

Sri Lankan government continues proscription of Tamil and Muslim groups and individuals

Saman Gunadasa
17 August 2022

The Sri Lankan government of President Ranil Wickremesinghe has added three groups and 55 individuals to the long list of official proscriptions, while delisting six organisations and 316 individuals, leaving 255 on the banned list.

These measures were announced on August 1 in an extraordinary gazette, on the basis of “terrorism-related activities” or “funding for terrorism,” without providing any evidence or specific information.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO), Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (TGTE) and National Thowheed Jama’ath (NTJ) remain listed, along with newly-added organisations including Darul Adhar, alias Jamiul Adhar Mosque.

The organisations are proscribed under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), enacted in 1979. This legislation provides the police and the security forces sweeping powers to arbitrarily arrest and detain people without charge and to use confessions extracted under torture as evidence in court.

Proscription lists have been maintained by successive governments since 2012 under a local regulation prepared according to the United Nations Regulations 2012 to try to give legitimacy to these anti-democratic actions.

The continued proscription of Tamil and Muslim groups is part of ongoing efforts by one government after another to whip up Sinhala chauvinism and discrimination against the country’s oppressed minorities. Facing the mass opposition of workers and poor, the crisis-ridden Wickremesinghe regime is determined to keep communal tensions alive and deepen the repressive measures.

A case in point is placing of Ahnaf Jazeem, a young Muslim poet, among those proscribed. He was arrested in early 2020 and imprisoned on trumped-up allegations, under the PTA, of promoting Islamic extremism.

Jazeem was tortured in an attempt to obtain incriminating statements against human rights lawyer Hejaaz Hizbullah, who had been arrested earlier under the PTA on bogus allegations. Jazeem was released on bail in December 2021 but remains under surveillance by military intelligence, pending a court hearing.

Anti-Tamil communal discrimination has been promoted by the ruling class to divide the working class along ethnic lines since formal independence from Britain in 1948. The Colombo establishment provoked a bloody communal war against the separatist LTTE in 1983 which continued for 26 years.

The LTTE was defeated in May 2009 after a brutal massacre in the final weeks of the war. Tens of thousands of Tamil civilians were killed, according to UN estimates, and hundreds more simply disappeared.

A 2019 Easter Sunday terrorist attack by a local Islamic group backed by ISIS was politically exploited by the then government to fuel anti-Muslim chauvinism, amid growing opposition among workers and the poor. Gotabhaya Rajapakse exploited this terrorist attack for his presidential election campaign, under the slogan “national security first.”

As the COVID-19 pandemic triggered an economic crisis and growing social opposition, Rajapakse intensified the anti-Muslim campaign and began banning more organisations and individuals. In March 2021, he announced the Prevention of Terrorism (De-radicalisation from holding violent extremist religious

ideology) Regulations, aimed against Muslims.

Wickremesinghe's government has delisted six Tamil organisations and 316 persons. Those organisations include the Global Tamil Forum (GTF), the British Tamil Forum and the Canadian Tamil Congress—the main Tamil diaspora groups.

This delisting has nothing to do with any regard for democratic rights. The government is concerned about the upcoming meeting of the Geneva-based United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), where the human rights situation in Sri Lanka will be discussed.

Wickremesinghe is also keen to rally the Tamil parliamentary parties to his proposal for an all-party government. He is seeking to enlist the entire Colombo political establishment to implement savage International Monetary Fund austerity dictates, which mean all-out class war against the working people.

The leaders of Tamil parties, such as the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and Tamil Peoples National Alliance (TPNA), welcomed the delisting of these organisations and individuals. They have already expressed their willingness in principle to support an all-party government.

The TPNA leader C.V. Wigneswaran admitted that "Wickremesinghe appears to be in a hurry to rope in Jaffna MPs to be part of the government, to showcase to Geneva." He added that the "president wanted him to share a document which outlines a proposal on how money could be channelled into the country from the diaspora."

The GTF issued a statement welcoming the delisting of itself and other Tamil diaspora organisations and individuals, saying "it was an important step towards achieving improved ethnic relations and economic outcomes."

The opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya MP Mano Ganeshan praised Wickremesinghe for the delistings, saying: the "international community will look upon Sri Lanka favourably as a result of it." He offered to facilitate talks with the diaspora, on behalf of the government, to obtain investment.

Sinhala chauvinists have expressed concern on the delistings. A spokesman for Jathika Nidhas Peramuna, which is headed by MP Wimal Weerawansa, asked on what basis the delistings had been decided and whether there remained a terrorist threat from these organisations.

The editorial in *Island* the right-wing yester "The SLPP, which elected President Wickremesinghe, with whose blessings the delisting in question has been effected, owes an explanation to the public." The newspaper is seeking to use the issue to boost communal propaganda.

The working class should reject all communalism and scare-mongering aimed at dividing the working class. The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) opposes the proscription of Tamil and Muslim organisations and individuals.

The SEP and its predecessor the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL) have a long record of fighting to unite the working class across ethnic lines. The SEP/RCL consistently opposed the communal war, demanding the withdrawal of the Sri Lankan military from the island's north and east.

Reeling under an enormous political crisis and mass opposition, the ruling class is once again seeking to inflame communalism. The SEP is fighting to unite the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers, rallying the rural masses for the urgent building of a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses based on their own independent action committees, as a means of fighting for their class interests against the relentless assault of the crisis-ridden ruling class.

The SEP's statement on August 7 declared: "The SEP calls on workers to strenuously oppose any attempt to whip up Sinhala chauvinism or Tamil communalism that has repeatedly been used by the ruling class to divide working people and weaken the fight for a socialist solution to crises created by capitalism."



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact