

Sri Lankan defence ministry stalls on inquiry into missing SEP member

By our correspondent
28 March 2007

Today marks the seventh day since the disappearance of Sri Lankan Socialist Equality Party (SEP) member, Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and his friend, Sivanathan Mathivathanan, both residents of the northern island of Kayts. Although the SEP has lodged formal complaints with government authorities, including Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse, no action has been taken to find the pair.

Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan disappeared on March 22 while visiting the village of Madathuveli on Punguduthivu Island near Kayts. Wimalaswaran went to pick up clothes from a rented house in the village in order to attend a wedding at Ampihainagar on Kayts.

Eyewitnesses saw Wimalaswaran on the back of his friend's motorbike entering the causeway connecting Kayts to Punguduthivu. His relatives and neighbours in Madathuveli also saw the pair at the house and leaving to return to Kayts. Nothing has been seen of either man or the motorbike since then.

The SEP immediately registered complaints with the commanding officers at the Punguduthivu and Velanai (Kayts) navy camps. On Saturday, the SEP faxed a complaint to the secretary of the defence ministry. All of the northern islands off the Jaffna peninsula are under the tight security of the navy, which works closely with the Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP) paramilitary.

Hundreds of people have been abducted, killed or "disappeared" over the past year as the government and military have escalated the war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Military-sponsored death squads are widely believed to be responsible.

The fact that the Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan disappeared after heading toward a navy roadblock points to the involvement of the military. The commanding officers in charge of the Punguduthivu and Velanai navy camps have failed to provide an adequate explanation of what took place.

When contacted by the SEP yesterday, the defence ministry had done nothing to initiate an investigation into

the disappearance of Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan. Additional Defence Secretary H.K. Balasooriya, who is in charge of police, admitted that the SEP's fax reached the ministry on Saturday, but said it only reached her on Monday. Such complaints, she said, were referred to the Inspector General of Police (IGP).

Balasooriya had done nothing about the fax, but said she would attend to it. She appeared not to have even read the complaint, asking whether the disappearance had occurred in Colombo. When told that the missing men lived on Kayts, Balasooriya said she would inform the deputy inspector general, northern range, and would know something about the situation by Friday.

The defence ministry's inaction and indifference underscores its attitude to hundreds of disappearances, none of which have been solved. If a naval officer or enlisted man had gone missing on Kayts in similar circumstances, there would have been no such lethargy. The security forces would have immediately used their repressive powers to instigate cordon-and-search operations and detain scores of innocent people.

The SEP holds the government and the military responsible for the safety of Wimalaswaran and his friend. Wimalaswaran is known throughout the area as a longstanding SEP member who has opposed both the Colombo government's war and the LTTE, and defended the rights of working people. We once again call on our supporters and WSWS readers to demand the defence ministry immediately conduct a full investigation in order to locate the two men.

Letters can be sent to:

Gotabhaya Rajapakse,
Secretary of Ministry of Defence,
15/5 Baladaksha Mawatha,
Colombo 3, Sri Lanka
Fax: 009411 2541529

N. G. Punchihewa
Director of Complaints and Inquiries,
Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission,

No. 36, Kinsey Road,
Colombo 8, Sri Lanka
Fax: 009411 2694924

Copies should be sent to the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka) and the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Socialist Equality Party, P.O. Box 1270, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Email: wswscmb@sltnet.lk

To send letters to the WSWWS editorial board please use this online form.

Below are the copies of a selection of the letters sent so far.

Dear Sir,

Socialist Equality Party (SEP) member, Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and his friend, Sivanathan Mathivathanan, both residents of Kayts, have disappeared since the evening of March 22. I request you to inquire into this incident and secure their safe release.

Wimalaswaran is well known for his socialist ideas in Kayts as a SEP member.

Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan disappeared in Velanai on Kayts island or Punguduthivu island. On March 22, Wimalaswaran had gone on his friend's motorbike to his rented out house at Madathuveli village in Punguduthivu to collect some of his clothes. They entered through the causeway to Madathuveli village and left, but did not arrive at their homes.

I am gravely concerned about the safety of Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan in the context of the war, where disappearances, abductions and killings occur frequently. Suspicion arises as to whether the navy was involved in this because this area is under their control. Reports of repressive actions by the navy and collaborating paramilitaries in this area enhance this suspicion.

M.G. Kiribanda, President of the Central Bank Employees Union,

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

Dear Mr Rajapakse,

Disappearance of Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and Sivanathan Mathivathanan

We write to demand you begin an immediate investigation and inquiry into the disappearance of Nadarajah Wimalaswaran, who is a member of the Socialist Equality Party of Sri Lanka, and his friend, Sivanathan Mathivathanan on March 22, 2007 at Kayts. These disappearances come at a time when the Sri Lankan security forces and their paramilitary allies are carrying out a brutal campaign of illegal arrests, detentions, abductions and extra-judicial killings, particularly against the oppressed Tamil youth, peasants, fishermen and the workers. Your government's record in this regard is well known internationally.

Wimalaswaran is acknowledged in the Kayts area for his courageous and principled socialist political views as a member of Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International and its organ, the *World Socialist Web Site*. Their political opposition to the brutal and repressive war carried out by your government against the Tamils in the North and East of Sri Lanka would have certainly made Wimalaswaran an enemy of your government.

Strong evidence exists already indicating the involvement of the Sri Lankan Navy, which controls the northern islands, in these disappearances. Therefore, we are gravely and justly concerned for the safety of the lives of Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan. We are also aware that Kayts area is under the military administration of Sri Lankan Navy, which comes under your command and authority. Therefore if any harm occurs to Wimalaswaran or Mathivathanan, along with the Sri Lankan security and paramilitary forces based in Kayts area, you will also be directly held responsible for those politically motivated crimes.

Yours sincerely,

AR and MF, Australia

Dear Sir

I am demanding, as a matter of democratic rights, that you conduct an immediate investigation into the disappearance of SEP member, Nadarajah Wimalaswaran, and his friend, Sivanathan Mathivathanan.

I am an unemployed worker in Australia who has followed the principled struggle of the SEP in Sri Lanka for many years. Just as with the murder of SEP supporter Sivapragasam Mariyadas in August of last year, members of your armed forces intentionally claimed that Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and Sivanathan Mathivathanan were members of the LTTE. These sorts of outright lies have been used by the military to justify its violent repression of anyone opposing this criminal racist war.

These men could be in grave danger. The world is watching you through the *World Socialist Web Site* and people from every country will be waiting for your immediate response to the demands of the SEP in Sri Lanka.

Sincerely,

SP, Australia

To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>