

More Sri Lankan students denounce Peradeniya university's ban on IYSSE meeting

Our reporters
30 January 2025

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka have stepped up campaigns at universities across the island against Peradeniya University's anti-democratic ban on a scheduled IYSSE meeting on January 3.

The planned IYSSE meeting—a lecture titled “How to fight against the IMF austerity”—was sponsored by the Political Science Student Association (PSSA), which obtained the necessary permission from the head of the university's Political Science Department.

A few hours before the scheduled event, however, Ranjith Pallegama, the acting vice chancellor of the university, informed the senior treasurer of the PSSA, through the Political Science Department head, that the lecture could not go ahead under its advertised title and theme. The sudden imposition of this anti-democratic ban is a violation of freedom of speech, not only of the IYSSE and the PSSA, but all students, academics and non-academic staff.

Over the past weeks, IYSSE and SEP members and supporters have campaigned at universities in Colombo, Moratuwa and Kelaniya, as well as Jaffna in the North and Ruhuna in the South. They have handed out hundreds of copies of Sinhala and Tamil versions of an IYSSE statement titled “Sri Lanka: Peradeniya University tries to justify ban on IYSSE lecture.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* has already published numerous statements from students, academics and workers condemning the meeting ban. Today we are publishing more statements collected during recent university campaigns.

The IYSSE won strong backing from Moratuwa University students on January 23 despite the efforts of campus security officers and Malisha Kavinda, a

prominent supporter of the official student union, to stop the campaign. Their efforts failed.

Harsha, a student, said the Peradeniya University ban on the IYSSE meeting “is blocking our opportunity to know the truth. Are we supposed to listen only to what the government says? We have never heard of such bans on meetings before and must fight against this.”

Noting the social hardships facing students, he said: “The situation in universities is unbearable. I come from far away, even beyond Kandy [in central province], but was unable, even in my first year, to get a hostel.

“This means I have to pay for boarding fee expenses and if we buy meals from outside the campus [restaurant], it costs at least 800 rupees for three meals a day. After considering all these, we spend more than 20,000 [\$US67] rupees a month.

“My friend and I both work part-time to cover these expenses and we don't even get Mahapola [a meagre government allowance paid to university students] which is in arrears for months now.”

When the campaigners pointed out the connection between their situation and the IMF austerity cuts, he replied: “We voted [for the government] with high hopes. Various false promises were given but nothing has been done yet. I think there is a lot of opposition developing among the people about these things.”

On January 20, IYSSE campaigners spoke to students at Colombo university.

Desh, a first-year computer science student, said universities could not impose meeting bans because “they are not private institutes and, in a democratic country, everybody has the right to express their ideas. I don't think anybody can oppose that [meetings].”

He warned that the ban on the IYSSE meeting could be extended to other universities and added: “That [ban] will

not stop there if the government and the university authorities are successful. This means you must continue your struggle. If we are going to organise such a meeting here it will also be affected.”

Desh had a mixed understanding of the government’s IMF agenda, saying that it could have “positive as well as negative effects.” But after IYSSE campaigners explained the devastating social impact of the IMF austerity measures, including the privatisation and restructuring of state-owned enterprises, he admitted there would be many negative aspects, and agreed that allocations for education could be reduced and that opposition to such cuts “would develop.”

On January 22, a powerful intervention was held at Jaffna University which attracted strong interest and support from students. The university student union secretary, however, mobilised union members in an attempt to intimidate IYSSE supporters and disrupt the campaign.

Abisanth, a science faculty student, said: “There’s hardly any discussion in the universities about the IMF austerity measures, including at Jaffna University. Many students know about the IMF and World Bank loans, and other foreign loan packages, but they don’t know the consequences of these foreign loans.”

Referring to previous IMF interventions, he said: “Many graduates have been without employment, many workers have been working for inadequate wages, many youths have been forced to migrate searching for foreign jobs. These issues originate in the IMF’s policies. There will be no solutions to these issues without rejecting the IMF policies.”

“I previously didn’t understand that there was a socialist perspective to repudiate government policies. The reason for this, and not getting a correct perspective, is the suppression of freedom of speech,” he said.

Neruja, an arts faculty student, referred to the austerity measures of previous governments and their impact on universities.

“I know that all the economic issues in Sri Lanka are due to the repayment of loans for international financial institutions. These issues must be discussed among university students. We face many issues at Jaffna university including increasing living costs, stationery price hikes and the lack of facilities.

“To try and keep our monthly expenses to within 20,000 to 25,000 rupees we have to slash most of our basic needs, even our daily meals. The government bursary must be increased threefold to manage our expenses,” she said.

Neruja referred to deteriorating condition in the university’s hostel: “We can only stay in the university’s hostel, and use its facilities, during normal conditions. We can’t stay there during the rainy season and when heavy rains fall because the premises are surrounded by flood waters. We were affected by heavy flood in recent months.

“At the same time, we have no protection from flood-related diseases and there are not even mosquito nets. As a result, many of the students in our hostel face the danger of dengue fever.”

On January 24, campaigners spoke to students at Ruhuna University.

Sanuji, a science student, was not aware of the IYSSE meeting ban and strongly condemned it. “There should be freedom to express opinions within the university. Depriving people of this represents a huge attack on the rights not only of students but everyone else. As a university student, I am against it,” she said.

On January 27, campaigners displayed placards along the road to the main entrance to Kelaniya University and held discussions with students and university employees.

Several thugs connected to the Inter University Students Federation (IUSF), claiming to be “students,” physically threatened the campaigners forcing them to move to the Colombo-Kandy Road. The IUSF is controlled by the fake-left Frontline Socialist Party.

Despite this intimidation, IYSSE campaigners distributed hundreds of leaflets among students.

The IYSSE and SEP campaigns continues to win strong support from workers, students and middle-class people across Sri Lanka and internationally. We urge you to support demand that Peradeniya University revoke the ban and allow the IYSSE to hold its lecture. Please send letters to the Peradeniya University VC with copies to the IYSSE.

To: Acting Vice Chancellor, University of Peradeniya
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CC: IYSSE
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To contact the WWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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