

# Sri Lankan authorities continue to stall over disappearance of SEP member

Our correspondent  
5 April 2007

The lack of any action by Sri Lankan security forces to locate Socialist Equality Party (SEP) member Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and his friend, Sivanathan Mathivathanan, raises serious concerns about their safety and further points to the involvement of the military in their disappearance.

The two men have been missing since March 22. They were last seen at about 6.30 p.m. at a military roadblock at the beginning of a long causeway connecting the northern islands of Punguduthivu and Kayts. Wimalaswaran was riding on the back of his friend's motorbike to pick up some clothes at a rented house on Punguduthivu and then return to Kayts, where they both live.

The commanding officer at the Punguduthivu naval camp, Hemantha Peiris, told the SEP that the pair had been recorded at the roadblock as arriving on the island at 5.30 p.m. and leaving at 6.30 p.m. An eyewitness on Punguduthivu saw Wimalaswaran, aged 27, and Mathivathanan, 24, stopped at the roadblock then restarting the motorbike in preparation for entering the causeway. An eyewitness on Kayts said she saw a motorbike crossing the causeway at about the same time.

No information is available about what happened at the roadblock at the Kayts end of the causeway. The commanding officer at the Velanai naval camp on Kayts, Silva, denied any knowledge of the two men and declared that his personnel had not arrested them. Further phone calls by the SEP have been met with a wall of silence. A naval officer refused to provide any information, including his own name, "on security grounds".

The Kayts roadblock is visible from a nearby village during the day time, but cannot be seen clearly at dusk. Moreover, at around 6.30 p.m., most villagers, fearing the military, are inside their houses well before curfew, which begins at 8 p.m. and lasts until 5 a.m.

The roadblock is normally manned by about 15 navy personnel, but an eyewitness told the WWS that two Criminal Investigation Department (CID) police officers were also present at about 5.30 p.m. when Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan were heading over to Punguduthivu Island. The two CID officers are fluent Tamil speakers, are regularly involved in interrogating locals at roadblocks in the area and have the power to arbitrarily detain people "on suspicion".

So far, the evidence strongly suggests that Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan were apprehended by the CID and navy on Kayts, and, at the very least, taken into custody.

Both men are fishermen who were on the causeway in the course of carrying out their normal daily activities. While the SEP has lodged complaints with the Punguduthivu naval camp, the Velanai naval camp, the Kayts police and the Defence Ministry in Colombo, it has received no formal replies, nor any indication that any serious investigation has begun.

Defence ministry additional secretary H.K. Balasooriya has failed to provide any details of police inquiries, despite several phone calls by the SEP insisting on the urgency of the case. When pressed to speak to naval officials in the area, she claimed that she had no authority to directly contact the navy camps on Kayts and Punguduthivu.

Yesterday, Balasooriya told the SEP that she had asked Terrorist

Investigation Division (TID) director Chandra Vakishta if the TID police unit had arrested Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan. She said she had not yet received a response and claimed she had no power to insist on one. "I cannot pressurise them to give a definite time [to reply]," the additional secretary said.

The Jaffna islands, including Kayts and Punguduthivu, are under the tight control of the Sri Lankan navy, which operates in collaboration with the paramilitary wing of the Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP)—a partner in the ruling coalition. The navy has a large base at Karainagar Island as well as camps at Allaipiddy and Velanai on Kayts Island and on the islands of Punguduthivu, Mandathivu and Nainathivu.

The military oversees every aspect of life on these islands. It enforces a strict curfew and carries out regular cordon and search operations, mans road blocks at all entrances and exits, as well as at other locations on the islands, and carries out routine patrols. For several months, fishing was completely banned, and is now limited to the hours of 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. in shallow waters only. These restrictions have left many fishing families destitute.

Throughout Sri Lanka's North and East, hundreds of people have "disappeared" or been murdered over the past year, most likely by military-sponsored death squads. Two other young men were reported missing on the Jaffna peninsula on the same day that Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan disappeared.

In a prominent case on Kayts Island, Catholic priest Thiruchchelvan Nihal Jim Brown and his assistant Wenceslaus Vincas Vimalathas disappeared last August. An eyewitness saw men wearing bullet proof vests on two motorbikes following the pair after they left the Allaipiddy navy check point. Northern region navy commander Rear Admiral Upali Ranaweera denied the navy had arrested the two men. Navy personnel stated that the priest and his assistant passed through the Allaipiddy check point but refused police requests for records and evidence.

