

Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka

February 2024



Jaffna University students who participated in a protest held on Independents Day were brutally manhandled by the police. Photo courtesy: Tamil Guardian

INFORM

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INFORM was established in 1990 to monitor and document the human rights situation in Sri Lanka, especially in the context of the ethnic conflict and war, and to report on the situation through written and oral interventions at the local, national and international levels. INFORM also focused on working with other communities whose rights were frequently and systematically violated. Presently, INFORM is focusing on election monitoring, freedom of expression and human rights defenders. INFORM is based in Colombo Sri Lanka, and works closely with local activists, groups and networks as well as regional (Asian) and international human rights networks.

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1. Executive Summary

The month of February witnessed a few high-profile cases that managed to stand out from the rest and those cases provide a clear snapshot of the current human rights status of Sri Lanka. However, these high-profile cases should not overshadow the ongoing human rights compromises that take place at the ground level and they are equally worthy of the attention of the global human rights community.

Context: It made headlines when the Online Safety Bill was passed with revisions and Speaker Hon. Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena signed to enact the controversial bill.

Deshbandu Tennakoon was appointed as the 36th Inspector General of Police in Sri Lanka. He was earlier appointed as Acting IGP and the duration of that interim designation came to an end on the 28th of February.

In a letter to the Hon. Speaker of Parliament Mahinda the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka wrote that the Supreme Court is specifically entrusted with the authority to assess any bill in terms of its consistency with the Constitution, including the Fundamental Rights Chapter of the Constitution.

The Commissioner General of Elections Saman Sri Ratnayake declared the date to conduct the Presidential Election will be decided between September 18 and October 18.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe recently found himself in hot water for this controversial appointment of Ratwatte, as there have been severe accusations levelled against him for his problematic conduct over the years.

Families of the Tamil individuals who disappeared in Kilinochchi commemorated seven years of continuous roadside demonstrations to demand information about the whereabouts of their loved ones who forcibly disappeared.

Case Updates: Vavuniya High Court judge ruled the Sri Lanka Army and several other former officials must be accountable for the disappearance of a Tamil youth upon arriving at the Omanthai checkpoint. At the time, the Sri Lankan Army was commanded by a former Presidential candidate who later became an opposition MP, Field Marshal Sarath Fonseka, while Major General W.U.B. Edirisinghe served as the Vanni Commander.

The Supreme Court of Sri Lanka has ruled that the Fundamental Rights (FR) Petition, which Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MP M. A. Sumanthiran filed in opposition to the Speaker's signing of the Online Safety Bill into law, be dismissed.

Challenging the FR petition filed by Archbishop Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith requesting an order to prevent the appointment of Acting IGP Deshabandu Tennakoon to the post of Inspector General Police, seven Buddhist monks submitted a motion to the Supreme Court.

The Cabinet of Ministers approved bringing reforms to the recently passed controversial Online Safety Act. According to the Cabinet Spokesman Minister Bandula Gunawardena, proposals have been received from relevant experts in the field regarding the Online Safety Act.

A petition under the Fundamental Rights Act has been filed in the Supreme Court, requesting an order instructing the Constitutional Council to approve the President's suggestion to name Nissanka Bandula Karunaratne, the current President of the Court of Appeal, as a justice of the Supreme Court.

Cabinet Minister of Environment Keheliya Rambukwella was arrested over his alleged complicity in the procurement of substandard medicine.

Galagodaatte Gnanasara Thero on February 15, at Colombo High Court expressed his regret and apologised to the Muslim community for any inconvenience caused by the statement he made regarding the Kuragala temple in a public press conference.

Repression of Media and Journalists: A group of journalists staged a protest in front of the district secretariat after they were denied access to cover the Batticaloa District Coordination Committee meeting.

When attempted to cover a group of civilians visiting a temple situated within the 'High-Security Zone' in Palali Vasavilan, Jaffna, three Tamil journalists - Prabhakaran Dilaksan, Sundarampillai Rajeskarana, and Chinnaiya Yogeswaran - were threatened by the Sri Lankan army.

