

# Sri Lankan SEP renews demand for action against killers of Sivapragasam Mariyadas

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)  
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Three months have passed since the murder of Sivapragasam Mariyadas, a supporter of the Sri Lankan Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in the eastern district of Trincomalee.

The international campaign launched by the SEP and the *World Socialist Web Site* to demand the arrest and prosecution of his killers has forced the Sri Lankan police to initiate an inquiry. To date, however, no suspects have been detained and basic leads have not been followed up.

The reason is obvious. All the evidence points to the involvement of the security forces. As the SEP warned in launching its campaign, the Sri Lankan police are notorious for covering up killings and abductions in which the military and its associated death squads are implicated.

The SEP appeals to working people in Sri Lanka and WSWs readers internationally to redouble their demands for Mariyadas's killers to be found and punished. Our campaign is striking an important blow against the security forces' ability to murder innocent civilians with impunity. Since the beginning of the year, human rights organisations have received hundreds of complaints of killings and "disappearances".

These murders are an integral component of the government's efforts to terrorise the island's Tamil minority and its renewed war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Mariyadas was a particular target because of his opposition to the war and to all communal politics, both the Sinhala supremacism of the Sri Lankan state and the Tamil separatism of the LTTE.

Mariyadas was killed on August 7 just after the government launched a major offensive to seize the Mavilaru irrigation sluice gate on July 26. The LTTE counterattacked and seized parts of Muttur, provoking a fierce battle for control of the town. The whole area, including the rural town of Mullipothana, where Mariyadas was living, was swarming with security forces.

Mariyadas had just moved to Mullipothana, where he had been running a photographic and communications centre for some time. He was at home with his wife Stella Krishanthi and three-year-old son. At about 9.30 p.m., he went to the door after someone called out his name. A gunman shot him several times and then fled on a waiting motor bicycle parked in the street.

In its statement of September 5, the SEP explained that the most likely culprits were the security forces and their Tamil paramilitary allies. The professional manner of the assassination, the fact that the killers knew their victim's name and their ability to evade patrols and pass through checkpoints all pointed to the involvement of the military. Further evidence reinforces this conclusion.

## A death threat

Four months before his murder, Mariyadas received a death threat from

a member of the home guards, an auxiliary force that operates closely with the military and police. On April 11, a home guard on duty in Mullipothana visited Mariyadas at his communication centre. He accused Mariyadas of providing information about the area to the LTTE and explicitly warned that he would be killed.

The death threat was made amid news on the same day that an LTTE attack had blown up a bus and killed 11 sailors. The incident took place near Thambalagamuwa, on the Trincomalee-Habarana road, about 10 kilometres from Mullipothana. As in the case of other attacks, the security forces responded by terrorising Tamils in the area and threatening "LTTE suspects".

Just days before, on April 7, a prominent pro-LTTE politician V. Vigneswaran had been shot and killed in Trincomalee. His murder took place near a military high security zone, close to army checkpoints, yet the killer was not detained. The assassination was particularly provocative as Vigneswaran was mooted to be the replacement for MP Joseph Pararajasingham, who was killed by unidentified gunmen last December.

Mariyadas did not make a formal complaint to the police, but he told Jayaweera, the owner of the building in which his communications centre was located. He also informed his wife and brothers, Sivapragasam Benedict and Jesudas. Jayaweera, a retired village officer, told the SEP that the home guard, nicknamed "Tomba", had also threatened to "smash-up" Mariyadas's communication centre.

## Other murders

The atmosphere was far more tense by early August. Battles were raging in Muttur and Mavilaru. The military's savage bombardment of Muttur, using artillery and multi-barrel rocket launchers, forced tens of thousands of mainly Muslim residents to flee. In the neighbouring areas, the security forces mounted a witchhunt against anyone suspected of sympathies for the LTTE.

On August 4, a Tamil three-wheeler driver named Vasudevan from Mullipothana was killed by unidentified gunmen. He had been hired to go to Kantalai. According to media reports, two men on a motorbike followed his vehicle and then shot him dead. Mariyadas made no secret in the town of his attitude to the killing, condemning it as an unjustified crime.

On August 5, the army finally retook the town of Muttur. On the same day, 17 local aid workers attached to the French-based Action Contre la Faim (ACF) were found dead at the organisation's compound base in the town. Fifteen bodies were in a row, each with a shot to the head, execution-style. Two others were found shot in the back. The Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM), which oversees the ceasefire, formally ruled on August 30 that the military was responsible for the murders.

On August 7, Mariyadas was murdered.

