

Sri Lankan police drag out their inquiries into the murder of SEP supporter

By Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
19 January 2007

More than five months after the murder of Socialist Equality Party (SEP) supporter Sivapragasam Mariyadas in the eastern Sri Lankan town of Mullipothana, the police investigation has failed to identify the killers, let alone arrest and prosecute them. The police involved are more preoccupied with avoiding responsibility for the case than in conducting any serious inquiries into the most likely culprits—the country’s security forces.

The investigation has now been passed between at least four different chief investigators from three different towns. On January 11, another switch became apparent when police officers from Trincomalee took a new statement from Mariyadas’s wife, Stella Krishanthi Mariyadas. Police told the SEP that inquiries were now being handled by the special crime division in Trincomalee.

Mariyadas was killed at his home in Mullipothana on August 7 at about 9.30 p.m. He was shot through the head and neck after being called to the door. The gunman fled with an accomplice on a waiting motorbike. The professional manner of the murder, the fact that the killers knew their victim’s name and their ability to evade patrols and pass through security checkpoints all pointed to the involvement of the military.

The murder took place in the midst of fierce fighting in the adjacent areas of Muttur and Mavilaru against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). President Mahinda Rajapakse had ordered the military to take the offensive and seize the Mavilaru irrigation sluice gate in open breach of the 2002 ceasefire agreement. Mariyadas was known for his opposition to the war and to the army’s atrocities. He had just moved to Mullipothana, where he had been running a photographic and communication centre for some time.

The SEP and the *World Socialist Web Site* launched an international campaign in September to demand the arrest and prosecution of Mariyadas’s killers. But as the various

twists and turns demonstrate, no serious police investigation has taken place.

* Initially, police at Thambalagamuwa took charge of the inquiry. They took a formal statement from Mariyadas’s wife, Stella Krishanthi, who also gave evidence at the magisterial inquiry. Periodically officers from Thambalagamuwa appeared in court to file new reports on the “progress” of the investigation. In fact, none took place.

* A month later, after the SEP’s campaign had begun, Rodrigo, an inspector from the Kantalai police crime division, told Stella Krishanthi that Colombo had assigned him to carry out the inquiry. He came to Trincomalee and recorded another statement from her.

* The following month, police inspector Kottaciarachchi, also from the Kantalai crime division, was placed in charge of the case.

* On November 20, in a motion in the Kantalai magistrate’s court, the Trincomalee crime investigation division (CID) announced that it was taking over the investigation. The police team in Kantalai did not appear to have been informed and asked Mariyadas’s younger brother, Jesudas Sivapragasam, to come to the town on November 25 to make a statement.

When contacted by the SEP, Trincomalee police sergeant P.A.N. Perera said that Sri Lanka’s Inspector General of Police had ordered the Trincomalee CID to carry out the investigation following the receipt of protest letters and petitions. Perera explained that Inspector M. G. Kudagodage was handling the case, but refused to divulge any details, saying it was a “secret inquiry”.

Stella Krishanthi has now given three statements to the police. But there is no evidence that any of the police inquiries has tried to track down witnesses or take statements from anyone other than Mariyadas’s immediate family. Elementary forensic analysis, including of the bullets that killed Mariyadas, has yet to be carried

out. The continual turnover of those heading the inquiry, not only ensures responsibility is being passed around, but is also a recipe for duplication, the loss of evidence and procrastination.

The SEP has further evidence that implicates the military in the killing. The WSWs has already reported that Mariyadas received a death threat four months before his murder. An eyewitness has now come forward to provide details of what happened.

The incident took place on April 11 after news spread that 11 navy personnel had been killed in a claymore mine explosion on the Trincomalee-Habarana road, about 10 kilometres from Mullipothana. Shortly after Mariyadas arrived at his studio around midday, an army truck stopped outside and dropped a person off. All were in civilian clothes.

The man entered the studio and abused Mariyadas in Sinhala, saying: “You are providing news to the LTTE. I am not going to keep you alive.” The eyewitness continued: “Oh, I got frightened. I thought Mariyadas could be murdered at that time. He slapped Mariyadas on the face. I don’t know the man personally. That man was dark and not very tall. He had short hair like a soldier and was in a T-shirt and trousers.”

According to the eyewitness, Mariyadas stayed silent and did not seem to take the death threat seriously. He told an aunt that he had been threatened by a home guard but that the owner of the studio building, Jayaweera, had spoken to the man. Jayaweera, a retired village officer, had earlier told the SEP that a home-guard, nicknamed “Tomba”, had threatened to “smash-up” Mariyadas’s communication centre. Home guards function as auxiliaries to the police.

Immediately after his murder, local soldiers, police and home guards spread the rumour that Mariyadas was an LTTE supporter. According to his wife, home guards came to the home of a neighbour, where she was sheltering, shouted at her and warned the others that the LTTE would take its revenge by killing them all. The claim that Mariyadas supported the LTTE is an outright lie. He had been in contact with the SEP for five years and assisted WSWs journalists. Although he did not take part openly in the SEP’s political activities, he was known for his opposition to the LTTE and its Tamil separatist perspective.

The murder of Mariyadas is one of hundreds that took place last year as the Rajapakse government escalated its war against the LTTE. It is an open secret that the military, in league with allied paramilitaries, has operated

death squads in the North and East of the island, as well as in Colombo. The abductions and killing of “LTTE suspects” is a means of terrorising the Tamil population. To date the killers have acted with impunity. In response to the worst atrocities, President Rajapakse has been compelled to promise an inquiry, but no one has been arrested or prosecuted for any of these murders.

In one of the most recent cases, Professor Sivasubramaniam Raveendranath, vice-chancellor of the eastern university, was kidnapped in Colombo on December 15. He was seized in one of the capital’s high security zones that are closely guarded by heavily armed military personnel and police. He has not been released. According to police, it is not known who abducted him.

We thank our supporters and WSWs readers who have sent letters to the Sri Lankan authorities demanding the arrest and prosecution of Mariyadas’s killers. This campaign, however, needs to be intensified. By demanding justice for Mariyadas and his family, a blow is being struck against the crimes being carried out by these death squads and their systematic cover up. This campaign is an essential part of the broader struggle to defend the basic democratic rights of working people—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim alike.

Protest 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

Attorney General K.C. Kamalasabeyson,

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*.

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