Sri Lankan soldiers kill Tamil youth in Jaffna

Wimal Perera
23 June 2020

Army soldiers shot and killed Thiraviyam Ramalingam, a 24-year-old Tamil youth, last Saturday evening at Muhamalai near Pallai. The killing took place about 30 kilometres south of Jaffna, in Sri Lanka's military-occupied and war-ravaged north.

The young man, who was from Kilali, was taken to the Pallai Divisional Hospital where he was pronounced dead. The *Tamil Guardian* reported that witnesses said a doctor was not sent to treat Ramalingam at the scene "for at least 45 minutes."

Angry residents organised a sit-down protest, blocking the Kandy-Jaffna A9 highway, and outside the hospital. When protesters demanded to know the whereabouts of other Tamil youth arrested by soldiers during the incident, the police showed them a video in an attempt to convince people that the youth were in their custody.

Police and Special Task Force commandos were deployed to disperse the demonstrators and block others from joining the protest.

There are many conflicting reports about the killing. The *Sunday Times* on June 21, citing police sources, reported that a "motorcyclist was killed… after soldiers opened fire when he defied orders to stop." The newspaper said "soldiers felt he was going to knock them down and ordered him to stop. They then opened fire when he tried to flee."

Citing Pallai police, *Lankadeepa* published a different version on June 21. It reported that a conflict developed after soldiers cracked down on a group of illegal sand miners in the Muhamalai area. The confrontation resulted in a soldier killing one sand "racketeer."

The newspaper claimed that the men had tried to flee in vehicles, running over the soldiers, while another group attempted to attack the soldiers and grab their firearms. The story appears to have been concocted by the police or military to justify the killing.

Yesterday, the Jaffna-based *Udayan* newspaper reported that four arrested youth had given evidence at Ramalingam's post-mortem. They said they had been travelling in a vehicle with the deceased when an army soldier demanded that they halt. They stopped the vehicle and came toward the soldiers with their arms raised in the air. When one of them panicked and tried to run away, a soldier shot him.

According to the post-mortem, there were injuries on the young man's body—one above the knee and one where a bullet had entered from behind and damaged his lungs, causing his death.

Ramalingam's funeral was held yesterday amid tight security. Police in Kodikamam, which is close to Ramalingam's home village, took out a court order banning all protests in the area. To deflect the anger of residents, Northern Province Governor M. S. Charles yesterday called for a report into the shooting.

Like all previous official inquiries, this report will not punish those responsible for the death of the young man but will cover up and justify the fatality, which is part and parcel of Colombo's ongoing military occupation of the North and East of the country.

Sri Lankan police and the military are notorious for cooking up stories to validate their actions. Irrespective of whether Ramalingam was involved in "illegal sand mining" or not, he was shot and killed by a soldier, one of numerous fatalities perpetrated by the military occupation forces.

The shooting also occurred under conditions of President Gotabhaya Rajapakse's intensifying militarisation of the country and a mounting anti-Tamil racialist campaign orchestrated by Colombo and the media. Rajapakse has given a clean slate to the military, encouraging its repressive actions and repeatedly insisting that the army be given immunity from any war crime allegations.

While workers, young people and the poor in the North and East face continuous police and military

© World Socialist Web Site

harassment, surveillance and anti-Tamil chauvinist rhetoric, these authoritarian conditions have worsened under Gotabhaya Rajapakse.

Colombo's nearly 30-year war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ended in May 2009 with the death of tens of thousands of Tamil civilians and the disappearances of hundreds who surrendered. Rajapakse oversaw these bloody assaults as the country's defence secretary.

Eleven years after the LTTE's defeat, the military occupation of the North and East continues. The Colombo establishment and the media are whipping up claims that "terrorism" and the LTTE are reemerging in order to impose even more repressive measures.

On June 12, the media reported that two people on a motorbike dropped a parcel with a doll near Velliveli Army camp, 20 kilometres from Jaffna. A military officer and two soldiers walking along the road saw the parcel and it blew up, injuring one of the soldiers, who tried to open it. On June 17, the media claimed that Kopay police had arrested a 25-year-old suspect following a search operation the previous day.

On June 15, the pro-government Hiru TV channel reported that a parcel of explosives had been found and deactivated near the Army Brigade headquarters in Kandavalai, Kilinochchi.

The channel said "security forces suspect that somebody may have brought the parcel in front of the camp for the purpose of sabotage." A report in *Divaina* claimed it was a "large bomb" that had been "manufactured in Sri Lanka." The media has not explained how it was possible to plant a sizeable bomb in a high-security zone.

Police and military violence, however, is not limited to the North and East. After coming to power late last year, Rajapakse began rapidly militarising his administration, appointing serving and retired generals to key government positions.

This year he has seized on the COVID-19 pandemic to mobilise soldiers in large numbers to Colombo and its suburbs. Early this month, Rajapakse established a 13-member taskforce with far-reaching powers, answerable only to him and chaired by the defence ministry secretary, retired Major General Kamal Gunaratne.

In the name of suppressing the underworld and the drug mafia, the government has also renewed its deployment of police commandoes in raids to target specific areas, accompanied by the extrajudicial killing of "suspects," a practice that began long ago in Sri Lanka.

The Rajapakse government faces an escalating foreign debt, growing unemployment and a deepening economic crisis intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. It fears the eruption of unified political and industrial action by the working class, across all ethnic and religious lines.

Rajapakse's moves toward a military-based dictatorship and the increasing state violence against the population are clear warnings of how the ruling elite is preparing for the bitter class struggles that lie ahead.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site