Repression of Freedom of Assembly: Claiming Independence Day a black day, a protest was held by Jaffna University students and northern political leaders at Kilinochchi Manamaduru on Independence Day, which was dispersed by the police using tear gas and water cannons. Seven of the twenty-one temples in the high-security zone in Jaffna have been given restricted access by the Sri Lankan army; where visitors were required to use army vehicles and provide their residential addresses to enter the temples.

Repression of Activists and Whistle-Blowers: Environmental activist and President of the Organisation to Protect Sapugaskanda, H.M.R.W. Herath was brutally assaulted by three individuals in Wadakada, Polgahawela.

Repression of State Officials: The 51-year-old Public Health Inspector, Roshan Kumara Withanage, was shot dead at his residence in Elpitiya.

Repressive Legal and Policy Action: On 03rd February, the President issued a gazette notification declaring all services connected to the supply of electricity and petroleum as essential services.

2. Context

2.1. Speaker of the House, signs the Online Safety Bill

The Online Safety Bill gets the Speaker's assent. Following the January 23–24 debate in Parliament, the Online Safety Bill was passed with revisions, and on February 1st, Speaker Hon. Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena recorded his certificate to it. The bill came into effect as the Online Safety Act No. 9 of 2024 (Economynext, 2024)

This bill was enacted in a context where global tech giants have expressed grave worries, while civil society organizations claim that it has a "chilling effect" on free speech (Tharaka, 2024).

2.2. Acting IGP Tennakoon assumes duty as the IGP

Deshbandu Tennakoon has been appointed as the 36th Inspector General of Police in Sri Lanka. He was appointed as Acting IGP three months ago and that period came to an end on the 28th of February (Samman, 2024)

Tennakoon assumed duties in a context where there were four fundamental rights petitions filed in the Supreme Court requesting an order to be issued preventing Tennakoon from assuming the position of Inspector General of Police.¹ The petitioners point out that Deshabandu Tennakon, who was the Senior Deputy Inspector General of Police in charge of the Western Province at the time of the Easter bomb attack, has neglected his duties. Also, another point mentioned in these petitions is that during the tenure of Deshabandu Tennakoon as a Senior Deputy Inspector General of Police, the protesters who stayed at Galle Face Ground during the people's protest were brutally attacked (Mawbima, 2024)

2.3. HRCSL reviews the Online Safety Bill

In a letter² to the Hon. Speaker of Parliament Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka wrote that the Supreme Court is specifically entrusted with the authority to assess any bill in terms of its consistency with the Constitution, including the Fundamental Rights Chapter of the Constitution. Based on such an assessment, the Court is required to prescribe how such a bill may be enacted by Parliament. Full compliance with the Court's Determination on a bill is, therefore, crucial to guaranteeing the fundamental rights of the people of Sri Lanka.

After closely examining the Online Safety Act, the Commission noted that a number of its provisions and omissions seem to be at odds with the Supreme Court's ruling on the Online Safety Bill.

¹ It is reported that these petitions have been filed by the Archbishop of Colombo Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, the Lawyers for Truth and Justice organization, three victims of the Easter attack, and an activist. The Attorney General, the Legislative Assembly and the Acting Inspector General of Police Deshabandu Tennakon have been named as respondents in these petitions.

² chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpccajpcgiclfindmkaj/<https://www.hrsl.lk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/HRCSL-Letter-to-Speaker-on-08-02-2024.pdf>

2.4. The Commissioner General of Elections signals when to hold the presidential election

The date to conduct the Presidential Election will be decided between September 18 and October 18, the Commissioner General of Elections Saman Sri Ratnayake said (Newswire, 2024)

He further stated the presidential election is administered by several departments. There will not be any problem in obtaining funds or running the election if all the departments involved do their share (Newswire, 2024).

