

SEP writes to Sri Lankan defence secretary demanding answers on disappearance of party member

28 April 2007

The letter below was sent by Socialist Equality Party General Secretary Wije Dias to the Sri Lankan defence secretary yesterday protesting against the failure of the police or defence ministry to conduct any serious investigation into the disappearance of SEP member Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and his friend Sivanathan Mathivathanan. More than five weeks after they were last seen by locals, the security forces are yet to confirm or deny arresting the two men. The letter outlines new evidence pointing to attempts by the navy and the Eelam Peoples Democratic Party, which is part of the ruling coalition government in Colombo, to obscure the circumstances in which the pair disappeared.

The SEP urges all of its supporters and readers of the World Socialist Web Site internationally to write to the Sri Lankan authorities to demand they locate Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan. Letters can be sent to:

*Gotabhaya Rajapakse, Secretary of Ministry of Defence
15/5 Baladaksha Mawatha
Colombo 3, Sri Lanka
Fax: 009411 2541529
E-mail: secretary@defence.lk*

*N. G. Punchihewa Director of Complaints and Inquiries
Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission
No. 36, Kinsey Road
Colombo 8, Sri Lanka
Fax: 009411 2694924*

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.

Gotabhaya Rajapakse, Secretary of Ministry of Defence, 15/5 Baladaksha Mawatha, Colombo 3, Sri Lanka

April 27, 2007

Dear Mr Rajapakse,

The Socialist Equality Party lodged a formal complaint with you on March 24, 2007 regarding the disappearance on March 22 of SEP member Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and his friend, Sivanathan Mathivathanan, both residents of Kayts island. At that time, we called on you to initiate an urgent inquiry to locate the two men.

We also informed you that the SEP suspected the involvement of the navy and the Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP) in their disappearance.

Five weeks after the disappearance of Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan, there is no evidence that any official investigation has been undertaken. This is completely unacceptable, and we once again demand that you provide us with information as to their whereabouts.

From our own inquiries, we know that the two men were last seen by locals at about 6.30 p.m. on March 22 riding a motorbike onto the long causeway from Punguduthivu island back toward Kayts island, after collecting some clothes from a friend's house in Madathuveli village.

The naval commander at Gotaimbara camp on Punguduthivu has confirmed that the pair was logged at the navy roadblock coming onto the island at 5.30 p.m. and leaving the island at 6.30 p.m. However, the naval commander at the Velanai camp on Kayts, which is responsible for maintaining the roadblock at the other end of the causeway, has denied all knowledge of the two men, except to say he did not arrest them.

Despite numerous phone calls over the past month, the police and the military have still not told the SEP what happened at the Kayts roadblock on the evening of March 22. We know from our own sources that two plain clothes officers attached to the navy were there, and questioned and body searched Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan as they passed through on their way to Punguduthivu.

Now it has been brought to our attention that a former EPDP member Sithambarapillai Chandrasekaran, known locally as Vakkan Rasan, has been speaking to the wives of the two missing men, telling them that their husbands are in military custody and encouraging them to make false statements to secure the release of the two men. Rasan has close associations with the navy and currently lives in Thuraiyur, Velanai—an area with a heavy navy presence.

Rasan initially visited Mathivathanan's wife, Sulakshana Mathivathanan, saying he was trying to help find her husband. He claimed to be acting on behalf of Mathivathanan's father, an EPDP official who works in the EPDP's Jaffna office. He also hinted that money might be required; pointing to what has become a notorious practice in the Jaffna district—the payment of tens of thousands of rupees in bribes to secure the release of detainees

held by the military.

On April 10, Rasan obtained a letter from Sulakshana in which she described the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of her husband and Wimalaswaran. Rasan said he wanted to show the letter to the Velanai navy officers. The following day, he returned and asked Sulakshana to be ready to accompany him to Point Pedro to see the two detained men.

On April 12, Rasan met Sulakshana and Wimalaswaran's wife, Sivajini Wimalaswaran. He declared that Wimalaswaran's case was difficult and promised to first help with Mathivathanan's release. He asked the two women to go with him to "a certain place". He told Wimalaswaran's wife not to say that the men had been picking up clothes, but that they had gone fishing and returned late.

The women refused to lie or to go with Rasan to the unknown destination. When Wimalaswaran's wife pointed out that she had already set out what she knew in formal complaints to the Human Rights Commission and other bodies, Rasan offered to retrieve the documents.

If the women had made the false statements proposed by Rasan, they would have implicated their husbands in breaching the military regulations covering the area—a ban on fishing from 4 p.m. to 7 a.m. and a curfew from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. There is no evidence that Mathivathanan and Wimalaswaran have broken either regulation.

Rasan made another attempt on April 14 to induce the women to cooperate by producing a letter, purportedly from Mathivathanan, asking his wife to follow Rasan's instructions. According to Sulakshana, the document was an obvious forgery as Mathivathanan is unable to write letters.

Rasan's activities raise disturbing issues. Firstly, he appears to be in close contact with naval officers at the Velanai base and to know that Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan are being detained by the military, possibly at a facility at Point Pedro. Secondly, it seems he consulted with his naval contacts about the contents of Mathivathanan's wife's letter, and then approached the women to change their story.

What relationship does Rasan have with the naval officers at Velanai? Is the navy responsible for his attempts to induce the wives of the two men to lie, and if so, why? The SEP is concerned that, in response to the significant international attention that our campaign has focussed on this case, a deliberate attempt is being made to weave a web of confusion to obscure illegal actions by the Sri Lankan security forces.

Our fears were reinforced by another incident on April 15. At about 4.45 p.m., two men, who introduced themselves as naval intelligence officers, sought out Mathivathanan's wife. To explain the lengthy delay in making any inquiries, they claimed they had been on leave, but were now looking into the disappearance of Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan.

Their main concern was with Mathivathanan's political affiliations. Was he a member of the SEP? They were aware that the SEP had made a formal complaint. Sulakshana explained that Mathivathanan was not an SEP member. They also asked whether the two men had been travelling back to Kayts from Punguduthivu or from Jaffna town. Sulakshana answered Punguduthivu, pointing

out that the Punguduthivu commanding officer had told her that the two men left his island at 6.30 p.m. "If so then our people near the [Velanai] bridge would have taken them [into custody]," one of the naval intelligence officers said.

Is this the start of a naval investigation into the two men's disappearance? If so, why have the SEP and the men's families not been officially informed? Why the delay of more than three weeks? Why are naval intelligence officers involved, when the SEP has been specifically informed by your staff that the police are in charge of the case? Why the particular interest in political affiliation, rather than the men's whereabouts? What relevance does SEP membership have to the investigation?

Further, did the two naval intelligence officers question the officers in charge of the Velanai naval base and the Kayts police who are responsible for security on the island? If so, what answers did they receive? If they have not spoken to the relevant officials, why not?

More than a month has now elapsed since Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan disappeared. Your failure to conduct any proper investigation may be seriously compromising the two men's health and well-being, if not their lives. Defence Ministry Additional Secretary Mrs. H.K. Balasooriya has simply informed us that senior police officials are looking into the matter. Another additional secretary, Mr. Sunil S. Sirisena, told us he would contact the Navy commander to investigate the disappearance. The Terrorist Investigation Division (TID), the body responsible for interrogating and detaining so-called terrorist suspects, is yet to confirm or deny whether it is holding the pair. The Deputy Inspector General (DIG) in charge of the Northern Range and the DIG of the Jaffna district have both refused to supply any information about their inquiries. The officer-in-charge of the Kayts police told us that "higher ups" had ordered him not to divulge any information.

The SEP strongly protests the failure of your ministry to provide the most basic answers. We demand to know if the two men have been detained and, if so, by whom and why. Where are they currently being held? In what conditions?

If Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan have been detained, we demand their immediate release. The two men have broken no law and are thus being held illegally. If they have not been detained, we insist on a full explanation of the steps your ministry and the police have taken to locate them. In either case, we hold you fully responsible for their safety and well-being.

The SEP expects a prompt and satisfactory reply to this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Wije Dias,

General Secretary,

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact