

Sri Lankan police harass witnesses in case of murdered SEP supporter

Our correspondent
18 May 2007

A magistrate in the Kantalai court in eastern Sri Lanka last month postponed the case of Socialist Equality Party supporter Sivapragasam Mariyadas, who was murdered on August 7 last year. The magistrate did not challenge a request for a further delay, made by the crime investigation division (CID) of Trincomalee police. No evidence was presented that the police have carried out any serious investigation.

Mariyadas was shot dead by a gunman on the night of August 7 at his home in Mullipothana in Trincomalee district. His murder had all the hallmarks of a well-planned murder carried out by one of the death squads that operate, either directly or indirectly, under the wing of the country's security forces.

The killing took place as President Mahinda Rajapakse ordered the military onto the offensive in the East of the island. Heavy security had been imposed throughout government-controlled areas, including Mullipothana, making it difficult for anyone to move about at night without being challenged. After Mariyadas's murder, local security forces spread the slander that he was an LTTE supporter.

The SEP and the *World Socialist Web Site* have waged a campaign for more than nine months to demand that the Sri Lankan authorities find and prosecute Mariyadas's killers. Like hundreds of other cases of murder or disappearance over the past year, in which the security forces are implicated, the police inquiry to date has been characterised by inaction, buck-passing and evasion. The investigation has been passed to four different investigative officers in three different towns.

The response of Sri Lankan authorities to the SEP's campaign has not been to order the police to conduct a full and thorough investigation, but to harass witnesses and those who have supported the call for Mariyadas's killers to be found and punished.

On March 1, a police officer met Asoka Handagama, a prominent film director, at his workplace in the Central Bank of Sri Lanka. Handagama was directly asked why he had issued a statement supporting the SEP campaign on the killing of Mariyadas and whether he knew the victim. Handagama said that although he did not know Mariyadas, he opposed such killings and defended basic democratic rights.

On March 4, Mariyadas's wife Krishanthi was asked to come to the local police station where a CID officer asked whom she

suspected had killed her husband. Krishanthi reminded the officer that she had already made several detailed statements to police and declared that she knew nothing more than had been published in several SEP statements.

On the same day, police also called in Ranjan, a friend of Mariyadas who owned a pharmacy in Mullipothana. He was questioned, not about the murder, but Mariyadas's political activities and his contact with SEP members. After the killing, Ranjan sold his business and moved out of the town.

On March 7, the officer in charge of the Trincomalee CID branch interrogated Mariyadas's two brothers, Sivapragasam Benedict and Jesudas. The officer had in front of him copies of WSWs articles on the murder and appeared particularly interested in the brothers' attitude to the SEP. He also wanted to know whether they thought the owner of the building in which Mariyadas had his photographic studio could have killed their brother.

All these developments point to a campaign on the part of the police to intimidate witnesses and SEP supporters as well as to identify a possible scapegoat on whom to pin the murder. There is no indication that the police have taken the basic step of interrogating members of the security forces who were on duty at the time, or processed forensic evidence collected at the scene.

Mariyadas was just one of hundreds of people who have been abducted or killed over the past year as the Rajapakse government has plunged the country back to war. The very conservative records of the Civil Monitoring Committee (CMC) show 103 people disappeared between July 2006 and April 2007—mostly Tamils in Colombo and the North and East of the island. According to the Asian Human Rights Commission, at least 1,000 people disappeared in 2006 and, by April, another 300 cases were reported this year.

The SEP is also waging an ongoing campaign to demand the Sri Lankan authorities investigate the disappearance of SEP member Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and his friend Sivanathan Mathivathanan. The two men were last seen around 6.30 p.m. on March 22 heading toward a naval checkpoint on the causeway between Punguduthivu and Kayts islands in northern Jaffna peninsula.

The SEP once again calls on its supporters and WSWs

readers to support our efforts to force the Sri Lankan authorities to investigate these cases and to bring those responsible to justice. Our campaign is an important blow against the Sri Lankan government's abuse of democratic rights and its attempts to intimidate and terrorise anyone opposed to its renewed war.

Protest letters over the Mariyadas murder 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.

Below is a selection of letters and petitions sent to Sri Lankan authorities.

Dear Mr. Secretary,

I am writing to you to once again express my concern over the killing of Sivapragasam Mariyadas at his home in Mullipothana in the eastern Trincomalee district August 7, 2006.

From my understanding of the facts, Mr Mariyadas was murdered for his political views, namely, his opposition to the war and bloodshed in your country.

Murder is a serious allegation. A political murder is even more so. That these allegations could have been left uninvestigated is worst of all, and reflects very poorly on your civil administration.

I therefore strongly urge that your office conduct a vigorous investigation into this matter, and hold those culpable parties fully accountable under the law.

Time is of the essence with these types of investigations—justice must only be done but must also be seen to be done. I hope to hear through the international media that your office has not only undertaken this investigation, but was successful in identifying and apprehending suspects.

Again, we would be grateful for any intervention from your office.

Yours sincerely,

DP

Regina, Canada

To Inspector General of Police Victor Perera, and Attorney General K.C. Kamalasabeyson,

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 magistrates 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.

JG, Spain

Dear Sir,

Inquiry into the murder of Sivapragasam Mariyadas who is a supporter of the Socialist Equality Party.

We wish to write to you regarding the above case. The late Mr Mariyadas was a supporter of the Socialist Equality Party, which is campaigning for a proper inquiry about his murder. Our union strongly supports this campaign.

Mr Mariyadas helped the SEP's political activity in a democratic way but unfortunately he was shot and died at his house at Mullipothana in Trincomalee District, after a series of threats by government armed forces, according to the SEP's sources. His murder is a great blow to democracy. So we kindly request you to make a free and fair inquiry and bring the accused in front of the law and justice as soon as possible.

Thank you.

Faithfully,

Malayaga Progressive Teachers Union (MPTU), Sri Lanka



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact