

Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka, March 2024



Police disperse the university student protest organized by the Inter-University Student Union using water cannons and tear gas. Photo Courtesy: Daily Mirror Online

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

Context: The IMF team reached a staff-level agreement with the Sri Lankan authorities on the second review under the economic reform program supported by a 4-year Extended Fund Facility (EFF) arrangement.

Human Rights Watch said in a letter to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that it should push Sri Lanka's government to scrap proposed legislation that would severely restrict civil society and risk the IMF's program in the country.

According to President Ranil Wickremesinghe, the parliament has passed 42 new laws in the past 14 months in order to support the country's economic transformation. The President also emphasized the need for Parliament to approve an additional 62 laws.

Rohitha Abegunawardhana was appointed to lead the Parliamentary Committee on Public Enterprises or otherwise commonly known as COPE and it caused the resignation of many members of the committee due to the past corruption allegations against Abegunawardana.

The Deputy Secretary General of Parliament received the No Confidence Motion against Speaker of the Parliament Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena from the opposition parties and by a majority of 42 votes, 75 parliamentarians voted in favour of the measure, while 117 lawmakers against it

According to the Department of Census and Statistics, one person in Sri Lanka spends at least 17,014 rupees per month to fulfil their basic needs. The reports further state that a family of 4 needs at least 68,056 rupees per month to fulfil their basic needs. It has been revealed in a survey conducted by that department regarding the official poverty line in Sri Lanka for the year 2024.

According to the Export Development Board (EDB), Sri Lanka's merchandise export performance in January 2024 was US\$ 970.7 million, a 0.77 percent decrease from January 2023.

Case updates: The Colombo High Court sentenced Bodu Bala Sena General Secretary Galagodaatte Gnanasara Thero to 4 years of hard labour and a fine. High Court Judge Aditya Patabandige delivered this judgement in the case of harming the ethnic and religious harmony by a controversial statement made regarding the Kooragala temple in 2016.

Ajith Nivard Cabraal, a former governor of the central bank, is one of five people who have legal action brought against them in connection with the 2012 Treasury Bond purchases made by the Greek government.

Since the Police had failed to provide evidence to prove the charges, the Kaduwela Magistrate's Court acquitted the 13 individuals who were arrested in connection with a protest near the Parliamentary entrance in 2022.

In connection with the 2005 death of a suspect while under police custody, two former police officers received death sentences. When the matter was brought up for hearing on March 4, the Colombo High Court handed down the death penalty.

Keheliya Rambukwella, the former minister of health, and five other individuals who were suspected of importing substandard immunoglobulin were also placed under extended remand until March 14.

The Cabinet decision permitting former President Maithripala Sirisena to remain in the government house in Colombo after his term ended has been overturned by the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka.

In a petition for fundamental rights, the Young Journalists Association of Sri Lanka is requesting that Deshabandu Thennakoon's appointment as Inspector General of Police (IGP) be revoked. The Association claims that the appointment is unlawful, arbitrary, irrational, and against and in breach of the articles of the Constitution in its petition.

The recommendations and conclusions of the Commission of Inquiry to Investigate Allegations of Political Victimization have been quashed by the Court of Appeals in a writ order directed at a number of people, including President Ranil Wickremesinghe and National People's Power (NPP) leader Anura Kumara Dissanayake.

Repression of media and journalists: Thiruchelvam Divakaran, a freelance journalist and media officer in the Government Information Department, was summoned to the Terrorist Investigation Department office.

Shanmugam Thavaseelan, a Tamil journalist and the chairman of the Mullaitivu Press Club, was called to court earlier in March about a complaint that a Sri Lankan naval commander filed in 2019 after he covered a rally on disappearances in Mullaitivu.

G.P. Nissanka, the owner and editor of the news website *Ravana Lanka News*, was arrested on March 5 by officers of the Criminal Investigation Department of the police at his residence in Pallededa area.

According to a statement from the Media Organizations Collective, on March 6, police detained freelance journalist Bimal Ruhunage at his residence in Kurunegala.

Repression of freedom of assembly: A tense situation emerged at the Vavuniya old bus station when the Santhan's (who was one of the seven convicts freed in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case) remains were brought there for the public to pay respects.

It was reported that a protest staged by *Jana Aragala Vyaparaya* in Colombo Fort in resistance to worsening economic conditions was controlled by the police using water cannons and tear gas.

While participating in festival ceremonies, eight Tamil Hindu devotees were captured by Sri Lankan police and allegedly mistreated during their more than ten-day incarceration.

To disperse a protest organized by the Inter-University Students Federation (IUSF) in Colombo, the police used water cannons. The protesters demanded a number of things, one of which was opposed to the purported privatization of education.

Repression activists and whistleblowers: A group of mobs trespassed into the private residence of the President of Puttalam Teachers' Association and activist by the name of Ajith Wijesinghe. The mobs vandalized and set on fire the house and vehicle of the said environmental activist.

Repressive legal and policy action: According to Minister of Justice, Prison Affairs, and Constitutional Reforms Dr Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe, election postponement is not expected as a result of the election amendment proposals, thus it is believed that electoral modifications that are now being discussed would cause elections to be delayed.

Other: The Terrorism Investigation Department (TID) of Sri Lanka has called activist and former LTTE cadre Selvanayagam Aravinthan for questioning on a Facebook account.

2. Context

2.1. IMF and Economic Reforms

Following successful meetings in Colombo, IMF Senior Mission Chief Peter Breuer and Deputy Mission Chief Katsiaryna Svirydzenka made the following statement:

The IMF team reached a staff-level agreement with the Sri Lankan authorities on the second review under the economic reform program supported by a 4-year Extended Fund Facility (EFF) arrangement. It concluded the 2024 Article IV Consultation discussions. The EFF arrangement was approved by the IMF Executive Board for a total amount of SDR 2.3 billion (about US\$3 billion) on March 20, 2023 (Newswire, 2024).

The staff-level agreement is subject to the approval by IMF management and the IMF Executive Board in the period ahead, contingent on: (i) the implementation by the authorities of prior actions; (ii) the completion of financing assurances review, which will focus on confirming multilateral partners' committed financing contributions and whether adequate progress has been made with the debt restructuring to give confidence that the restructuring will be concluded in a timely manner and in line with the program's debt targets (Newswire, 2024).

Upon completion of the Executive Board review, Sri Lanka would have access to SDR 254 million (about US\$337 million), bringing the total IMF financial support disbursed under the arrangement to SDR 762 million (about US\$1 billion) (Newswire, 2024).

2.2. Financial reforms and repression of civic space

Human Rights Watch said in a letter to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that it should push Sri Lanka's government to scrap proposed legislation that would severely restrict civil society and risk the IMF's program in the country. The proposed Non-Governmental Organizations (Registration and Supervision) Act is one of numerous recent and planned laws that will limit fundamental freedoms, notwithstanding the vital role of public oversight in ensuring good government and combating corruption (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

The IMF's US\$3 billion bailout of Sri Lanka, which is conditional on government reform commitments, helped to alleviate the immediate economic crisis after the country defaulted on its foreign debt in 2022, but further progress is jeopardized by President Ranil Wickremesinghe's administration's adoption of laws that would severely restrict basic rights.

On January 30, 2024, the government distributed the draft NGO law to selected members of civil society, giving them three weeks to respond. The measure fails to meet any obvious need, instead attempting to subject civil society organizations to intrusive government surveillance and involvement, and threatens civil society members with imprisonment if they do not comply with burdensome administrative procedures.

On February 28, the National Collective of CSOs and NGOs, a coalition of Sri Lankan civil society organizations, wrote to the government, claiming that the proposed law would "violate the fundamental rights to freedom of association and expression," as well as harm the delivery of services by civil society organizations, including to "the many families who are struggling to make ends meet in the midst of severe economic hardship."

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, in his March 1 update to the UN Human Rights Council on the crisis in Sri Lanka, said he was "concerned by the introduction of new or proposed laws with potentially far-reaching impact on fundamental rights and freedoms which variously strengthen the executive, grant broad powers to the security forces, and severely restrict rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression, impacting not only on civic space but the business environment."

2.3. 42 new laws have been passed over the past 14 months

According to President Ranil Wickremesinghe, the parliament has passed 42 new laws in the past 14 months in order to support the country's economic transformation. The President also emphasized the need for Parliament to approve an additional 62 laws. He stated that the bills would be reintroduced for approval in the next parliamentary session if this goal could not be met during the current one (Sunday Island Online, 2024).

These remarks were made by the President during his keynote speech at the 'What's New'¹ legal reform discussion with young attorneys (Sunday Island Online, 2024).

2.4. Rohitha Abegunawardhana elected as new COPE chairman

Rohitha Abegunawardhana, an SLPP MP, was chosen to lead the Parliamentary Committee on Public Enterprises or otherwise commonly known as COPE (Newswire, 2024). Following this appointment, many other members of the committee resigned and the nomination of the new chairman to the committee was cited as the reason behind the resignations of several committee members today, and some of the members who resigned highlighted various past corruption allegations levelled against Abegunawardhana (Mawbima, 2024).

2.5. Sri Lanka's export ratio is in decline

According to the Export Development Board (EDB), Sri Lanka's merchandise export performance in January 2024 was US\$ 970.7 million, a 0.77 percent decrease from January 2023. The EDB reports that agricultural exports increased by 3.58% in January 2024 compared to January 2023, totalling US\$ 225.43 million. On the other hand, industrial exports fell by 2.08% to US\$ 744.77 million over the same time frame (Newswire, 2024).

2.6. No Confidence Motion against Speaker

The Deputy Secretary General of Parliament received the No Confidence Motion against Speaker of the Parliament Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena from the opposition parties (Newswire, 2024).

Subsequently, by a majority of 42 votes, the Speaker survived the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) motion for no confidence. 75 parliamentarians voted in favour of the measure, while 117 lawmakers against it (Parliament of Sri Lanka, 2024).

According to the no-confidence motion, the Speaker disregarded the Supreme Court's recommendations regarding the Online Safety Bill's Sections 13, 17, 20, 33 (6), 34 (1), 35 (1), 21, 22, and 33. The Speaker was also accused of allowing the third Reading of the Online Safety Bill to be passed without a vote and disregarding the Chief Opposition Whip's call for a division at the Committee Stage (Ada Derana, 2024).

Furthermore, the opposition MPs asserted that when the other members of the Constitutional Council were evenly divided on the issue, the Speaker had "unconstitutionally and unlawfully" used his deciding vote to support the nomination of IGP Deshabandu Tennakoon (Ada Derana, 2024).

2.7. The cost of living rapidly increases

According to the Department of Census and Statistics, one person in Sri Lanka spends at least 17,014 rupees per month to fulfil their basic needs. Accordingly, the reports further state that a family of 4 needs at least 68,056 rupees per month to fulfil their basic needs. It has been revealed in a survey conducted by that department regarding the official poverty line in Sri Lanka for the year 2024 (Mawbima, 2024).

The Department of Census and Statistics states that a minimum amount of 16,524 rupees per month has been spent to fulfil their basic needs in 2023, and in this year 2024, the expenditure has increased by 490 rupees to 17,014 rupees (Mawbima, 2024).

¹ The 'What's New' project by the Presidential Secretariat under the guidance of President Ranil Wickremesinghe to recognize the need for new legal reforms and the importance of the views of the youth and the new generation.

According to census and statistical data, an amount of 6,966 rupees was spent per person to fulfil their basic needs in 2019. Therefore, within the period of the past 5 years, the expenditure per person has increased from 6,966 rupees to 17,014 rupees by an amount of 10,048 rupees (Mawbima, 2024).

2.8. Extra Judicial Killings

A case of the death of a person during a raid carried out by the Police Narcotics Division in Halawatha Division was reported from Pambala village belonging to Madampe Police Domain (BBC News Sinhala, 2024).

Based on the information received by the Halawatha Division Poisons and Narcotics Division, a group of police officers of that division chased a three-wheeler, where two people in the three-wheeler jumped out of the three-wheeler and ran away, the police said. Two suspects were arrested by the police during that operation, and one of them died (BBC News Sinhala, 2024).

On many previous occasions, human rights activists have emphasized that the Sri Lankan police have failed to make arrests in accordance with international and local laws when arresting suspects (BBC News Sinhala, 2024).

Kalahara Dilshan was one of the recent victims of a case of 'encounter death' enabled by police. It was reported that he was an ex-commando soldier of the Sri Lanka Army. Media reported that he was the alleged shooter of the chief incumbent of a temple in Malvatuhiripitiya, Gampaha. Some media reports coincided with this murder with the appointment of Deshabandu Tennakoon as the IGP who was also a torture convict (Sri Lanka Brief, 2024).

3. Case Updates

3.1. Ganasara Thero imprisoned for 4 years for hard labour

On March 28, the Colombo High Court sentenced Bodu Bala Sena General Secretary Galagodaatte Gnanasara Thero to 4 years of hard labour and a fine (Aruna, 2024).

High Court Judge Aditya Patabandige delivered this judgement in the case of harming the ethnic and religious harmony by a controversial statement made regarding the Kooragala temple at a public press conference held in Colombo in 2016 (Mawbima, 2024).

The charge against Gnanasara Thero was that he insulted the religious beliefs of the Muslim people and was punishable under Section 291 B of the Penal Code. The case was heard before High Court Judge Aditya Balapatabedi at Colombo High Court No. 04. The case number was H.C. 1948/2020. Some pointed out this judgement delivered by High Court Judge Aditya Balapatabedi as a double standard compared to his judgement to grant bail to stand-up comedian Nathasha Edirisooriya, who was arrested under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Act (ICCPR) for allegedly making fun of Buddhism. In other words, some were keen to insinuate that the judgement delivered concerning the controversial statement made by the Gnanasara Thero had a minority or religious bias (Whatnews, 2024). In June 2014, Galagodaatte Gnanasara Thero made the infamous '*Aba Sarana*' statement near Aluthgama Dargah town. It was a speech that strongly incited hatred against the Muslim community, and that provocative statement was followed by Sinhalese storming the Dargah town and setting it on fire. Then Defense Ministry Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa controlled the police at the time of this violent attack. Even though there was very clear evidence that the police and STF soldiers were standing by while the attack was carried out, even though they were published in the media, no action has been taken regarding the incident (Whatnews, 2024).

3.2. Former Central Bank Governor Cabral accused of the 2012 Greek bond scam

Ajith Nivard Cabraal, a former governor of the central bank, is one of five people who have legal action brought against them in connection with the 2012 Treasury Bond purchases made by the Greek government. According to the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC), a complaint made by former MP Sujeewa Senasinghe led to the filing of legal proceedings against the five people. Senasinghe alleges in his complaint that the Central Bank bought Treasury Bonds issued by the Greek government in 2012 when it was going through an acute financial crisis. Senasinghe claimed that the Central Bank had made the acquisition despite being aware of Greece's financial problems and that this had cost the Sri Lankan government more than Rs. 1.84 billion (Newswire, 2024).

After looking into the complaint, the Bribery Commission has brought a case against the five people in the Colombo High Court. Following investigations into the complaint, the Bribery Commission has filed a case before the Colombo High Court against the five individuals (Newswire, 2024).

3.3. Aragalaya activists acquitted from a court case

According to reports, a number of people were arrested in connection with a protest near the Parliament entrance in 2022 and were placed on bail as they were found not guilty.

Since the Police had failed to provide evidence to prove the charges, the Kaduwela Magistrate's Court acquitted the 13 individuals from the case. The individuals who had engaged in the protest as part of the '*Aragalaya*' peoples' movement, called for the resignation of former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa (Newswire, 2024).

3.4. Two police officers sentenced to death

In connection with the 2005 death of a suspect while under police custody, two former police officers received death sentences. When the matter was brought up for hearing on March 4, the Colombo High Court handed down the death penalty (Newswire, 2024).

The two Peliyagoda Police officers were charged with killing a suspect they attacked in 2005 while they were being held at the police station. The suspect was reportedly apprehended for having committed a robbery (Newswire, 2024).

3.5. Minister Kheliya remanded further

Keheliya Rambukwella, the former minister of health, and five other individuals who were suspected of importing substandard immunoglobulin were also placed under extended remand until March 14 (Newswire, 2024).

After being arrested in connection to an Immunoglobulin procurement scandal while serving as Minister of Health, the Minister of Environment was forced to step down from his designation (Hindustan Times, 2024).

3.6. Court order against Former President's official residence

The Cabinet decision permitting former President Maithripala Sirisena to remain in the government house in Colombo after his term ended has been overturned by the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka. The Cabinet's October 2019 decision to allow the former President to continue living in the government mansion on Paget Road in Colombo even after he left office is suspended by this court ruling (Newswire, 2024).

3.7. FR petition filed against IGP Deshabandu Thennakoon

In a petition for fundamental rights, the Young Journalists Association of Sri Lanka is requesting that Deshabandu Thennakoon's appointment as Inspector General of Police (IGP) be revoked. The Association claims that the appointment is unlawful, arbitrary, irrational, and against and in breach of the articles of the Constitution in its petition.

Manushika Cooray, an attorney at law, filed the petition on behalf of the Young Journalists Association of Sri Lanka on behalf of its President Tharindu Jayawardhana, Secretary M.F.M. Fazeer, Convener Shalika Wimalasena, Treasurer Nirosh Maithree, Committee Member Tharindu Uduwaragedara, Vice President B. Niroshkumar, and Member Reka Nilukshi. Respondents to this petition include Deshabandu Thennakoon, the Attorney General acting on behalf of the President of Sri Lanka, and the nine members of the Constitutional Council, including its Chairman and Speaker of the Sri Lankan Parliament, Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena, and Secretary-General Dammika Dassanayake. Additionally, until the application's outcome is known, the petitioners have requested an interim injunction prohibiting and suspending Deshabandu Thennakoon from carrying out his duties as IGP (Newswire, 2024).

3.8. Court of Appeal invalidates the Political Victimization Commission's conclusions and recommendations

The recommendations and conclusions of the Commission of Inquiry to Investigate Allegations of Political Victimization have been quashed by the Court of Appeals in a writ order directed at a number of people, including President Ranil Wickremesinghe and National People's Power (NPP) leader Anura Kumara Dissanayake.


After investigations into claims of political victimisation by the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption, FCID, CID, and the Special Investigation Unit of the Police from January 8, 2015 to November 16, 2019, then President Gotabaya Rajapaksa appointed the three-member Presidential Commission of Inquiry on January 20, 2020.


4. List of Incidents


4.1. Repression of Media and Journalists				
no	Date	District	Description	Source
4.1.1	15th	Mullaitivu	<p>Tamil Journalist summoned for interrogation</p> <p>Thiruchelvam Divakaran, a freelance journalist and media officer in the Government Information Department, was summoned to the Terrorist Investigation Department office at the Butani Capital Towers in Colombo for questioning, hundreds of miles away from his home in Mullaitivu.</p> <p>In a similar incident where Shanmugam Thavaseelan, a Tamil journalist and the chairman of the Mullaitivu Press Club, was called to court earlier in March about a complaint that a Sri Lankan naval commander filed in 2019 after he covered a rally on disappearances in Mullaitivu.</p>	<p>Sri Lanka's terrorism police summon another Tamil journalist for interrogation. Tamil Guardian. Posted on 16th March 2024. Last accessed on 13th May 2024.</p>
			 <p>Journalist Thiruchelvam Divakaran. Photo Courtesy: Tamil Guardian.</p>	

4.1.2	5th and 6th	Pallebedda, Ratnapura. Kurunegala.	<p>Arrests and investigation of Journalists G.P. Nissanka and Bimal Ruhunage</p> <p>According to news reports and the Media Organizations Collective, a coalition of Sri Lankan organisations that support press freedom and freedom of expression, G.P. Nissanka, the owner and editor of the news website <i>Ravana Lanka News</i>, was arrested on March 5 by officers of the Criminal Investigation Department of the Sri Lanka police service at his residence in Pallebedda area.</p> <p>According to a statement from the Media Organizations Collective, on March 6, police arrested freelance journalist Bimal Ruhunage at his residence in Kurunegala.</p>	<p>Sri Lanka arrests, investigates journalists G.P. Nissanka, Bimal Ruhunage. Sri Lanka Brief. Posted on 16th March 2024. Last accessed on 13th May 2024.</p>
4.2. Repression of Freedom of Assembly				
4.2.1	03 rd	Vavuniya	<p>Police obstruct Santhan's funeral procession</p> <p>When police stopped the vehicle carrying Santhan's² remains, a tense situation developed at the Vavuniya old bus station. His remains were brought to the old Vavuniya bus station to let people pay their final respects. But just as the car was trying to park, the police got involved and told it that it could not be stopped there. Eventually, the driver was threatened with arrest if the vehicle stopped and was instructed to exit the vehicle. The police were accused by the locals of inciting hostility during this time of grieving.</p>	<p>Sri Lankan police obstruct Santhan's funeral procession. Tamil Guardian. Posted on 03rd March 2024. Last accessed on 13th May 2024.</p> <p>Santhan's final journey marked by tributes to his life and sacrifice. Tamil Guardian. Posted on 03rd March 2024. Last accessed on 13th May 2024.</p>

² The final journey of T. Suthendraraja, known as Santhan, one of the seven convicts freed in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case.

4.2.2	20th	Colombo Fort.	<p>Police violently control the <i>Jana Aragala Vyaparaya</i> protest</p> <p>It was reported that a protest staged by <i>Jana Aragala Vyaparaya</i> in Colombo Fort was controlled by the police using water cannons and tear gas. The protest was staged over several issues, including the high prices of goods and foreign agreements by the government. It was reported that 29 individuals were arrested at the protest.</p>  <p>Police obstruct the <i>Jana Aragala Vyaparaya</i> protest. Photo courtesy: Ceylon Today.</p>	<p>29 arrested during 'Jana Aragala Vyaparaya' protest in Fort. News Wire Posted on 20th March 2024. Last accessed on 13th May 2024.</p> <p>Police fire tear gas to disperse protest near Fort. News Wire. Posted on 20th March 2024. Last accessed on 13th May 2024.</p> <p>Twitter Sampath Smarakoon Twitter.. Posted on 21st March 2024. Last accessed on 13th May 2024.</p> <p>පීචිරු ඇතළු 4ක් 27 දා දක්වා රිමාන්ඩ්. Dinamina. Posted on 22nd March 2024. Last accessed on 13th May 2024.</p>
4.2.3	8th	Veddukkuna ari, Vavuniya.	<p>Police arrest Hindu worshippers</p> <p>While participating in festival ceremonies, eight Tamil Hindu devotees were captured by Sri Lankan police and allegedly mistreated during their more than ten-day incarceration. The eight were taken into custody at the Veddukkunaari temple, which is close to Vavuniya. Buddhist monks, supported by the government's Department of Archaeology, claim the temple is an old Buddhist monument. It is one of the temple sites in northeastern Sri Lanka that nationalist Buddhist monks have claimed, often with the help of security services and government organizations. The Veddukkunaari site is regarded by Hindu worshippers as an old Hindu shrine. Earlier, the Vavuniya magistrate's court had decided that Veddukkunaari could host the</p>	<p>Sri Lankan Authorities Detain Hindu Worshippers. Human Rights Watch. Dinamina. Posted on 08th March 2024. Last accessed on 13th May 2024.</p>

			<p>ceremonies for Shivaratri, the main festival day of the god Shiva. But as night fell on March 8, worshippers, including a parliamentarian from the opposition, were attacked by the police. Human Rights Watch was informed by rights advocates that the detainees claimed to have been beaten while under detention; as a result, the court ordered a medical assessment, and for the first three days, their families were not allowed to see them. On March 19, the authorities' allegations were dismissed at their third court appearance.</p>  <p>Police arrest the worshippers. Photo Courtesy: Tamil Guardian.</p>	
4.2.4	6th	Colombo	<p>Police fire water cannons at an Inter-University Student Federation protest</p> <p>To disperse a protest organized by the Inter-University Students Federation (IUSF) in Colombo, the police used water cannons. Two demonstrators, among them IUSF Convener Madushan Chandrajith, were reportedly taken into custody. The protesters demanded a number of things, one of which was opposed to the purported privatization of education.</p>	<p>Water cannons used to disperse university protest in Colombo. News Wire. Posted on 06th March 2024. Last accessed on 13th May 2024.</p> <p>Water cannons used to disperse university protest in Colombo. News Wire. Posted on 05th March 2024. Last accessed on 13th May 2024.</p>
4.3. Repression Activists and Whistleblowers				
4.3.1	31st	Madurankuli , Puttalam.	<p>The Puttalam Teachers' Union President's residence has been set on fire</p> <p>A group of mobs trespassed into the private residence of the President of</p>	<p>ගමක් කැළඹූ ගීනි කැබිම/සුදු පාට ජලය දැමූ පාට වෙයි/සැකරුවන් සොයා පොලීසිය ලුහුඬදී. Youtube SI tv1st-news. Posted on 01st April</p>

			<p>Puttalam Teachers' Association and activist by the name of Ajith Wijesinghe. The mobs vandalized and set on fire the house and vehicle of the said environmental activist.</p> <div>  <p>උණසුම් පුවත්</p> <p>කඩු පොලු කල්ලියක් පතී.. ගුරු සංගම් සභාපතිගේ නිවසට ගිනි තබයි..</p> <p>April 1, 2024 at 10:02 pm lanka C news</p> <p>ලංකා ගුරු සංගමයේ පුත්තලම දිස්ත්‍රික් සභාපතිවරයාගේ නිවසට මැර කණ්ඩායමක් කඩායැදී පහරදී නිවසට ගිනි තබා පලාගොස් ඇත.</p> <p>පොලීසිය සඳහන් කරන්නේ අපීත් විජේසිංහ නම් සභාපතිවරයාගේ පුත්තලම මදුරංකුලිය ප්‍රදේශයේ පිහිටි මෙම නිවසට කඩා වැදුණු කඩු පොලු රැගෙන පැමිණි පිරිසක් බඩු මුට්ටු වලට දැඩි ලෙස අලාභ හානිකර නිවසට ගිනි තබා බලා ගොස් ඇති බවයි.</p> <p>හලාවත නගර සභාවේ ගිනි නිවන රථ පැමිණ ගින්න මැඩපවත්වා ගෙන ඇති අතර ඔහුට අයත් මෝටර් රථයට හා යතුරුපැදියටද දැඩි ලෙස අලාභ හානි කර තිබේ.</p> <p>එම ප්‍රදේශයේ කර්මාන්තශාලාවකින් බැහැර කරන අපවිත්‍ර ජලය හේතුවෙන් පරිසර හා සෞඛ්‍යයක් ගැටලු සම්බන්ධයෙන් පුත්තලම අධිකරණයේ නඩු ගොනු කිරීමටද ඒ මහතා මුලිකත්වය ගැන කටයුතු කර ඇතැයි මුලික විමර්ශනවලදී තොරතුරු හෙලිව ඇත.</p> <p>Photo Courtesy: Lanka C news.</p> </div>	<p>2024. Last accessed on 13th May 2024.</p> <p>"කණු මාළු ගෙනත් සැමන් වින් ඇතුළට දාලා විකණන අයට මිනිස්සු ගැන මොන ආදරයක්ද?". Youtube. Hiru Tv Posted on 01st April 2024. Last accessed on 13th May 2024.</p> <p>මදුරන්කුලිය නිවසක් ගිනිනයි. Hiru News. Posted on 01st April 2024. Last accessed on 14th May 2024.</p>
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4.4. Repressive Legal and Policy Action

4.4.1	25th		<p>Election law amendments Election postponement is not expected as a result of the election amendment proposals that Parliament has been presented with, according to Minister of Justice, Prison Affairs, and Constitutional Reforms Dr Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe. Additionally, he pointed out that President Ranil Wickremesinghe has already filed measures to combat corruption and institute a proportional electoral system. Since 1994, every contender for president has promised to combat election-related corruption; however, none of them have delivered on their commitments. A lot of people have been speculating that the electoral</p>	<p>Election law amendments : Justice Minister explains Tamil Guardian. Posted on 25th March 2024. Last accessed on 13th May 2024.</p>
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			modifications that are now being discussed would cause elections to be delayed.	
4.4.2	22nd		Public Security Ordinance President Ranil Wickremesinghe has issued a Gazette Extraordinary calling upon the armed forces to maintain public order in specified areas. Accordingly, the Army, Navy and the Air Force have been called to maintain public order in specified areas.	The Gazette No: 2376/30 Posted on 22 nd March 2024. Last accessed on 13 th May 2024
4.4.3	03rd		Declaring certain public services essential By the powers vested in terms of section 2 of the Essential Public Services Act, No. 61 of 1979, President Ranil Wickremesinghe ordered all services connected to the supply of electricity and the supply or distribution of petroleum products and fuel to be essential. In Sri Lanka, this has been a common practice by the government to prevent trade union actions enabled by trade unions related to said services.	The Gazette No:2373/59 Posted on 10 th March 2024. Last accessed on 13 th May 2024.
4.5. Other				
4.5.1	12th	Vavuniya	TID summons former LTTE cadre over Facebook account The Terrorism Investigation Department (TID) of Sri Lanka has called activist and former LTTE cadre Selvanayagam Aravinthan for questioning on a Facebook account. Aravinthan's summons was issued just a few weeks after the Online Safety Act of Sri Lanka was enacted, in a context where this act has been widely criticized for its potential to restrict free speech. Although the Act was recently passed, Tamils in the North-East have been called and incarcerated for years over social media posts.	Sri Lanka's TID summons former LTTE cadre over Facebook account. Tamil Guardian. Posted on 10 th March 2024. Last accessed on 13 th May 2024.

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