

Sri Lanka: FSP calls on MPs to defeat PTA (Amendment) Bill

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The Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) yesterday (21) urged MPs to defeat the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) (Amendment) Bill, claiming that it would merely strengthen the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act, No. 48 of 1979 as amended (PTA) and allow for the State to engage in more oppressive mechanisms against its citizens.

The Bill, which was tabled in the Parliament earlier this year, is due for a second reading today (22) in Parliament.

“The Government tabled the Bill claiming that it would address the problems in the PTA. There is no need for amending this Act. It needs to be abolished. The Act was brought in temporarily to deal with the emergency situation in the 1970s. How many years has it been since the war ended? Why are these oppressive tactics being continued?” questioned FSP Education Secretary Pubudu Jayagoda while addressing the media yesterday.

Jayagoda noted the numerous cases of those who were unfairly held under the PTA.

“We know of the case of the person who cut a branch at late Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar’s house, who was arrested under the PTA, following Kadirgamar’s death. This person died in prison, with no charges proved against him. Muslim poet Ahnaf Jazeem, was held under the PTA for months on end on accusations that his writing incited violence when in fact his poems were against terrorism. Reports show that hundreds of Muslims were arrested following the Easter Sunday terror attacks based on such reasons like owning Arabic books,” said Jayagoda.

Jayagoda warned that during the prevailing economic crisis in the country, attention must be given to democratic crises as well, as the PTA could tomorrow be used to oppress those who demand for essentials such as liquid petroleum gas or fuel.

“We urge MPs to defeat this Bill as it would only strengthen the provisions of the existing PTA, and demand that it be abolished completely,” he stressed.

The proposed amendments were tabled in Parliament last month, and were then challenged in the Supreme Court (SC). The Speaker of the House read out the SC determination in Parliament this week, which said that while some amendments needed to be amended, others needed to be passed with a two thirds majority in the Parliament.

This month, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) called for an immediate moratorium on the use of the PTA. The Tamil National Alliance has begun a campaign, collecting signatures from around the island, for a public petition, demanding that the PTA be repealed. The Archbishop of Colombo Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, Jazeem and lawyer and former PTA detainee Hejaaz Hizbullah have added their signatures to the petition. Sri Lanka’s main Parliamentary

Opposition - the Samagi Jana Balawegaya's Leader and Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa has also called for the repeal of the PTA this year.

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