

Sri Lankan police stall on disappearance of SEP member

Our correspondents
2 August 2007

Sri Lankan police again appeared before court last week with nothing to show in the case of missing Socialist Equality Party (SEP) member Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and his friend Sivanathan Mathivathanan, and asked for another extension of time.

Both men disappeared on March 22. They were last seen entering a long causeway connecting the northern islands of Punguduthivu and Kayts. The Sri Lankan navy, which has a heavy presence throughout the area, maintains checkpoints at both ends of the causeway. The naval commander in charge of the Punguduthivu checkpoint has confirmed Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan passed through, but the officer in charge at the other end denies any knowledge of the pair.

The police have not taken the basic step of taking statements from the naval commanders from Punguduthivu and Velanai (Kayts) and the naval personnel on duty on March 22. At a hearing of the Kayts magistrates' court on July 20, the police failed to produce the statements they were directed by the presiding magistrate to produce a month before and asked for another month.

S.E. Ehanathan, legal representative for the wives of the two men, objected to the police actions and asked the magistrate to direct the police to submit a witness list of the relevant navy officers. The police were given until July 27, but last Friday again appeared before the court without the list. Another hearing is set for August 3, giving the police another week to draw up the list.

The legal case has dragged on since May 10, when the two wives lodged a formal complaint. After being directed to do so, the Officer in Charge of the Kayts police, Gunasekera, and a naval officer from the Velanai navy camp, D.M.S. Dasanayake, did appear in court on May 18. Nearly two months after the men disappeared, it was apparent that the police had taken no action to find them. The SEP, not the police, found eyewitnesses to the

movements of Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan on March 22.

The magistrate directed the police to take statements from the wives and ordered the commanding officers from Velanai and Punguduthivu to attend a full day session of the court on June 15. The two naval personnel did not appear in court and the police had made no attempt to contact them. The only statements produced were from two eyewitnesses—one who saw Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan being questioned at the Kayts checkpoint on their way to Punguduthivu, and a second who saw them at the Punguduthivu checkpoint preparing to return.

The contemptuous attitude of the police and navy toward the court is not unusual. Hundreds of people, mainly Tamils, have disappeared or been murdered in the past year since the government of President Mahinda Rajapakse plunged the country back to civil war. Strong circumstantial evidence points to the involvement of the security forces and allied Tamil paramilitaries. In all but a handful of cases, the police have taken no action to find the victims or arrest the culprits.

Jeyaratnam Anureka, 20, told the WSWS about the disappearance of her husband, Jesuthasan Jeyaratnam. They were both injured in fighting last August between the navy and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) at Allaipiddy on Kayts Island, where the family was living. After leaving the hospital, they stayed with their two children at the Navanturai St. Nicolas refugee camp.

Jeyaratnam and several others started going to Allaipiddy to collect and sell palmayrah wood to earn a little money. The men had to cross from Jaffna to Kayts via a long bridge with an entry point at Pannai manned by the navy. There was another check point at Allaipiddy where a navy camp was also located. The naval personnel accused villagers from Allaipiddy of helping the LTTE,

but Anureka said her husband had no connection to the LTTE.

On February 7, Jeyaratnam went missing. The man who was with him, Santhanam Baskaran, reluctantly told Anureka that her husband had been detained at the Pannai checkpoint. Anureka said she had asked at the Pannai and Allaipiddy checkpoints but those on duty denied any knowledge of the disappearance. She lodged formal complaints with the police, the Jaffna branch of the Human Rights Commission and the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM) office but to no avail. The police declared they could do nothing.

We urge SEP supporters and WSWS readers to demand that Sri Lankan authorities immediately conduct a full inquiry into the disappearance of Wimalaewaran and Mathivathanan and secure their safe release. This is a part of the broader campaign to defend democratic rights, upon which the government is flagrantly trampling as it intensifies its communal war.

Letters can be sent to:

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

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We publish below a selection of recent letters.

We publish below a letter received recently.

Dear Sir,

Re: Disappearance of Socialist Equality Party (SEP) member, Nadarajah Wimalaewaran, and his friend, Sivanathan Mathivathanan.

I am writing to register my strong concern over the still unexplained disappearance on 22 March this year of Socialist Equality Party member Nadarajah Wimalaewaran and his friend Sivanathan Mathivathanan while travelling on a causeway from Punguduthivu Island

to Velanai on Kayts Island.

Witnesses have placed the missing men restarting their motorbike at the Punguduthivu checkpoint as they prepared to head onto the long causeway back to Kayts. The men subsequently disappeared. The causeway is under strict surveillance by the navy, which maintains checkpoints at both its ends and therefore must be able to account for all persons entering and leaving the causeway.

Yet the investigation into this case by the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission has been met with obstruction from the armed forces and the police. A recent article on the *World Socialist Web Site* (27 July) stated that, "Evasion by the navy and also the police in conducting a proper investigation into this disappearance for more than three months has once again confirmed the suspicion of their involvement in the disappearance."

The article continues: "The lack of action by the Sri Lankan police and the Human Rights Commission is scandalous. Hundreds of people, mainly Tamils, have been 'disappeared' or murdered since President Mahinda Rajapakse won office in November 2005 and plunged the country back to war. On July 18, villagers on Kayts found the decomposed body of a 22-year-old youth, who had been missing for six months. The body, which had been tied to a concrete pillar with nylon rope, was found in a well at Sinnamadu.

"All the evidence in these cases points to the operation of death squads run by the security forces or allied Tamil paramilitaries. In very few of the cases have the police identified, let alone arrested and charged, any suspects."

Many people around the world are aware of these disappearances and are following this investigation very closely. I look forward to serious progress being made in the case of Nadarajah Wimalaewaran and Sivanathan Mathivathanan, resulting in determining their status and whereabouts.

Yours faithfully,

NC

Glasgow, Britain



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