2.5. Lohan Ratwatte takes office as State Minister

Lohand Ratwatte has been appointed as State Minister for Plantation Industries and Mahaweli Development.³ President Ranil Wickremesinghe recently found himself in hot water for this controversial appointment of Ratwatte, as there have been severe accusations levelled against him for his problematic conduct over the years. These accusations include gaining notoriety for killing ten unarmed Muslims during the 2001 general elections for which he was convicted and sentenced by the high court and later exonerated on flimsy grounds. It was reported that in 2021 he forced Tamil political inmates to kneel at gunpoint after breaking into the Anuradhapura jail. These Tamil political prisoners were questioned about whether they had murdered any government armed force soldiers during the war by the then-prison minister Ratwatte. "*Tamil Guardian*" further detailed that he went on to point his gun at the inmates, accusing them of complaining to the UN, adding that the President, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, had allowed him to release or kill the inmates (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

2.6. Tamil families of the disappeared in Killinochchi 7 years of continuous protests

Families of the Tamil individuals who disappeared in Kilinochchi commemorated seven years of continuous roadside demonstrations to demand information about the whereabouts of their loved ones who forcibly disappeared (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

The families marched through Kilinochchi and arrived at Kilinochchi Kandaswamy Kovil, the site of their inaugural demonstration in February 2017. Families of the missing hoisted black flags and carried pictures of their loved ones as they marched through the town; the majority of the missing had been kidnapped by paramilitary groups supported by the government or by Sri Lanka's security services (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

2.7. Truth and Reconciliation Commission initiates

The much-maligned Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sri Lanka hosted a discussion with journalists and civil society organizations based in Colombo, despite opposition from Tamils in the Northeast and international organizations. According to the President Media Unit, Sri Lanka's Interim Secretariat for Truth and Reconciliation Mechanism (ISTRM) met with stakeholders and "discussed various aspects of the draft bill for a Commission for Truth, Unity, and Reconciliation (CTUR), which will play a pivotal role in addressing grievances of persons affected by the conflict in the North and East, promote reconciliation and non-recurrence" (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

During the forum, it was emphasized that the ISTRM, assigned to lay the groundwork until the establishment of a CTUR, has been holding stakeholder consultations with victim groups,

³ chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/2/2369-43_E.pdf

affected communities, religious dignitaries, policy-makers etc, and diligently working on developing a way forward report based on truth mechanisms in other jurisdictions, and drafting guidelines and procedures for the consideration of the Commissioners under the proposed Act. The ISTRM comprises four divisions, each staffed with personnel possessing expertise in legal matters, policy development, public relations, and information technology (The Island, 2024).

The forum provided a platform for robust discussion on various aspects of transitional justice, including the need to adopt a victim-centric approach ensuring that the voices of victims are heard. Participants also expressed views on aspects such as the handling of sensitive information related to national security, collaboration with the National Archives for systematic records management and the involvement of the Tamil diaspora in the transitional justice process. The importance of conducting an inclusive and transparent consultation process to gather input from various stakeholders to build trust and legitimacy for the transitional justice process was reiterated. Participants were informed that the draft CTUR bill is available for review and feedback by the stakeholders, and that this inclusive approach is adopted to ensure that the proposed legislation takes account of the diverse needs and concerns of all sections of society (The Island, 2024).

3. Case Updates

3.1. Vavuniya High Court declares the Sri Lanka army responsible for youth who disappeared 18 years ago



Loved ones of the forcefully disappeared demanding justice. Photo Courtesy: Ceylon News

Vavuniya High Court judge Manikkavasagam Ilanchelian ruled the Sri Lanka Army and several other former officials must be accountable for the disappearance⁴⁵ of Kandasamy Ilamaran, a Tamil youth upon arriving at the Omanthai checkpoint⁶ in 2006. On February 7, 2024, the Vavuniya High Court delivered the ruling in the habeas corpus petition on the victim Kandasamy Eelarangan's 18-year disappearance. In 2006, Senior Counsel K.S. Ratnavale petitioned the Vavuniya High Court for a writ of habeas corpus on behalf of the mother of the victim in question (Center for Human Rights and Development, 2024). Despite the claims made by the Army that the youth was not arrested or detained, the petitioner disputed that the youth had disappeared after being last seen and recorded at the Omanthai checkpoint and that no information was to be found about him (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

⁴ According to the writ application, Kandasamy Eelarangan had driven a van through the Omanthai check post to drop off a passenger at the Katunayake Bandaranaike International Airport. The vehicle had pulled up to the aforementioned check post and it was reported that the army searched Kandasamy Eelarangan, and the other passenger as they were entering the army-controlled area from the LTTE-controlled area. The tight constraints at the time prevented Kandasamy Eelarangan's mother from looking for her son right away. She eventually filed complaints, but to no effect, with the Human Rights Commission, the ICRC, and the police. In 2006, Senior Counsel K.S. Ratnavale applied for a habeas corpus writ in the Vavuniya High Court on behalf of the mother of the particular victim. Respondents in this petition included the Officer Commanding of the 211th Brigade of the Army and the Commander of the Sri Lankan Army. The Sri Lanka Army objected to this petition, claiming that the victim left the checkpoint after being checked. The court cases stalled as the last stages of the war increased the number of individuals displaced. In order to continue the case after the conflict, approval was sought from the Supreme Court in 2013. The case had since been prosecuted until the verdict was given.

⁵ The Sri Lankan army's assertion that Kandasamy Eelarangan departed the Omanthai checkpoint was denied by his mother. She testified in Court that he disappeared at the particular check post. Also, the Senior Counsel stated that no case was filed in court concerning the young Umadharan who just so happened to travel in the van with Kandasamy Eelarangan and that no information was available about him.

⁶ As the Center for Human Rights and Development reports during the time of war Omanthai Check Post was a significant checkpoint used by the Sri Lanka Army and many relatives of those who vanished reported that their loved ones had last been seen there while being questioned by the Army.

The then-commanding officer in charge of the Omanthai, the army commander of the Wannai region, and the army commander of Sri Lanka at the time, according to Justice Manikkawasagar Ilanchelian's ruling, are all accountable for the youth's disappearance (Ceylon News, 2024). At the time of the youth's disappearance in 2006, the Sri Lankan Army was commanded by a former Presidential candidate who later became an opposition MP, Field Marshal Sarath Fonseka, while Major General W.U.B. Edirisinghe served as the Vanni Commander (Daily Feature, 2024).

3.2. Supreme Court dismisses MP Sumanthiran's petition over the Online Safety Bill

MP M. A. Sumanthiran of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) filed a Fundamental Rights (FR) Petition against the Speaker's signing of the Online Safety Bill into law, which has been ordered to be dismissed by the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka (Ceylon Wire News, 2024).

The Online Safety Bill, according to MP Sumanthiran, was not legally adopted since the government neglected to include the Supreme Court's ruling on the bill when it was being enacted in Parliament.

In his Petition, MP Sumanthiran claimed that the government was seeking to enact the Bill without fully adhering to the Supreme Court Determination and that he had pointed out that the draft committee stage amendments would not sufficiently rectify the shortcomings, and provided his concerns in writing to the Speaker (Farzan, 2024).

Sumanthiran, however, pointed out that the Parliament voted on the Bill before the Determination was fully implemented (Farzan, 2024).

According to the Petitioner, the Bill could only be passed with a simple majority if all the Supreme Court's changes were incorporated. Had these not been incorporated, the Bill would only have passed with the support of two-thirds of all Members of Parliament (Newswire, 2024).

According to MP Sumanthiran, the bill could not become law because it was only approved by a simple majority of the MPs in attendance. He claimed that the Speaker had betrayed the public's confidence and the fundamental rights that the people were promised by certifying that the Bill was signed into law (Newswire, 2024). According to Sumanthiran, since the Speaker had followed the Attorney General's advice, the Attorney General bears some of the blame for the infringement on fundamental rights brought about by the Bill's alleged certification. Therefore, the Speaker of Parliament and the Attorney General were named as respondents (Newswire, 2024).

3.3. 7 Buddhist monks file a petition to support the IGP Thennakoon

Challenging the FR petition filed by Archbishop Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith requesting an order to prevent the appointment of Acting IGP Deshabandu Tennakoon to the post of Inspector General Police, seven Buddhist monks submitted a motion to the Supreme Court.

Professor Rahula Thero of Kotapitiya; Chancellor of the University of Ruhuna Prof. Akuratiye Nanda Thero; Senior Professor, Department of Sanskrit and Eastern Studies, University of Kelaniya, Induragare Dhammarathana Thero; Professor Agalakada Sirisumana Thero; Professor Medagoda Abhayatissa Thero, Sri Jayawardenapura University, Bodagama Chandima Nahimi and Uduwe Dhammaloka Thero are the monks who came forward to be parties to this petition (Mawbima, 2024).

Monks who submitted the motion said that the powers of appointing the Inspector General of Police has been delegated to the Executive and the Constitutional Council by the Constitution, and the intervention made by the Archbishop of Colombo Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith has taken a religious face. They further mentioned that Deshabandhu Tennakoon has done a great service to the country as a senior police officer by protecting the endangered archaeological artefacts in the Eastern Province (Mawbima, 2024).

3.4. Cabinet grants approval to amend the Online Safety Bill

The Cabinet of Ministers approved bringing reforms to the recently passed controversial Online Safety Act. According to Cabinet Spokesman Minister Bandula Guanwardena, proposals have been received from relevant experts in the field regarding the Online Safety Act (Mawbima, 2024).

The statement follows the Cabinet's approval of the proposal presented by Public Security Minister Tiran Alles, who asked the Legal Draftsmen to prepare a draft bill for revising the Online Safety Act (Newswire, 2024).

It was said that there had been no chance to introduce suggested amendments provided by the distinguished individuals in the field since the changes made during the Parliamentary committee meetings on the aforementioned draft law should be made following the ruling of the Supreme Court (Daily Feature, 2024).

3.5. Constitutional Council's decision challenged in SC

A petition under the Fundamental Rights Act has been filed in the Supreme Court, requesting an order instructing the Constitutional Council to approve the President's suggestion to name Nissanka Bandula Karunaratne, the current President of the Court of Appeal, as a justice of the Supreme Court. The petitioner claimed that it was arbitrary and unfair for the Constitutional Council to have rejected the President's request to appoint the most senior judge of the Court of Appeal, who had also received the Chief Justice's endorsement, to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court (Mawbima, 2024).

The members of the Constitutional Council Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena, Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena, Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa, Nimal Siripala de Silva, Sagara Kariyawasam and several others were named as respondents by the petitioner (Daily Feature, 2024).

The petitioner Sarith Maheeputhra Pathirathne an Attorney-at-Law by profession filed a petition naming the members of the Constitutional Council including Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena, Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena, Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa, Nimal Siripala de Silva, Sagara Kariyawasam and several others as the respondents (Daily News, 2024).

3.6. Former Minister of Health Keheliya gets arrested over Immunoglobulin case

Cabinet Minister of Environment Keheliya Rambukwella was arrested over his alleged complicity in the procurement of substandard medicine, including the human intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG) from India for state hospitals when he was in charge of the health portfolio during the country's economic crisis (Newswire, 2024).

Rambukwella, Janaka Chandragupta, the former secretary of the health ministry, and five other people have been placed under remand concerning this case. Investigations showed

that the importation of the aforementioned subpar medication had resulted in financial fraud totalling 144 million LKR (\$ 465,000) (WION, 2024)

He was arrested in response to intense public uproar and agitation catalysed by civil society activists and particularly health sector trade unionists. This was a historic occasion because this was the first time a sitting minister was compelled to be removed from his current position and eventually arrested. In light of the widespread accusations levelled against Rambukwella, the backing gained from prominent politicians and party members was astonishing which resulted in him surviving the no-confidence motion submitted in Parliament against him by opposition MPs (APnews, 2024).

Rambukwella was charged with favouring a certain supplier above the standard tender process when buying various medications by using the economic downturn as a justification.

