

Sri Lankan JVP/NPP government prohibits “commemoration of war heroes” by Tamils

K. Ratnayake
1 December 2024

Addressing the media on November 25, Sri Lankan Public Security Minister Ananda Wijepala declared that it was not “permissible” to hold commemoration events associated with Maviraal Naal (Great Heroes Day) of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The LTTE remains a proscribed organisation, Wijepala said, adding: “Legally, individuals are allowed to commemorate the deaths of their relatives... [but] it is not allowed to hold ‘Mahaviru’ celebrations to glorify LTTE members or use their images under the LTTE logo.”

Wijepala’s statement repudiates previous claims by President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and his government that they stand for democratic rights, national unity and oppose communalism and racism.

Prompted by Wijepala’s remarks, the Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) of the police arrested three people on November 30 under the country’s repressive Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). Those arrested include Manoharan Kajendroopan from Inuvil in Jaffna, a Tamil British national from Kilinochchi and another person from Baddegama in the island’s south.

The TID charges include, “inciting public unrest, promoting the activities of a banned organisation, and spreading false propaganda.” Those arrested under PTA measures can be detained without trial for up to 18 months, with many held on remand for years before being brought to court.

Thousands of people in the North and East, however, defied the threatening remarks of the public security minister and participated in remembrance events for their loved ones on November 27 in Jaffna, Kilinochchi and Batticaloa.

The LTTE have been holding commemoration events, beginning in 1983, to respect its cadres killed during the bloody 26-year communal war waged by successive Colombo governments.

The LTTE was defeated in May 2009, following indiscriminate attacks by the Sri Lankan military which, according to UN estimates, killed around 40,000 civilians and saw the “disappearance” of thousands of individuals. Commemoration events have been expanded since then to include Tamil civilians, as well as LTTE fighters killed during the conflict.

The main responsibility for the bloody, almost three-decade

war is the Sinhala ruling elite and its successive governments. Since the island’s nominal independence in 1948 Colombo has used anti-Tamil discrimination and worked to divert social discontent along ethnic lines to weaken and divide the working class.

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) played a despicable role during the war, aligning itself with the most rabid sections of the military and demanding state repression against all those opposing the conflict.

The banning of commemoration of LTTE cadres killed during the war by the government is a divisive and reactionary act that exposes the bogus character of the Dissanayake regime’s promises to oppose communalism.

In prohibiting these commemorative events, the JVP/National People’s Power (JVP/NPP) government is continuing the repression and social discrimination against Tamils by successive governments. This is of a piece with the new regime’s opposition to any serious investigation of the war crimes committed by the Sri Lankan military against the LTTE and the Tamil masses during the war.

Fifteen years since the war ended, the Northern and Eastern provinces remain under heavy military occupation with residents intimidated by constant surveillance by military and police intelligence. The military still controls tens of thousands of acres of land seized from ordinary working people during the war.

While the Sri Lanka workers and the rural masses confront worsening poverty, the situation facing Tamils in the North and East is even more extreme. In 2019, serious poverty afflicted 20 percent of households in the North, and 15 percent in the East. The Jaffna, Mullaithivu and Kilinochchi districts recorded poverty levels as high as 21, 40, and 23 percent respectively. The situation, however, is now far worse since the 2022 collapse of the Sri Lankan economy.

During the presidential and national election campaigns, Dissanayake and his JVP/NPP issued vague promises about releasing political prisoners arrested during the war; taking steps to return land seized by the military to its original owners; and work for “national harmony.”

The JVP fared poorly in the majority Tamil districts in the September 21 presidential election, a consequence of the

widespread hostility to its long record of anti-Tamil incitement. However, in the subsequent parliamentary election, held last month, the party won a plurality of votes in all but one district in the North and the East. A section of the Tamil elite decided to swing behind the JVP on the calculation that this would ensure a flow of government patronage.

The parliamentary election result in these areas was also driven by widespread disaffection with the traditional Tamil parties, such as the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK), Eelam People's Democratic Party and the Tamil National People's Front (TNPFF).

Falsely claiming to be defending democratic rights, calling for war crime investigations and a solution to the worsening social crisis, these Tamil parties aligned themselves with the US and other imperialist powers and New Delhi to garner support for their demands for concessions and privileges from Colombo.

The Tamil elites fully support the austerity policies dictated by the International Monetary Fund and being implemented by Colombo since 2023.

In the lead up to the presidential and parliamentary elections, Dissanayake and his JVP/NPP claimed it would “renegotiate” the IMF’s austerity demands to provide social relief for the people.

In his November 21 address to parliament, Dissanayake dropped these promises, declaring that his government would fully implement the IMF’s demands. In the same speech, he said that his government would not allow the “resurgence of divisive racist politics in our country.”

This promise is as worthless as his pledge to renegotiate a better deal with the IMF, and broken just as quickly. Public Security Minister Wijepala’s announcement that the government was banning commemorative events and its use of the PTA, which it previously promised to abolish, to arrest three people on Saturday, makes this clear.

When Dissanayake and the JVP speak about opposing “communalism” and fighting for “national patriotism,” these phrases are interlaced with Sinhala and Buddhist supremacism, and directed against the Tamil minority.

This is the political heritage of the JVP which emerged in the mid-1960s, basing itself on a poisonous combination of Maoist and Castroite peasant guerrillaism and Sinhala patriotism. It was this reactionary agenda that underpinned its armed uprising against the Bandaranaike government in 1971 and its murderous Sinhala chauvinist campaign in 1988–89 against the Indo-Lanka Accord during Colombo’s civil war against the LTTE.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) vehemently opposes Dissanayake government’s recent anti-democratic ban on commemorative events and demands the immediate release of the three Tamil youths arrested last Saturday.

Against all capitalist parties, the SEP fights for the unity of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers across the ethnic divide in

unity with the international working class on a socialist program. This was the basis of the struggle by the SEP, and its predecessor the Revolutionary Communist League, against the war and its call for the withdrawal of the Sri Lankan military from the North and the East.

At the same time, we opposed the LTTE’s separatist policies and reject the communalist policies of present-day supporters and the pro-US imperialist Tamil nationalist parties, including the ITAK, TNPFF and similar formations.

The ending of all forms of communal discrimination and the defence of democratic rights can only be secured in a unified struggle of Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala workers with the support of rural masses to overthrow the capitalist profit system.

This is why the SEP fights for a Sri Lanka Eelam Socialist Republic—that is a workers’ and peasants’ government—as part of a Federation of Socialist Republic of South Asia and internationally.

The objective possibility and necessity for fighting this program was shown in the mass uprising in April-July 2022. Millions of workers participated in this upsurge that cut across ethnic lines in two general strikes on April 28 and May 26—a multimillion-strong movement that toppled the then President Gotabhaya Rajapakse and his government.

This mass movement was betrayed by the trade union bureaucracies, with the support of fake-left Frontline Socialist Party, which diverted workers into supporting calls by the JVP/NPP and Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) for a capitalist interim regime.

In opposition to all these parties, the SEP calls for the independent mobilisation of the working class to fight for a workers’ and peasants’ government and socialist policies. We call for the establishment of action committees of workers in every workplace, the plantations and other major economic centres and the building of action committees by the rural masses.

A Socialist and Democratic Congress of Workers and Rural Masses must be built with the delegations from all these action committees to discuss and take the decision to organise this fight.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact