

After seven months

Sri Lankan authorities fail to investigate murder of SEP supporter

Our reporter
29 March 2007

Eight months after the murder of Socialist Equality Party supporter Sivapragasam Mariyadas, Sri Lankan police have carried out no serious investigation to find and arrest his killers.

The lack of action is not an isolated case. Scores of people, mainly Tamils, in the North and East of the island and in Colombo, have been killed or “disappeared” over the past year. The police have solved none of these cases, which are, in all likelihood, the work of military-sponsored death squads.

In this context, the SEP holds grave fears for the safety of its member, Nadarajah Wimalaswaran, who went missing with his friend, Sivanathan Mathivathanan, last Thursday evening while returning to his home on the northern island of Kayts. Kayts and the surrounding islands are under the tight security of the Sri Lankan navy, which has provided no adequate explanation for the disappearance of the two men (see “Sri Lankan SEP demands urgent inquiry into disappearance of party member”).

Mariyadas was killed on August 7 last year at his home in the eastern town of Mullipothana around 9.30 p.m. He was with his wife Stella Krishanthi and three-year-old son when he was called to the door by name. A gunman shot him several times, then fled with an accomplice on a waiting motorbike.

The murder took place amid intense fighting in the adjacent areas of Muttur and Mavilaru. As a result, the security forces were on a state of high alert in Mullipothana as well. The professional manner of the murder, the killer’s ability to evade military patrols and checkpoints, and his knowledge of Mariyadas’s name and whereabouts indicate the collusion of the security forces.

Mariyadas had no personal enemies in Mullipothana, where he ran a photographic studio and communication centre. But a local home guard had accused Mariyadas of being a supporter of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and threatened his life on April 11. Home guards are armed auxiliaries who work closely with the military and police.

Immediately after his murder, the military and local home guards spread the same slander that Mariyadas was an LTTE member. Mariyadas had been a supporter of the SEP for five years. While he did not openly engage in the SEP’s political activities, he supported the party’s program and was known for his opposition to the government and its communal war, as well as to the LTTE.

The SEP and the *World Socialist Web Site* have been waging a campaign in Sri Lanka and internationally to demand that the Sri Lankan police find and prosecute Mariyadas’s killers. To date, the police inquiries have been characterised by inaction, lame excuses, buck passing and evasion. The police investigation has been transferred to four officers in three different towns during the past eight months.

SEP general secretary Wije Dias wrote to Attorney General K.C. Kamalasabeyson last September demanding a full police investigation of

the murder (see “SEP writes to Sri Lankan attorney general to demand inquiry into supporter’s murder”). The Attorney General’s Department only acknowledged the letter in January. Dias finally received a reply on February 5 from P. Kumararatnam, a senior state counsel in the department.

Dias raised a number of basic breaches of procedure in the inquiry to that point, including: 1. Mariyadas’s body was removed from the crime scene by the police officer. 2. The magistrate did not proceed to the crime scene. 3. The evidence of the eyewitnesses was not recorded. 4. The evidence of the home guard who reported the incident was not recorded.

Kumararatnam answered none of these issues in his response. The brief note simply declared: “At present [the] Kantalai police have concluded their investigations and handed over the file to Criminal Investigation Department for further investigations.”

The Attorney General’s Department only responded because of the dozens of letters sent by WSWS readers and SEP supporters expressing their concerns about the lack of a proper investigation. We appeal once again for further protest letters to demand that Mariyadas’s killers be found and prosecuted. Such a step would be a blow to the death squads who are operating at present with impunity.

Letters 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*.

Socialist Equality Party,
P.O. Box 1270,
Colombo, Sri Lanka.
Email: wswscmb@sltnet.lk

To send letters to the WSWS editorial board please use this online form.

We publish below a selection of letters and petitions sent to Sri Lankan authorities.

The following is a petition signed by 26 WSWS readers in France.

1. The Inspector General of Police Victor Perera, Police Headquarters, Colombo 1.

2. Attorney General K.C. Kamalasabeyson, Attorney General’s Department, Colombo 12.

We are writing this to you to request that a prompt and proper inquiry be made into the murder of Sivapragasam Mariyadas, a political supporter of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), on August 7 in Mullipothana, about 20 kilometres south of Trincomalee.

Mariyadas was shot in the forehead and neck by a gunman, killing him on the spot at about 9.30 p.m. at his residence when he went to the door responding to someone calling him by name. His wife, Stela Krishanthi, saw the assailant in shorts, t-shirt and helmet as he ran and jumped over the compound wall.

Officers from the Thambalagamuwa police station who arrived half an hour later took down a statement from Krishanthi and removed Mariyadas's body to the hospital at Kantalai. The following day a magisterial inquiry was held at the hospital and a routine verdict delivered: death from gunshot injuries caused by unidentified gunmen.

On September 4, we were informed by Sergeant Perera, acting head of the crime branch Thambalagamuwa police, that investigators had found no clues and the case was due to be heard again in the local magistrate's court only on December 7—i.e., three months afterwards.

The circumstances of the murder indicate a professional, targeted assassination. We have reason to suspect that it was carried out by members of the security forces, police or paramilitary thugs. The entire area is in the midst of a war zone and heavily patrolled by troops, police and home guards. Anyone moving at night is routinely subjected to security checks at roadblocks.

We urge that timely action be taken to expedite this inquiry and the culprits, whoever they are, be brought to book.

Dear Sir,

I, as the president of Central Bank Employees Union, would like to bring your attention to the letter sent to you by me on September 11, 2006. I urged you in that letter to hold a full investigation into the murder of Sivapragasam Mariyadas, a supporter of Socialist Equality Party (SEP) at his home at Mullipothana on August 7, 2006.

Although nearly five months have passed, you have not responded to my letter. I use this opportunity to express my strong opposition about it.

I have learnt that so far the official investigation into the murder of Mariyadas has been handed over to four police officers in succession and also that they have failed to find any clue to the killers. That practice of the police indicates evasion of their responsibility for a serious investigation. I am shocked by this behaviour of the police.

It further strengthens the suspicion raised by the SEP and *World Socialist Web Site* based upon the circumstances of the murder that the members of government security forces or associated paramilitary groups were involved in the assassination.

Such suspicions have been raised not only in relation to the killing of Mariyadas. It is a public fact that relatives of victims and local and foreign human rights organisations have accused state forces and their associated paramilitary groups of being involved in most of the killings, abductions and forcible disappearances reported recently.

Moreover, it seems that such culprits enjoy the privilege of immunity from legal prosecution. No one who cherishes the democratic rights of the people can tolerate this situation.

Therefore I urge you again to arrest and prosecute the killers of Mariyadas immediately.

Yours truly,

K.B. Mavikumbura.

President,

Central Bank Employees Union.

Dear Sir,

Police must hold a prompt and serious investigation into the murder of Sivapragasam Mariyadas.

I was shocked greatly with the *World Socialist Web Site's* revelation of the murder of Sivapragasam Mariyadas, a political supporter of the

Socialist Equality Party.

When we consider the background of this assassination, this whole area is within a war zone. It is patrolled by the military, police and home guards throughout 24 hours of the day and is also an area where passing people and vehicles are checked at road blocks and checkpoints.

Under such circumstances, the fact that the assassin could flee on a motorcycle is a reasonable evidence to suspect the involvement of members of security forces, police or paramilitary forces in the assassination.

It is further confirmed by remarks made by members of the military on the funeral day of Mariyadas that he was a supporter of the LTTE.

Moreover, the police role in removing the body of Mariyadas from the scene before the post mortem, which should have been held at the crime site itself, has provided a vital help [to the killers].

Now five months have passed since the killing. The passing of responsibility for the investigation into the crime to four police officers in succession so far, indicates that the police are evading their responsibility for a prompt and serious investigation to find the culprit.

We who cherish democracy urge you to hold a prompt and serious investigation into this crime. The failure to do so indicates the nature of this racist state. Therefore I request an impartial and serious investigation into the murder of Sivapragasam Mariyadas.

Yours,

(Retired worker from Oil Corporation)

D. Jayweera

Demand for a full investigation into the murder of Sivapragasam Mariyadas.

I condemn the murder of Sivapragasam Mariyadas in his house stated at Mullipothana.

SEP supporter Mariyadas fought against the war between the government and LTTE and every kind of racism.

This murder took place when the security forces heavily patrolled the area, 24 hours a day, searching all vehicles and people. This situation indicates that the army, or an associated group, was responsible for the murder.

At the same time, the police removal of Mariyadas's body from the scene is a breach of procedure. They failed to interview eyewitnesses and the investigation has passed to at least four different chief investigators from three different towns. This also indicates that no proper investigation has begun.

As a former secretary of the Sea Officials Association in Sri Lanka Port Authority and as a worker, I demand quick and full investigation of Mariyadas's murder.

D. A. Jothipala, a WSWWS reader.

Take action to prosecute those responsible for the murder of Sivapragasam Mariyadas.

Socialist Equality Party supporter Sivapragasam Mariyadas was murdered six months ago. The SEP and its supporters have continuously demanded that you and the Sri Lankan authorities carry out a full investigation and prosecute those responsible for the murder. I know that the SEP has fought continuously and firmly for the democratic rights of the working class. The murder of an SEP supporter is a violation of the rights of the working class and all the oppressed.

An inquiry into this murder is all the more important because the finger points to the state forces and its supporters. Despite the people's opposition to the war, killings and abductions are being reported everywhere in the country. People's hatred and contempt is increasing about these abductions and killings. As someone who has an interest in people's democratic rights, I demand, without delay, the prosecution of those responsible for this murder.

A. Jayaratna

(Member of Ceylon Teachers Union)



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact