

Sri Lankan military kills alleged ‘LTTE suspects’

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The Sri Lankan military claimed last week to have killed three alleged “LTTE leaders,” saying they were trying to “revive” the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam, which was militarily crushed in May 2009.

On April 11, Sri Lankan defence spokesman Brigadier Ruwan Wanigasooriya told the media that the military killed Kajeepan Ponnaiah Selvanayagam, alias Gopi, in overnight skirmishes in the jungle near Nedunkerni in the northern Vavuniya district.

Gopi, Wanigasooriya claimed, was the leader of an attempt to “revive the LTTE within the pro-Tiger Tamil diaspora.” Others killed were Sundaralingam Kajeepan, alias Thevihan, and another man believed to be Navaratnam Navaneethan, alias Appan. The military said the operation involved hundreds of soldiers.

The military has provided no evidence for any of its claims. The killings occurred amid intensified propaganda by President Mahinda Rajapakse’s government that the LTTE is being resuscitated. Since early March, the military has unleashed a terror and intimidation campaign in the north, detaining over 60 people, including 10 women, under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act.

According to official statements, the men were in a house and were shot dead when they tried to escape. The military, notorious for its targeted killings, torture, detention and interrogations, had no interest in detaining the individuals to question them about the so-called LTTE revival.

The entire story smacks of a staged incident and is riddled with contradictions. Earlier, a defence spokesman said a Sri Lankan soldier had been killed but later “corrected” this, stating that he lost his life in preparatory exercises before the operation. The Jaffna-based *Uthayan* reported that Gopi had been in military

custody. The defence ministry released photos showing dozens of soldiers after the operation, but no photographs of the three Tamils were published.

Gopi’s body was identified at the Anuradhapura hospital by his father-in-law S. Balakurubaran, detained mother S. Rasamalar, and wife Sarmila. A local magistrate ordered the bodies buried at government expense in Anuradhapura.

S. Balakurubaran told the BBC’s Tamil service that his son-in-law’s body had gunshot wounds under the chest and lower stomach. Gopi worked in Saudi Arabia for three years following his marriage. “Since January there have been no communications with him. Now I’ve seen him as a dead body,” he said.

Brigadier Wanigasooriya claimed that an “attempted resurgence of terrorism” had emerged “in the general area of Pallai in the Jaffna Peninsula,” with information “surfacing” about “several key suspects leading the campaign.”

Wanigasooriya said a local group was “functioning under the instructions of LTTE leaders Nediyan and Vinayagam, based in Europe and preparing the ground for another armed campaign.” He alleged that those killed had participated in LTTE activities before the separatist organisation was defeated in 2009.

The supposed LTTE revival is part of the Rajapakse government’s justification for the occupation of the north and east by hundreds of thousands of soldiers.

Mahinda Samarasinghe, Sri Lanka’s special envoy on human rights and plantations minister, told the media that Colombo had been “criticised about the presence of the military in the north” and asked by international governments at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva to “scale down” its operations. The increasing military presence, however, was taken “in view of the national security needs,” he insisted,

and the latest incident provided “clear evidence of that.”

Samarasinghe was referring to the US-sponsored resolution passed last month by the UNHRC. It called for the Office of Human Rights Commissioner to investigate human rights violations, including war crimes, committed during the Sri Lankan government’s military offensive against the LTTE.

The US, which fully endorsed the war against the LTTE, pushed through the resolution with backing of its European allies, not out of concern for human rights but to force Colombo to distance itself from Beijing as part of Washington’s strategic encirclement of China.

The Rajapakse government’s claims of a resurgence of the LTTE are not simply seeking to justify its military occupation of the north and east. The government is whipping up anti-Tamil communalism to divide the working class and divert the growing opposition of workers, youth and rural poor against the escalating attacks on living conditions and basic rights.

Reports indicate that military and paramilitary goons are threatening and intimidating people throughout Sri Lanka’s north. Thousands of youth detained after the war as LTTE suspects and released following “rehabilitation” are being targeted in particular.

On Monday, a group of thugs, suspected to be from military intelligence, assaulted Sivagnanam Selvatheepan, a journalist for the Jaffna-based *Yarl Thinakk ural*, *Valampuri* and the Colombo-based Tamil daily *Veerakesari*. Selvatheepan was viciously attacked after being followed by four masked men on motorbikes on Jaffna’s Point Pedro road. The journalist is in hospital with head injuries and a broken leg.

WSWS reporters spoke with several residents from the north, who condemned the military terror campaign. A fisherman from the war-devastated Vanni said: “We have to struggle for our daily livelihood. We were unable to do any fishing and lived in poverty during the war. We had to take out bank loans to pay for fishing gear and are now struggling to pay these loans. Once again, we have military oppression imposed on us.

“We heard that the pass system [which restricts fishermen going to sea] would be imposed again. We’ve also been asked to tell the military if any new people come to our homes. They often interrogate the youth who are ‘rehabilitated.’ We fear that we are back in wartime again. The many political parties that came

to meet us during elections are not coming to meet us in this situation. We feel we are isolated.”

A Jaffna resident said: “After the resolution was passed in Geneva, the government resorted to a communalist campaign... We don’t see any counter actions by the TNA [Tamil National Alliance, a coalition of Tamil capitalist parties] against the government’s actions. They talk about the international powers and Geneva, but they did nothing when people were arrested and tortured by the military. We think that votes that we cast for them [in the recent northern provincial council election] are useless.”

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