

Sri Lanka: Unionists ready for renewed bout against 'suppression'

Monday 8 August 2022, by [PERERA Yoshitha](#) (Date first published: 7 August 2022).

Protesters converged on Nugegoda yesterday heralding another wave in their campaign against the incumbent government which they say does not have a people's mandate to rule.

This is expected to culminate in a countrywide protest in main cities and towns on August 9,

Unionists organised under the banner of the Trade Union Coordinating Committee, which represents a wide cross-section of public and private sector workers, and their allies including political parties, student unions, are demanding the immediate dissolution of parliament, which they say is a cause of further anarchy in the country.

Wasantha Samarasinghe, the co-convener of the union collective, said the suppression will not stifle the protest campaign.

Joseph Stalin, the general secretary of the Ceylon Teachers' Union (CTU), was arrested on August 3, for violating a court order and remanded in custody until August 12 by the Colombo Fort Magistrate's Court. He was arrested last Wednesday evening at the CTU headquarters and held for nearly 24 hours for interrogation.

Mr. Stalin, police allege, violated a court order on May 28 during a protest march on Bank of Ceylon Mawatha in Colombo Fort.

Unionists demonstrated in front of the Fort Railway Station early Thursday against what they called the "unlawful arrest" of Mr Stalin and other protesters.

Nearly 100 who gathered, demanded the release of Mr Stalin and other protesters, chanting anti-oppression slogans against the government of President Wickremesinghe.

"This country's people are taking to the streets to protest this corrupt and conspiratorial regime. However, as of today, police are arresting protesters, which is anti-democratic and should be stopped immediately," according to Ceylon Teachers' Service Union (CTSU) general secretary Mahinda Jayasinghe.

Their main demand is dissolution of parliament — which they say is the source of all of the country's current issues — and holding of parliamentary elections immediately.

Tens of thousands of students, teachers, trade union activists, and artists marched along the Galle Road in a protest march on May 28. Saman Ratnapriya, President Wikremesinghe's current advisor on trade unions, also took part in the demonstrations that day.

"It was very clear that not only the United National Party (UNP) supported that protest on May 28,

but it also had Mr. Wickremesinghe's blessing," said Ravi Kumudesh, co-convenor of the Trade Union Coordination Centre.

Hundreds of others have already been arrested on charges of causing damage to public property during months of protests that culminated with the storming of the presidential residence on July 9, when Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the then president, fled to the Maldives and then to Singapore, from where he sent in his resignation.

Meanwhile, it emerged in court on Friday that the unexplained Rs 17.5 million that protesters had found on July 9, in piles of fresh banknotes in a room in the presidential residence and handed over to Colombo Fort Police, had been given to Public Security Minister Tiran Alles.

The Colombo Fort Magistrate's Court was told that SDIG Deshabandu Tennekoon had advised the Fort Police OIC to send the cash to Mr Alles, instead of handing it over to the court as required by law.

The court had previously ordered a report about the handing over process of the Rs 17.5m by July 27.

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P.S.

The Sunday Times

<https://www.sundaytimes.lk/220807/news/unionists-ready-for-renewed-bout-against-suppression-490978.html>