

# Police kill young worker in northern Sri Lanka

Our correspondents  
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Hundreds of villagers protested near Pointpedro on Monday and Tuesday over the police shooting of a young worker. The town is situated on the northernmost point of the Jaffna Peninsula, where the Tamil residents were the victims of racist police violence and killings in 1984.

Yogarajah Thinesh, a 24-year-old man from Thunnalai village, was killed on Sunday evening while riding on the back of a lorry. He was sitting on a load of sand. According to reports, police opened fire with a T-56 assault rifle, hitting him in the chest and hip.

The police claimed the lorry was carrying illegally mined sand and they opened fire because the driver failed to heed orders to stop. The police admitted that two officers from a police post chased the vehicle by motorcycle and shot at it.

The vehicle driver and another person allegedly fled the scene and the police launched a search operation to apprehend them. Under normal police practices, officers are supposed to stop suspect vehicles and make arrests but they appear to have deliberately fired at Thinesh.

According to reports, angry and distraught Thunnalai villagers and nearby residents attacked the area's police post and the home of the police sub-inspector involved in the shooting. A police jeep was also damaged. Heavily-armed Special Task Force (STF) members and an armoured vehicle were mobilised to intimidate villagers and break up the protests.

In an attempt to cover up the cold-blooded killing and deflect residents' outrage, Inspector General of Police Pujith Jayasundara dispatched a special police unit to Jaffna to "investigate the incident." The two police involved in the shooting were suspended and remanded until July 29. Police spokesman Ruwan Gunsekera evasively told the media the officers "used excessive

power."

Yogarajah Thinesh's death is not an accident but the by-product of the ongoing police and military occupation of the poverty-stricken and war-torn region.

While the 26-year communalist war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ended eight years ago in 2009, Northern Province residents still live under de facto military rule. Young people, in particular, face constant police and military intelligence surveillance.

The Colombo government, with the tacit backing of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), has suppressed investigations into the military's numerous war crimes during the conflict.

Thunnalai is one of many impoverished towns and villages in the Northern Province. Residents have no permanent work and attempt to survive by doing all sorts of odd jobs. Some youth try to earn money in the sand-mining business, with lorry owners paying up to 300 rupees per load. Others travel many kilometres to mangrove swamps to collect firewood and sell it for domestic use. Police frequently arrest youth, claiming they are destroying the forests.

Thinesh's family is typical of thousands in the area. Relatives and friends said the young man, who abandoned his education because of the family's economic circumstances, was a calm and kind individual, not involved in any criminal activities.

"We are a poor family," Thinesh's sister told the WSW. "Our father left us during our childhood and we had to live with my mother. Even though she did various odd jobs, she could not get a proper living and our uncles had to help us. Our childhood was very tragic.

"My brother Thinesh went to Saudi Arabia where he worked hard for two years. We were unable to pay back

in full the money we borrowed to send him for that job. In Saudi Arabia he had an accident and received medical treatment for three months. He came here for a vacation and was going to return after three months. Now he has been killed by the police.”

One of Thinesh’s uncles said: “They talk about the war [being over] but the killings are still taking place. We voted for [President] Maithripala Sirisena and [Prime Minister Ranil] Wickremesinghe but we don’t see any change in our life conditions.

“The TNA is supporting the government; they’re doing nothing for us. The price of essentials is going up and there are no proper jobs for our people. [Northern Province Chief Minister and TNA leader C.V.] Wigneswaran has said we needed Tamil police but what we’ve seen is Tamil police killing Tamil people.”

One of Thinesh’s close friends denounced the police actions. He told the WSWs: “The police could stop a vehicle but under what authority can they shoot people? There is not a war going on, so why are the police taking up arms and going around? The police repression is continuing in our area and we oppose it. We have no proper employment here, and that is the main problem.”

The ongoing police and military repression aims to suppress the explosive social and political conditions in the province. Last October police shot and killed two Jaffna University students, Pawnraj Sulakshan and Nadarasa Gajan, who were riding a motorbike. The police claimed the students refused to stop the vehicle. The court case against the policemen involved in that shooting is still dragging on.

After two days of complete silence about last Sunday’s shooting of Thinesh, the so-called Tamil leaders offered crocodile tears. TNA leader M.A. Sumanthiran declared: “The police cannot take the law into their hands. If individuals are involved in illegal sand mining then the police can take legal action but they cannot take people’s lives.”

Northern Province Chief Minister Wigneswaran said: “We cannot tolerate this incident because the Tamil young man was shot by Tamil police.”

Wigneswaran has been campaigning for more Tamil police, claiming they would “serve” the Tamil population. But the repressive nature and actions of the capitalist state apparatus are no different, irrespective of whether it is administered by the Tamil bourgeoisie or

other ruling elites.

The TNA, which fully backs the pro-US government, is the main instrument helping to maintain the anti-democratic repression in the island’s North and East, where majority of Sri Lankan Tamils live.

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