police should not be unleashed at this juncture, and opposition parties must intensify their efforts to contain and dissipate the mass movement while preparing an interim regime to implement brutal International Monetary Fund austerity measures.

Addressing a press conference on Wednesday, General Shavendra Siva appealed to the public, and especially youth, "to help the tri-forces and the police to maintain law and order until a new president is elected." Notwithstanding these appeals, the military and police attacks on protesters continue, with at least 84 protesters hospitalised and one youth killed from injuries sustained in clashes with security forces over the past week.

The Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), Rajapakse's ruling party, issued a statement on Wednesday calling on Acting President Wickremesinghe and law enforcement authorities to "restore law and order" immediately. The statement referred to agitators as law breakers who "had murdered several individuals, including a parliamentarian as well as destroyed public and private properties."

In the meantime, SLPP sources told Reuters that Wickremesinghe was the party's first choice for the presidency. These moves underscore the ongoing collaboration between Rajapakse's party and

Wickremesinghe for a future military-police crackdown on protesters and far-reaching state repression.

Army spokesman Brigadier Nilantha Premaratna told a media conference yesterday afternoon that 16 soldiers have been injured in clashes with protesters. He also alleged that two army soldiers had been “brutally assaulted and their weapons and ammunition were stolen by protesters.” These weapons, he said, could be used by protesters to spread violence, a clear indicator that future state provocations against demonstrators are being prepared.

In a televised address on Wednesday, Wickremesinghe denounced the occupiers and said he had instructed security forces to remove them. The protesters should not be allowed to occupy Temple Trees (the prime minister’s residence), the President’s Secretariat and the President’s House, he said, because they would take or destroy documents. Anti-government protesters announced yesterday that they were ending their occupations of these buildings.

Yesterday, Parliamentary Speaker Abeywardane, a close confidante of Rajapakse and an SLPP veteran, canceled the parliamentary session scheduled for today. He said it will resume within three days after receiving the president’s resignation letter. Nominations for the presidency were to be submitted on July 19 and a new president elected by the parliament on July 20.

None of these parties of the political establishment, including opposition parties, has condemned Wickremesinghe’s dictatorial moves. At most, they have issued feeble appeals to the military and the acting president.

Sajith Premadasa, leader of the main parliamentary opposition, the Samagi Jana Balawegaya, appealed to the military, declaring, “I am asking our dear security forces not to be pawns of an oppressive regime.”

Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) leader and former president Maithripala Sirisena appealed to Wickremesinghe, “I am pleading in the name of God for Ranil Wickremesinghe to resign fast.” Anura Kumara Dissanayake, the leader of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), issued similar appeals.

By contrast, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) has exposed the reactionary nature of Sri Lanka’s constitution and the dictatorial powers it gives the president.

Rejecting the trap of an interim all-party government,

behind which preparations for dictatorial rule are being made, the SEP insists that the working class must take matters into its own hands.

What is required is for the working class to break free from the stranglehold of the unions and establish independent action committees. These must demand the abolition of the executive presidency, now headed by Wickremesinghe, and fight for socialist policies and for the provision of urgently needed essentials—food, cooking gas, petrol, healthcare and other pressing social requirements—to the masses.

This independent unified movement of the working class must rally the rural poor and youth to establish a government of workers and peasants, committed to socialist policies, as a part of broader struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally.



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