3.7. Ganasara Thero apologises to the Muslim community

The Attorney General filed a case against the General Secretary of the “*Bodu Bala Sena*” organisation Galagodaatte Gnanasara Thero in the Colombo High Court for making a statement during a press conference held on March 30, 2016, in a manner that was harmful towards national and religious harmony in the country. The hearing of the evidence in this case eventually came to an end (Mawbima, 2024).

Galagodaatte Gnanasara Thero on February 15, at Colombo High Court expressed his regret and apologised to the Muslim community for any inconvenience caused by the statement he made regarding the Kuragala temple in a public press conference. He made this statement from the dock in front of Judge Aditya Patabandi (Mawbima, 2024).

3.8. SC conveys determination on Anti-Terrorism Bill

Speaker of the Parliament Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena received the Supreme Court's ruling on the much-disputed Anti-Terrorism Bill on Tuesday, February 20. The Supreme Court decided that although certain sections of the proposed legislation must be approved by a special majority, other provisions of the Anti-Terrorism Bill need to be approved by both a special majority and a referendum, unless amendments recommended by the Supreme Court are carried out (Mawbima, 2024).

There have been 31 petitions filed opposing the proposed legislation, which aims to replace the contentious Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA).

The petitioners include the following: the Ceylon Teachers' Union (CTU), His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, Ranjith Madduma Bandara, the General Secretary of Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), MP Vijitha Herath of the National People's Power (NPP), the Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA), the Socialist Youth Union (SYU), and Duminda Nagamuwa of the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) (Mawbima, 2024)

They say the Bill, if passed in its current form, would grant unlimited powers to the Tri-Forces, the Police and the Coast Guard to make unwarranted arrests without reasonable suspicion, and this is a violation of fundamental rights including the freedom of expression guaranteed by the Constitution (Adaderana, 2024)

The Deputy Speaker of Parliament announced to Parliament that the Speaker has received the Determination of the Supreme Court in respect of the Bill titled “Anti-Terrorism” which was challenged in the Supreme Court in terms of Article 121(1) of the Constitution.

Consequently, the Supreme Court's ruling regarding the Bill's constitutionality comes to the following conclusion:

- Clause 3, Clause 42, Clause 53, and Clause 70 of the Bill are inconsistent with Article 12(1) of the Constitution and require a Special Majority to be passed by Parliament. However, the

Supreme Court has stated that the said inconsistencies can be ceased if the said Clauses are amended as per the Determination of the Court.


- Clause 4 has to be suitably amended as per the Supreme Court Determination. • Clause 72 (1) is unconstitutional and needs to be passed by a Special Majority and a Referendum. The unconstitutionality will cease if this Clause is amended as per the Determination of the Supreme Court.
- Correspondingly, Clause 72(2) must be amended in accordance with the Determination.
- Clause 75 (3) infringes Article 4 (c) read with Article 3 of the Constitution and requires a 2/3rd Majority and a Referendum. The invalidity will cease 7 upon the amendments suggested in the Determination.
- Clause 83 (7) requires a Special Majority to be passed into law. It has to be suitably amended as per the Supreme Court Determination.

4. List of Incidents

4.1. Repression of Media and Journalists				
No	Date	District	Description	Sources
4.1.1		Batticaloa	<p>Journalists were denied covering the District Coordination Meeting in Batticaloa</p> <p>A group of journalists staged a protest in front of the district secretariat after they were denied access to cover the Batticaloa District Coordination Committee meeting.</p>	<p>Journalists in Batticaloa barred from covering the district coordination meeting.</p> <p>Tamil Guardian. Published on 15th Feb 2024. Last Accessed 2nd May 2024</p>
4.1.2		Palali Vasavilan, Jaffna	<p>Army threatens three Tamil journalists in Jaffna</p> <p>When attempted to cover a group of civilians visiting a temple situated within the 'High-Security Zone'¹⁷⁸ in Palali Vasavilan, Jaffna, three Tamil journalists - Prabhakaran Dilaksan, Sundarampillai Rajeskarana, and Chinnaiya Yogeswaran - were threatened by the Sri Lankan army.</p> <p>These three journalists sought to report on the crowd gathered to offer prayers at the temple, which has lately been opened to the public. Eventually, the mobile phones of these journalists were confiscated and destroyed by the army.</p>	<p>Army threatens three Tamil journalists reporting in Jaffna.</p> <p>Tamil Guardian. Published on 23rd Feb 2024. Last Accessed 2nd May 2024</p>
4.2. Repression of Freedom of Assembly				
4.2.1	4th Feb	Manamaduru, Kilinochchi	<p>Police obstruct a protest in Kilinochchi</p> <p>Claiming Independence Day, a black day, a protest was held by Jaffna University students and northern political leaders at Kilinochchi Manamaduru on Independence Day, which was dispersed</p>	<p>Sri Lankan police manhandle ITAK leader in Kilinochchi.</p> <p>Tamil Guardian. Published on 04th Feb 2024. Last Accessed 2nd May 2024</p>

