

Sri Lanka kidnaps LTTE leader

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Sri Lankan military intelligence operatives last week seized the newly appointed leader of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Selvarasa Pathmanathan, in South East Asia and flew him back to Colombo. While the details remain unclear, this secretive operation breached basic democratic rights and flouted international and local law.

Pathmanathan, also known as KP, was for many years the LTTE's alleged principal fundraiser and procurer of arms. After the Sri Lankan military defeated the LTTE in mid-May and killed its main leaders, including V. Prabhakaran, Pathmanathan claimed the leadership and announced the establishment of a so-called transnational government in exile.

The Sri Lankan government has been appealing to countries around the world to suppress the "terrorist" LTTE, in particular targeting Pathmanathan and other leaders in exile. Last week's snatch operation demonstrates that the Sri Lankan regime will go to any length to destroy the remnants of the LTTE.

Military spokesman Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara initially told the media that Pathmanathan was seized in Thailand, but Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva denied that claim. Subsequent media reports suggest that the LTTE leader was captured in the Tune Hotel in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur, then handed over to a Sri Lankan military intelligence operative. Pathmanathan apparently moved to Malaysia after he was arrested in Thailand in 2007 but escaped from custody.

Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak would not confirm or deny the report, saying he did "not have any information on the matter," and called for a formal inquiry. Tune Hotel management later reported that its security cameras had not recorded Pathmanathan's arrest.

It is hardly surprising that the Malaysian government

has denied any knowledge of, or collaboration, in the operation. Najib does not want to disturb economic and political relations with Sri Lanka, or to inflame sentiment among Malaysia's substantial ethnic Indian minority. In May, Malaysian police cracked down on protests by Tamils against the Sri Lankan military's war crimes.

Colombo has not denied reports that Pathmanathan was captured in Malaysia. Defence spokesman *Keheliya Rambukwella* told the media on August 7 that the operation had been carried out with the assistance of officials from an Asian country. It is certainly possible that the Malaysian government or sections of its security apparatus collaborated with their Sri Lankan counterparts in grabbing Pathmanathan.

Visuvanathan Rudrakumaran, appointed by Pathmanathan to prepare the LTTE's "transnational government," also claimed that the Sri Lankan military intelligence probably had the support of certain sections of the Malaysian defence or intelligence establishment.

In the wake of the LTTE's military collapse, bitter differences have emerged in its exile leadership. Pathmanathan had been under attack for announcing the death of LTTE chief Prabhakaran and for advocating a moderate approach. D.B.S. Jeyaraj, a columnist for the *Daily Mirror*, suggested: "The venomous attacks on KP in sections of the Tiger (LTTE) media abroad indicate a very high level of hostility towards KP... There is strong suspicion that valuable 'inside' information about KP's moves was leaked out."

The Sri Lankan operation follows the pattern set by the US in the wake of the September 11 attacks on the US. American agents have been responsible for seizing scores of "terrorist suspects" around the world, with or without the collaboration of local authorities. The detainees were either sent to prison camps like Guantánamo Bay or "rendered" to third countries for

interrogation and torture.

Interpol issued an arrest warrant for Pathmanathan several years ago on charges of gun-running. He is also on India's wanted list in connection with the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by a suicide bomber in 1991. However, Pathmanathan's capture flouted the normal legal procedures for arrest and extradition. Without or without the collusion of Malaysian authorities, he was snatched and spirited out of the country along with his aide "Appu". Both are being held without trial in the custody of the Terrorist Investigation Department (TID), which is notorious for torture.

The Colombo media has reported that the police and military are questioning Pathmanathan to extract information about the LTTE's international network in preparation for a more extensive crackdown. In an unprecedented move, Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse, the brother of President Mahinda Rajapakse, interrogated Pathmanathan last week for an hour.

The kidnapping was devised at the highest levels of the Sri Lankan government and state apparatus. According to *Nation* columnist Tissa Ravindra Perera: "The entire operation had been secretly planned between Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse and Chief of National Intelligence Major General Kapila Hendawitharana." Columnist Jeyaraj wrote that the government recently appointed Brigadier Udaya Perera as the deputy high commissioner to Kuala Lumpur to coordinate "operation KP".

The government and media have openly bragged about the success of the operation. An editorial in the *Daily Mirror* entitled, "Sri Lanka: Asia's new Israel?" compared Sri Lankan military intelligence with the lawless activities of Israel's notorious Mossad in hunting down and, in some cases killing, the leaders of various Palestinian groups.

"If the precision of the feat of annihilating the entire local leadership of the world's most sophisticated terrorist group did not win the deserved accolades for Sri Lanka abroad, then at least this will make the global powers realise that here is a force to reckon with. One should not be surprised if some nations opt to seek the assistance of Sri Lankan sleuths to crack down on their own enemies," the editorial boasted.

The operation is just one more demonstration of the government's contempt for democratic rights and, in

this case, international law. The regime is currently detaining nearly 300,000 Tamil civilians in violation of their rights. Thousands of young people have been dragged out of the detention camps for more intensive interrogation in secret prisons where they can be held indefinitely without charge. Over the past three years, hundreds of people have been murdered or "disappeared" by pro-government death squads acting in collaboration with the security forces.

Far from scaling back the security forces built up over the more than two decades of civil war, the Rajapakse government is expanding the army and police. Sooner rather than later, its police-state measures will be directly against workers and the rural poor as they seek to defend their living standards against intensifying attacks on jobs, wages and essential services. Rajapakse has already announced an "economic war" to impose the burden of the country's deepening economic crisis on the working class.



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