### Heightened security

The East and North of Sri Lanka have been war zones for more than two decades. The military functions as an army of occupation. Throughout these areas, there are military camps and high security zones. While security was relaxed after the 2002 ceasefire, it heightened again this year as the government plunged the island back to war. Roadblocks, checkpoints and patrols are routine. Military intelligence operatives are very active.

In early August, the security forces in Mullipothana were on high alert. Mariyadas's house was situated immediately behind the Al Hijra Muslim school, which had been converted to a refugee camp for residents who had fled from Muttur. The premises were being guarded around the clock by police and home guards.

Less than 500 metres from Mariyadas's home is the small town centre of Mullipothana where police, home guards and military personnel were stationed. From there, a road leads to an army camp about a kilometre further on.

Both entrances to the town have police and military checkpoints: one is at Thambalagamuwa toward Trincomalee (seven kilometres from Mullipothana) and the other is at "91 mile post" toward Kantalai (five kilometres from Mullipothana). Another two other checkpoints have been established on the main Trincomalee-Kantalai road.

Yet, in the midst of a heightened security alert, two men on a motorbike were able to escape scot-free after shooting Mariyadas.

### Belated police inquiry

More than two months after the murder, police inspector C.A. Rodrigo from Kantalai police station's special crime division contacted Mariyadas's wife and younger brother, saying he had been asked to investigate after the police had received a number of complaints about the lack of an inquiry. He finally took a formal statement from Mariyadas's wife Krishanthi on October 17.

The investigation has since been passed onto another police inspector, Kotaciachchi, also from Kantalai. When contacted by the SEP last week, he refused to provide any information about the case and was more interested in what the SEP had found out. "We are searching for suspects. Do you know something? Do you have any clue? Tell me now," he declared defensively.

His assistant, sergeant Bandara, told the SEP there had been little progress. He said the police had taken statements from two employees from Mariyadas's communication centre, but they had no significant clues. D.P.P. Ramanayake, officer in charge at Thambalagamuwa police station, gave the same story. Thambalagamuwa police have taken two statements—one from a neighbour of Mariyadas and another from the owner of his rented house. But they had "no clue" as to the killers, he said.

But the "investigation" was compromised from the outset. As SEP general secretary Wije Dias pointed out in a letter to the Sri Lankan Attorney General S.C. Kamalabeyson, the Thambalagamuwa police breached basic legal procedure by removing Mariyadas's body from the scene without proper authority. The police also advised the investigating magistrate against visiting the scene on security grounds.

The police are deliberately dragging their feet. They have submitted four empty cartridges, ammunition and blood samples to the court, but are yet to seek permission for a government analyst to examine the evidence. An examination of the empty cartridges and ammunition is obviously vital to determine the type of weapon used to kill Mariyadas.

The police have made no serious effort to track down witnesses and take statements. The home guard Lalith, who informed the police of Mariyadas's murder, has not been called to give evidence. No effort has been made to follow up the death threat against Mariyadas. No statement has been taken from Jayaweera, the owner of the building housing Mariyadas's communication centre. Significantly, none of the police, home guards and soldiers on duty in Mullipothana and at various guard posts and checkpoints in the area on the night of August 7 have been questioned.

If there are "no suspects," it is because the clues are leading in a direction that the police do not want to follow. The attitude of the military to Mariyadas was evident on the day after his death. Security personnel on duty at Mullipothana told locals that they should not be concerned about the murder of a "Tiger" [LTTE member]. Those who tried to attend his funeral in his hometown of Selvanayagapuram in Trincomalee were threatened and turned back by soldiers and police.

Despite the efforts of the security forces, hundreds of people—Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese—attended the funeral. Mariyadas was well known and liked in Mullipothana as well as his hometown. As a supporter of the Socialist Equality Party since 2001, he was known as an opponent of the LTTE as well as the Colombo government and the war. He was deeply hostile to the racism and communalism that has poisoned life in Sri Lanka since independence and led to the protracted civil war.

The SEP again appeals for supporters and WSWs readers to send protest letters to the Sri Lankan authorities to demand that Mariyadas's killers be caught and punished. Our campaign is part of the broader struggle to unite working people against the onslaught on democratic rights in Sri Lanka and internationally.

Letters and statements should be sent to:

Inspector General of Police, Victor Perera,  
Police Headquarters, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka.

Fax: 0094 11 2446174

Email: [igp@police.lk](mailto:igp@police.lk)

Attorney General K.C. Kamalabeyson,  
Attorney General's Department, Colombo 12, Sri Lanka.

Fax: 0094 11 2436 421

Copies should be sent to the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka) and the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Socialist Equality Party,  
P.O. Box 1270, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Email: [wswscmb@sltnet.lk](mailto:wswscmb@sltnet.lk)

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