⁷ Seven of the twenty-one temples in the high security zone of Jaffna have lately been given conditional access by the Sri Lankan army. This means that in order to enter the temples, worshippers must use army transportation and provide their home address.


⁸ Despite the end of the armed conflict in 2009, the Sri Lankan military has continued to maintain the high security zones-

			<p>by the police using tear gas and water cannons. It was reported that five university students were arrested at the site. The students of the University of Jaffna and northern political leaders stated that due to the lack of sustainable solutions for pressing issues facing the people of the North and East, such as interference with the freedom of the media, the adoption of laws that interfere with the freedom of expression, and the lack of solutions for the problems that the people cannot bear at present due to the adverse economic condition, a situation has arisen where it is impossible to celebrate Independence Day. Students and political leaders protested, terming Independence Day a black day.</p>  <p>Police arresting the protesters who are protesting in Vavuniya. Photo Courtesy: Tamil Guardian.</p>	<p>ඉරණමඩු විරෝධතාවට කැඳවූ ශ්‍රී.සරසවි සිසුන් 5ක් අත්අඩංගුවට. Lankadeepa. Published on 4th Feb 2024. Last Accessed 2nd May 2024</p>
4.2.2	Palay, Jaffna		<p>Army grants “conditional access” to temples in occupied lands in Jaffna</p> <p>Seven of the twenty-one temples in the high-security zone in Jaffna have been given restricted access by the Sri Lankan army; visitors are required to use army vehicles and provide their residential addresses to enter the temples. Therefore, before being permitted to enter any of these Hindu temples, visitors must give their names, addresses, phone numbers, and identity card numbers to the temple administration, which will then share them with the district and divisional secretariat offices.</p>	<p>Sri Lankan Army grants 'conditional access' to temples in occupied land in Jaffna. Tamil Guardian. Published on 21st Feb 2024. Last Accessed 2nd May 2024</p>

4.2.3	30th Jan	Colombo	<p>SJB anti-government protest gets dispersed by the police</p> <p>Police fired water and tear gas at the protest march that started near the Colombo Municipal Council on the afternoon of January 30 near the Colombo Public Library. The protest was organized under the theme 'Let's drive this evil government: a year of change 2024'. Meanwhile, hospital director Doctor Kumara Wickramasinghe said that several people who were injured during the protest march were admitted to the Colombo National Hospital.</p>	<p>සජීන්ගේ 'දුෂ්ට ආණ්ඩුව එළවීමේ' විරෝධතා පා ගමනට ජල හා කළුළු ගැස් ජරහාර: පිරිසක් රෝහලේ.</p> <p>Mawbima. Published on 30th Jan 2024. Last Accessed 2nd May 2024</p>
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4.3. Repression of Activists and Whistle-Blowers

4.3.1	20th Feb	Kurunegala	<p>Mobs attack environmental rights activists H.M.R.W. Herath</p> <p>Environmental activist and President of the Organisation to Protect Sapugaskanda, H.M.R.W. Herath was brutally assaulted by three individuals in Wadakada, Polgahawela. After being admitted to the hospital, he filed a complaint with the Pothuhera Police on the same day. It was reported that he was attacked to intimidate as he is a spirited activist who passionately advocate against the adverse effects caused by stone quarries.</p> <div data-bbox="625 1435 1093 1921" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>Paper article published about thug attacking on Chairperson of the Protecting Sapugaskanda Organization. Phot courtesy: Aruna new paper</p>	<p>කුරුණෑගල පොතුහැර පොලීසියට වෙට්ටු ආන වන්ඩි-පරිසර සභාපති කෙනෙකු මරන්න හදලා අතපය කඩලා SI Tv 1st Youtube Channel. Published on 22nd Feb 2024. Last Accessed 2nd May 2024</p> <p>සපුගස්කන්ද සුරැකීමේ පරිසර සංවිධානයේ සභාපති රංජිත් විමලධර්මට පිරිසක් යකඩ පොලුවලින් පහරදීලා.</p> <p>CENS. Published on 21th Feb 2024. Last Accessed 2nd May 2024</p> <p>CEA Calls for Impartial Investigation. Ceylon Today. Published on 29th Feb 2024. Last Accessed 2nd May 2024</p>
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4.4. Repression of State Officials				
4.4.1	26th	Elpitiya	<p>PHI shot dead in Elpitiya</p> <p>The 51-year-old Public Health Inspector, Roshan Kumara Withanage, was shot dead at his residence in Elpitiya. The Police suspect that the PHI was killed under contract after he was threatened while performing his duties. The PHI was a well-known strict law enforcement officer who was also committed to his profession and did not allow any of the officers under him to commit any wrongdoing, which had earned him many enemies over the years.</p>  <p>Treasurer of the Public Health Inspectors' Union Roshan Kumara. Photo courtesy: The Island.</p>	<p>‘PHI සංගමයේ භාණ්ඩාගාරික සාකච්ඡා කළේ බාල පුත් පළමු වසරට භාර දීමට යාමට සූදානම් වෙමින් සිටියදී. Mawbima. Published on 26th Feb 2024. Last Accessed 2nd May 2024</p> <p>PHI shot dead in Elpitiya. Daily News. Published on 27th Feb 2024. Last Accessed 2nd May 2024</p>
4.5. Repressive Legal and Policy Action				
4.5.1	3 rd		<p>Gazette notification was issued on declaring certain public services essential</p> <p>On 03rd February, the President issued a gazette notification declaring all services connected to the supply of electricity and petroleum as essential services.⁹ Declaration as essential services have been historically used by governments in Sri Lanka to prevent trade union actions. This draconian law allows the imposition of 2 to 5 years of rigorous imprisonment, forfeiture of property, and removal from professional registration against those who engage in trade union actions if found guilty of violating the President's order.</p>	<p>The Gazette. No, 2369/58. Published on 3rd Feb 2024. Last Accessed 2nd May 2024</p>

⁹ chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/2/2369-58_E.pdf

4.5.2	21 st		<p>Gazette notification issued calling upon tri-forces to maintain public order</p> <p>President Ranil Wickremesinghe has issued a Gazette Extraordinary calling upon the armed forces to maintain public order in specified areas.</p> <p>Accordingly, the Army, Navy and the Air Force have been called out for the maintenance of public order in the areas specified below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative Districts of Colombo, Gampaha, Kalutara, Galle, Matara, Hambantota, Jaffna, Mannar, Mullaitivu, Batticaloa, Ampara, Trincomalee, Puttalam and the territorial water adjacent to such Districts • Administrative Districts of Kandy, Matale, Nuwara Eliya, Kilinochchi, Vavuniya, Kurunegala, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Badulla, Monaragala, Ratnapura, Kegalle 	<p>The Gazette. No, 2372/11, Published on 21st Feb 2024. Last Accessed 2nd May 2024</p>
4.5.3	13 th		<p>On 13th February, the President issued a gazette notification declaring all services connected to the supply of health and public transportation as essential services.</p>	<p>The Gazette No, 2371/11, Published on 21st Feb 2024. Last Accessed 2nd May 2024</p>

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