

Sri Lanka: Journalist's abduction highlights intimidation of media

By our correspondents
4 September 2006

An unidentified group of gunmen kidnapped Nadarajah Kuruparan, a senior Tamil radio journalist in Sri Lanka, last Tuesday and held him captive for nearly 24 hours. While it remains unclear exactly who carried out the abduction, there is every reason to believe that the military, or Tamil paramilitary groups aligned with the military, was responsible. The Colombo government and the military have been attempting to intimidate journalists into toeing the official line on the deepening civil war in the North and East of the country.

Kuruparan is news manager for "Sooriyan FM", a popular Tamil language radio service broadcast from Colombo by the Asian Broadcasting Corporation. The station had reported on how Tamils were affected by the war, and a recent program dealt with the involvement of the security forces in human rights violations and abductions in the capital. Kuruparan interviewed the parents of several missing Tamil youths, as well as parliamentarians and human rights activists. According to the Free Media Movement (FMM) organisation, the broadcaster had received threats, particularly over the last fortnight, from several paramilitary groups.

Kuruparan was abducted on August 29 around 4.30 a.m. as he went to work. Two hours later, his van was found abandoned 300 metres away from his house in the southern Colombo suburb of Mount Lavinia.

Kuruparan's colleagues and other journalists immediately demanded his release. About 200 media workers took part in a protest on Tuesday afternoon organised by the FMM, Sri Lanka Tamil Media Alliance, Trade Union Federation of Media Employees, Sri Lanka Muslim Media Forum and Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association. The protesters shouted slogans in front of Colombo Fort railway

station including: "Stop killing journalists", "Where is Nadarajah Kuruparan", and "Release Nadarajah Kuruparan immediately".

The kidnapped journalist was released unharmed the following morning. Kuruparan described his ordeal to the *World Socialist Web Site*: "When I was entering Galle road, my vehicle was blocked by a white van. They asked me to stop and get out. One of them showed a pistol. There were about four or five of them. They spoke in clear Sinhala. They told me that they had some information about me and wanted to get some clarifications. They wanted me to go with them."

Kuruparan was held in a house following an hour-long journey in the white van. He never discovered who his abductors were or the exact reasons for his abduction. The reporter's captors did not question him. They dumped him, blindfolded, in Colombo's southern suburbs on Wednesday morning.

All of the circumstances point to the involvement of the security forces. Ever since President Mahinda Rajapakse has launched an undeclared war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in late July, the media, particularly the Tamil press, has come under increasing harassment and intimidation.

Rajapakse called a meeting of media representatives on August 16 to ensure that they fell into line. According to a report in *Daily Mirror*, the president came under pressure from security forces chiefs the previous week. The military had denounced "unnecessary media hype of the LTTE [which] might give the LTTE an advantage".

Rajapakse invited the top management of the ABC news network, to which "Sooriyan FM" is affiliated, and warned them not to report statements issued by the LTTE concerning the Sri Lankan military's recent offensive in the east.

Addressing the Colombo demonstration last week, FMM spokesman Sunanda Deshapriya condemned Kuruparan's abduction and described it as a part of a series of attacks on journalists in Sri Lanka. "We don't know exactly who has abducted Kuruparan," he declared. "We demand his immediate release. The journalists have the right to give unbiased reports to the country and the world."

Sri Lanka Tamil Media Alliance President S. Rajkumar said: "The aim of repression against and assassinations of journalists is to block real information on the war in the north and east from reaching the people of Sri Lanka's south and the world. But the repression and assassinations will not succeed in stopping the work of journalists."

There have been a series of attacks targeting media and journalists, particularly Tamil media. To cite a few instances:

* On the night of May 2, unidentified gunmen entered the Jaffna office of the pro-LTTE Tamil daily *Uthayan* and opened fire, killing two staff members and severely injuring another two.

* On August 15, Sathasivam Baskaran, a *Uthayan* distributor, was shot dead while distributing the newspaper in Jaffna town during a brief one-hour relaxation of the strict curfew. With the town under virtual martial law, the murder was almost certainly carried out by the security forces or its allies. On the same day, military personnel searched the Colombo offices of *Suder Oli*, an associated paper of *Uthayan*.

* On August 18, the warehouse of *Uthayan* paper in Jaffna was burnt down by four unidentified armed men during the curfew imposed by Sri Lanka military. On August 20, Sinnathamby Sivamaharajah, the managing director of Tamil language *Namathu Eelanadu* newspaper, was shot and killed in Vellippalai. Sivamaharajah was a former MP for the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance.

The protest over Kuruparan's abduction and growing public opposition to the trampling on basic democratic rights may have influenced his release. According to the *Hindustan Times*, two senior government figures, Alavi Mowlana and A.H.M. Azwer, met Rajapakse and urged him to secure the journalist's release.

Police and government officials have promised a full investigation into the circumstances surrounding Kuruparan's kidnapping. These declarations carry little

weight, however. As in other cases potentially implicating the security forces, another police cover-up is the most likely outcome.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>