The SEP is well known throughout Sri Lanka for its opposition to the civil war and its demand that the Colombo government immediately withdraw all armed forces from the North and East of the island. Wimalaswaran, a member of the SEP for nearly 10 years, is known throughout the area as an open opponent of the war, and defender of the rights of working people.

The SEP demands that the Sri Lankan government, the military and police carry out an urgent investigation to locate Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan and immediately inform the party of their whereabouts. At the same time we call on all *World Socialist Web Site* readers to send urgent letters to the Sri Lankan authorities, demanding that they release all the information in their possession relating to the two men, and conduct such an investigation.

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 WSWWS editorial board please use this online form  
Below is a further selection of the letters sent so far.

1 April 2007

Dear Sir,

At the press conference it held on March 30, the Socialist Equality Party announced the disappearance of Nadarajah Wimalaswaran, a long standing member of that party, and his friend Sivanathan Mathivathanan, both residents of the northern island of Kayts, on March 22 last.

The SEP has further stated that Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan were last seen at around 6.30 p.m. that day on Punguduthivu Island, riding a motor bike toward a long causeway connecting it to Kayts island, where they both live. The commander at the Punguduthivu navy camp claimed the two men passed through the navy roadblock on his side of the causeway. The commander of the Velanai navy camp in Kayts Island, in charge of the roadblock at the other end, denied any knowledge of them.

Since the causeway itself is under military control, one is compelled to suspect that the navy is either directly responsible for their disappearance or has access to those who witnessed it.

The SEP has raised the demand that a prompt and proper inquiry be conducted into this disappearance and the culprits be brought to book. I wholeheartedly support this demand.

The SEP is the sole organisation in Sri Lanka that works alike amongst the Tamil- and Sinhala-speaking people for a socialist solution to the crisis confronting the working masses. Over the past two decades, it has opposed the war and stood for the democratic rights of the Tamil-speaking people. It has constantly worked to educate and unite Sinhala and Tamil workers on the basis of socialist internationalism. It has opposed Sinhala chauvinism as well as Tamil separatism. The destruction of a cadre of such a party is an enormous blow to the working people, not just in this country but all over the world. I insist that the demand raised by the SEP for a proper inquiry be heeded with due regard.

T.H.Ismail

Committee member

Sri Lanka Telecom Employees Union

Dear Sir,

The report of the disappearance of the Socialist Equality Party member Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and his friend Sivanathan Mathivathanan of the northern island of Kayts has again raised concern about the democratic rights of citizens of Sri Lanka.

The Socialist Equality Party has a long history of bitter struggle for the democratic rights of people in Sri Lanka and around the world. It is well known for its opposition to all types of nationalism and also to LTTE separatism. In this context, the disappearance of Nadarajah Wimalaswaran can be believed to have its roots in the political ideology he supports and practices.

The area in which this incident took place is under the control of government security forces. Therefore I urge you to investigate the

incident and to find the whereabouts of the above mentioned citizens.

Thank you

SW

31 March 2007

Secretary Rajapakse and Director Punchihewa,

I am writing to express my accord with the Socialist Equality Party's campaign to find the whereabouts, and to secure the liberty of, Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and his friend Sivanathan Mathivathanan, who disappeared in the northern Jaffna islands on March 22.

I am demanding that your government and the defence ministry immediately conduct an urgent and full investigation in order to locate the two men.

I am reproducing two letters that have already been written, published on the *World Socialist Web Site*, which express far more than I could myself. I am in complete agreement with all who express support for the Sri Lankan government to initiate and sustain some efforts toward securing liberty for these disappeared men.

CK

Chicago

Dear Mr. Rajapakse,

I am writing to demand that the Defence Ministry immediately make a full investigation into the disappearance of Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and his friend, Sivanathan Mathivathanan, who were last seen by a friend and a relative on the evening of March 22 in the town of Madathuveli on Punguduthivu Island. Mr. Wimalaswaran is a member of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), and the SEP has formally lodged complaints with the government authorities (including your office) regarding their disappearance, but it appears that no action by the government has yet been taken. This is a very serious situation considering the escalation of the war against the LTTE over the past several months.

People all over the world are anxious for the well-being of these two men and will hold the Sri Lankan government responsible for the safety of Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and Sivanathan Mathivathanan.

Sincerely,

JP

USA



To contact the WSWWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**