

Sri Lanka: North-East activists end 100-day protest demanding federalism

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At the end of the 100-day protest staged by the North-East Co-ordinating Committee (NECC), a people's declaration urging for a federal solution within a merged Northern and Eastern Province was delivered yesterday (8) in all eight districts of both provinces.

Speaking to *The Morning*, North-East District Co-ordinating Committee President Lavakusarasa Kandumani said that more than 1,000 people participated on the 100th day of protest held by his organisation, and that those from both the Tamil and Muslim communities participated in the protest that was held in both the North and the East. He further noted that many civil society organisations, relatives of missing persons, and women's organisations collaborated in this struggle led by the NECC.

"We have been urging for an honourable political right until the 99th day of our protest, but only today, the 100th day, we declared that a federal solution within a merged North and East would be suitable," he added.

The declaration read: "We, the Tamil-speaking people of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, today (8), the 100th day of our continuous 100 days of activism for power sharing, present the people's declaration for a sustainable political solution for Tamil speaking people in the North and East. We have taken into consideration all the past power-sharing proposals that were presented by the rulers as a solution to the ethnic issue; analysed the content of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution; particularly explored the 'federal model of power sharing within a united Sri Lanka' that was agreed to by the Sri Lankan delegation headed by the then-Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris under the guidance of then-Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in the Oslo Declaration 2002, with the mediation of Norway; and we present our declaration as the voice of the people.

"The Tamil people have been living in the Northern and Eastern Provinces since the prehistoric period with their distinct identity. Along with the numerical majority Tamil people, numerical minority Muslim people are also living in these areas. The successive majoritarian Sinhala rulers who came to power based on racism, systematically oppressed the Tamil people politically, linguistically, economically, and socially, and perpetrated violence against the Tamil people. Because of these reasons, it was assured by the 13th Amendment to the Constitution that the people of the North and East must be given a provincial-level solution within a merged North-East Province and also to Constitutionally ensure that Tamil is an official language. However, in 2006, the merged North-East Provincial unit was demerged, and the North and East were created as two separate provinces."

Accordingly, the declaration included 16 points and the important points among them are that the Northern and Eastern Provinces must be remerged, and that the North and East must become a single provincial unit; that the Central Government must ensure a federal model of power sharing for a merged North-East Province that cannot be withdrawn; for the merged North-East Province to

be governed by a people's representative council that would be democratically elected by the people; to ensure that women's representation in this council would be 50%; that the Chief Minister shall be the head of the people's representative council; that the Governor shall not control the people's representative council of the Province and that he/she shall represent the Central Government as an honorary representative; and that the lands situated within the North-East Province must come under the control of the governance of the said Province.

The NECC, through the declaration, urged India, the United Nations (Human Rights Council (UNHRC) core group of countries on Sri Lanka including the UK, the US, Germany, Canada, Malawi, North Macedonia and Montenegro, the EU, and the UN to provide the necessary assistance to the Sri Lankan Government to confirm a federal model of power sharing to the North and East areas that cannot be withdrawn.

Meanwhile, President Wickremesinghe has assured recently that a final settlement with the Tamils and the Northern population of the country would be reached within the next few months, which was then welcomed by the Tamil National Alliance representatives.

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