



Dharavi dharna for Lankan Tamils

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Dharavi, which is home to a large chunk of the city's emigrant Tamil population is abuzz with activity. Banners with graphic images of killed and maimed Tamil civilians dot every street corner here, with messages in Tamil, typed in deep red.

Posters of martyrs who gave their lives for the Tamil cause jostle for attention alongside banners of political parties like the BJP and the Congress that pledge their support for Lankan Tamils. Dharnas have been organised to strengthen the demand for a halt of hostilities that local leaders claim have killed thousands of Tamil civilians.

"We have no connections with the LTTE, we don't endorse their cause. We are only concerned with the mounting civilian casualties. Something urgently needs to be done about this humanitarian crisis. Through these dharnas and peaceful marches we want to appeal to the Tamil residents of the city to show solidarity with their counterparts in Sri Lanka and demand a stop to all atrocities against them," says S A Sundar, president of a local NGO, Citizens Forum of Maharashtra.

Incensed by reports coming from various news media, Dharavi's Tamil youth have also pitched in to organise various functions to highlight the crisis in Sri Lanka. "We are frustrated with the government's lack of initiative to act decisively on the atrocities taking place in Sri Lanka. If the Indian government can protest against the Israeli attacks on Palestinians in Gaza then why cant they do it for Tamils residing in our backyard," questions B Makizhan, a student of computer sciences who is part of the Dharavi youth group.

Even members of local political parties have shed their political affiliations to give momentum to the voices of Dharavi's irate Tamil residents. "We are really concerned with what's happening in Sri Lanka. How can we sit here and do nothing when Tamil civilians are being raped and murdered? Making Tamil residents of Mumbai aware of these atrocities is the least we can do. Our cause has attracted members of every Mumbai based political party, who have risen above their political differences to support us," says Captain R Tamilselvam, general secretary of BJP's Mumbai South Cell. Tamilselvam is in the process of organising a large rally to stop the war in Sri Lanka and has invited the radical leader of the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), V Gopalaswamy aka Vaiko to spearhead the protests.

Tamil Nadu based political parties that have been pressurising the centre to act on the Lankan Tamil issue are also here lobbying for more Tamil residents to participate in the protests in the city. "This is an extension of the protests that have already taken place in cities around the world. We want to give expression to the general mood of the Tamil people who want this inhumane war to cease immediately," says S Kumana Rajan, joint secretary of the Mumbai suburban wing of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK).

Dharavi's Tamil residents hope that their protests will precipitate the Indian government to act decisively to alleviate the plight of their suffering brethren in Sri Lanka.

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