

Sri Lanka: Hartal with 1,000 unions unless both President and PM resign

Tuesday 19 July 2022, by [CORALAGE Buwanajee](#), [RATHNAYAKE Dinitha](#) (Date first published: 15 July 2022).

A multi-sectoral, islandwide hartal-cum-strike protest campaign with the expected participation of over 1,000 trade unions (TUs) is to be conducted on 18 July by the National Trade Union Co-ordinating Centre (TUCC) if both President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Acting President and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe have not officially resigned by that date.

TUCC Co-Convener Wasantha Samarasinghe, speaking to the media, said that the entire country will come to a standstill due to the hartal. He added that hospitals, ports, banks, and transportation will therefore be gravely affected.

“We would tell Speaker of Parliament Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena, Rajapakasa, and Wickremesinghe to stop conspiring and misleading the people.”

Samarasinghe also claimed that Wickremesinghe is using his power to tarnish the “aragalaya” (struggle) by imprisoning persons.

Speaking to *The Morning*, representing the TUCC, Academy of Health Professionals President Ravi Kumudesh said that more than 400 trade unions would participate in the hartal.

“Unions representing the health, postal, railway, ports, electricity and water supply sectors would be participating in the hartal and strike action on 18 July if Rajapaksa does not step down.”

According to Kumudesh, Colombo Fort would be the centre of the islandwide trade union action.

“If Wickremesinghe feels that he has the majority of the public, it is a disrespectful act to find shortcuts and create chaos in the country because he will have that opportunity in the upcoming elections. If we don’t get answers by 18 July, we will call the entire trade union movement to the battlefield. Therefore, we emphasise that it is everyone’s responsibility to use the next 72 hours correctly.”

Speaking to the media yesterday, Ceylon Teachers’ Union General Secretary Joseph Stalin said: “We would like to clearly announce that if Rajapaksa and Wickremesinghe do not resign within the course of today, we would commence a widespread and continuous trade union action along with indefinite hartal actions. The duo needs to resign.”

Furthermore, he emphasised that the trade union action taken by the alliance in support of the “aragalaya” is to support the requests and the cry of the people, thus accentuating the trade union actions that have been underway since 9 July.

“We as the alliance of trade unions and mass organisations have taken different measures during this ‘aragalaya’,” stated Stalin.

Additionally, he expressed that many of the dire requests of the people are not being answered by the distorted Parliament that is currently in power, which does not reflect the people's vote anymore. The importance of abolishing the Executive Presidency along with the required amendments to the Constitution was mentioned as the requests by the general public which have to be taken into consideration. Pointing to the people on the streets since 9 July, he highlighted the people's desire for Rajapaksa and Wickremesinghe to resign and to be held accountable for the alleged crimes that they have committed.

Calling into attention the fact that this is the first time in history that a sitting President has fled his own country, he said that this is purely the result of the protest led by thousands of people including the working class. "So due to that, the President has lost power not only to stay in his official residence, but also in the country."

Moreover, he requested that those who aided the President to flee the country should be brought before the law and be held accountable for their actions. Referring to the media statement by the Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) which stated that under the permission of the Ministry of Defense, abiding by the powers of the Executive President and following legitimate aviation regulations, the President was able to leave the country in an aircraft belonging to the SLAF, he stressed that the military officials that gave such orders should be revealed to the public and be held responsible for their actions.

Further, Lanka Postal Services Association Chairman Jagath Mahinda also said that all senior and junior officers would participate in the hartal under the TUCC and the Ekabadda Janatha Viyaparaya (United People's Movement). "More than 1,000 trade unions are expected to participate in the union action," he claimed while speaking to The Morning.

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