

Sri Lankan magistrate directs police to investigate disappearance of SEP member

Our correspondent
14 May 2007

A magistrate's court on Kayts Island in northern Sri Lanka on Thursday called on police to conduct a proper investigation into the disappearance of Socialist Equality Party (SEP) member Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and his friend, Sivanathan Mathivathanan. The pair has now been missing since March 22.

The Kayts magistrate Jeyaram Trotsky was responding to a letter presented in court by the wives of the two men requesting that he direct the police to expedite their inquiry. The letter explained that although a formal complaint was submitted on March 25, "[we] have not been informed of any steps taken to investigate the disappearance of our husbands and to find them."

Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan were last seen on at motorbike at about 6.30 p.m. heading onto a causeway connecting Punguduthivu Island to Kayts Island after picking up some clothes from a friend's house in the village of Madathuveli. They would have had to pass through a naval checkpoint at the Kayts end of the causeway. But the commanding officer of the Velanai camp, which is responsible for the checkpoint, has told the SEP that he knows nothing about the two men or their disappearance.

The two women stated in their letter to the court: "We strongly suspect that the security forces are involved in the disappearance of our husbands and are deeply concerned that the police have failed to properly investigate the case and to keep us informed. We urge you to order the police to carry out a full and urgent inquiry into all aspects of this grave incident and ensure our husbands' safe return."

After reading the letter, the Kayts magistrate pointed to the growing international attention being focussed on human rights violations in Sri Lanka and called on the

police to properly investigate the case. He directed the responsible police officer to appear at the next court hearing and instructed the police to inform the Punguduthivu and Velanai navy camps to attend as well. The next hearing is fixed for May 18.

Over the past year, as the Sri Lankan government has plunged the country back to civil war, hundreds of civilians, mainly Tamils, have disappeared or been murdered. Government forces regularly deny any involvement but these deaths squads simply could not operate without the tacit support of the police and military, which maintain strict security throughout the war zones of the North and East.

The Jaffna branch of the Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission (SLHRC) announced on Thursday that 80 disappearances have been reported in the first four months of the year on the Jaffna peninsula and surrounding island such as Kayts. Some 70 young people, fearing they will be abducted or killed, have surrendered to the commission and have been put in "protective custody" in Jaffna prison.

The SLHRC is an official government body, which has virtually no powers. As its spokesman explained, the commission can only keep records of the missing and appeal for their release. Last weekend two more civilians were abducted at Sarasalai near Jaffna.

Since Tuesday Jaffna college students, supported by their parents, have been demanding the release of four students who were seized recently by armed men in white vans. Fearing angry demonstrations, the military stationed squads of soldiers near schools in Jaffna this week. "White vans" have been associated with death squads and disappearances in Sri Lanka over decades.

The SEP calls on its supporters and WSWs readers to continue to support our campaign by writing to Sri Lankan authorities to demand an immediate and

exhaustive inquiry into the disappearance of Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan.

Letters can be sent to the following addresses:

Gotabhaya Rajapakse, Secretary of Ministry of Defence,
15/5 Baladaksha Mawatha,
Colombo 3, Sri Lanka
Fax: 009411 2541529
Email: 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.

The following petition was signed by 40 people who attended a memorial meeting held in Paris on April 15 for Raveenthiranathan Senthil Ravee, a member of International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) who was tragically killed in a motor accident.

Appeal for the release of Socialist Equality Party member Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and his friend Sivanathan Mathivathanan.

Dear Sir,

It is almost a month since Socialist Equality Party (SEP) member Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and his friend Sivanathan Mathivathanan disappeared while travelling through two navy roadblocks near the 3.8 kilometre causeway connecting Kayts, their residential area, and Punguduthivu.

Through its investigations the SEP has established that:

1. Both of them were body checked and questioned by two police officers and naval personnel when they passed through the Kayts end of the causeway in the afternoon of March 22.

2. Subsequently they went through the Punguduthivu checkpoint and at about 6.30 p.m. they returned through the Punguduthivu checkpoint and travelled in the direction of Kayts. The commanding officer of the

Punguduthivu camp has confirmed their movements through the Punguduthivu checkpoint.

As you know, the Kayts area is under the close control of the navy. There is every indication that military personnel or the police are either directly responsible or complicit in the disappearance of these two persons.

The continued silence of the authorities to appeals made by the SEP as well as members of the public, nationally and internationally, confirms our well-grounded suspicions as to the culpability of the state forces.

Under these circumstances, we, who consider that the democratic rights of the people are of paramount importance, demand that the Defence Ministry takes immediate measures to secure the prompt release of Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and Sivanathan Mathivathanan and apprehend those responsible for their disappearance.

We also demand that the government conduct a serious investigation into the murder of SEP supporter Sivapragasam Mariyadas at his home in Mullipothana in the eastern Trincomalee district on August 7, 2007 and prosecute those who carried out this killing.



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