

# Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka

## June 2024



The police disperse the school principals' and teachers' union protest using tear gas and water. Photo courtesy: Daily Mirror.

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# 1. Executive Summary

**Context:** UN OHCHR states in a new report that the Government of Sri Lanka needs to take effective measures to ascertain and reveal the fates and locations of individuals who have been victims of enforced disappearance, and to ensure that those responsible are held accountable.

Minister of State for Finance Shehan Semasinghe said that the purpose of the Public Debt Management Bill is to transfer the responsibility of debt management to one central place and another objective of the Bill is to manage the country in such a way as to create debt sustainability.

The IMF said in a statement that the Executive Board approved the release of \$336 billion to Sri Lanka as the third tranche under the Extended Credit Facility.

Verité Research, a Colombo-based research institute stated that out of the 63 commitments to be fulfilled by the end of last May under the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) aid program, Sri Lanka has fulfilled only 32 commitments and Sri Lanka has failed to fulfil 16 commitments. Recently Dr. Nishanda Mel, Executive Director of Verity Research stated that the IMF is becoming a problem rather than a solution to Sri Lanka's economic crisis.

The annual budget progress review conducted by Verité Research revealed that 49.3 billion LKR had been allocated to the 25 highest value spending proposals included in the 2023 budget speech, but the government has failed to provide information on the progress of the budget promises that had allocated 43.8 billion LKR (i.e. 89%) of that amount.

The National Secretariat for NGOs Director General Sanjeewa Wimalagunaratna stated that managing the country's NGOs poses a significant challenge for authorities due to the complexities involved in obtaining legal registration under different laws, hindering effective oversight and regulation. However, the Sri Lankan government has been attempting to bring in new laws to regulate NGOs for several years, and civil society organisations have been raising their concerns over the potential of these laws leading to repression of civil society and dissent groups.

There is a growing concern regarding President Ranil Wickremesinghe's potential consultation with the Attorney General to seek advice on the feasibility of extending the current presidential term through a two-thirds majority vote.

The Supreme Court (SC) has ruled the Electricity Amendment Bill as incompatible with the Constitution, requiring a special majority in Parliament for its passage.

During the Electricity Bill debate, NPP parliamentarian Vijitha Herath said that the Sri Lanka Electricity Bill is an attempt by the government to hand over the country's power sector to India's Adani group, thus establishing a private sector monopoly in the electricity industry.

The SC has also determined the Gender Equality Bill that came into public debate due to the inclusion of SOGI to be in conflict with the Constitution in its entirety.

Secretary of the Ministry of Justice, Prison Affairs and Constitutional Reform M.N. Ranasinghe said that 2022-2024 will go down in history as the period in which the highest number of law reforms were carried out in Sri Lanka.

**Case Updates:** A High Court in Colombo ordered the temporary lifting of the foreign travel ban of Jeffrey Aloysius, the father of the former Central Bank (CBSL) chairperson, who is also the 6th accused in the CBSL bond scam.

Opposition political parties and civil society organisations filed special determination petitions in the SC contesting the constitutionality of the Economic Transformation Bill, highlighting its

negative impact on worker rights, especially the rights of young people. They also claimed that the government failed to consult workers, trade unions, and young people, whom this bill will directly impact.

Delivering a landmark judgment regarding the extent of the executive president's pardon power, the SC declared that the decision of former President Sirisena to pardon a murder convict, was arbitrarily and legally invalid.

The Fort Magistrate ordered four members of the Socialist Youth Union to appear before the Government Analyst in connection with the incident of trespassing and damaging the Temple Trees during the democratic people's struggle.

Former Ratnapura District Secretary Malani Lokupothagama and the former OIC of the Ratnapura Police apologised to a journalist in the SC for an incident in which the journalist was attacked for allegedly wearing a hat into the District Secretary's office.

Colombo Chief Magistrate dismissed the charges brought by the Cinnamon Garden Police against the President of the Medical and Civil Rights Professional Association of Doctors (MCPA), and any other leaders of civil organisations for placing a floral wreath in front of the residence of Rambukwella.

The Writ Petition brought by former Navy Commander Admiral-of-the-Fleet Wasantha Karannagoda against the Colombo High Court Trial-at-Bar on the alleged abduction and forced disappearance of 11 youths from Colombo in 2008 will be heard by a five-judge bench appointed by the Court of Appeal.

**Repression of Media and Journalists:** TV journalist Dhanushka Seneviratne was attacked by a group of unknown people at his accommodation in Kelaniya.

**Repression of Freedom of Assembly:** The Police fired water cannons to disperse a protest organised by unemployed graduates near the parliament.

A protest organised by school teachers and principals was also attacked by the police with water cannons and tear gas.

**Repression of Activists and Whistleblowers:** P. Deepachelvan, the President of the Tamil Literary Forum, underwent a 3-hour interrogation for the second occasion within a span of 2 months by the Counter Terrorism Investigation Division in Paranthan, in Kilinochchi district, regarding a fictional character in his second book titled "Terrorist."

**Repressive Policy and Legal Actions:** By issuing a gazette notification under the Public Security ordinance, the President Wickremesinghe declared that all services connected to the supply of electricity and petroleum products and fuel as essential services in an attempt to prevent trade union actions enabled by trade unions related to said services.

The president also issued a gazette order calling on the armed forces to provide them with powers to intervene in civilian affairs. Similar gazettes have been frequently issued in recent years, indicating continuing militarization and repression of civil liberties in the country.

**Other:** The chairman of the Committee on Public Finance SJB Parliamentarian, Dr. Harsha De Silva, said before parliament that he was receiving unwarranted threats in relation to a visa issuing procedure worth millions of dollars.

It was reported that Water Supply and Plantation Infrastructure Minister Jeevan Thondaman and his mobs kept Kelani Valley Plantations CEO Anura Weerakoon and other official's hostage and threatened them to reinstate two plantation workers who had been suspended,

while demanding the company administration to increase the wages of plantation workers. The police allegedly did not take the necessary actions following the Minister's involvement. The minister had also threatened that the products of Kelani Valley Plantation Company would not be allowed to be presented at the Colombo Tea Auction.

## 2. Context

### 2.1. UN OHCHR says accountability needed for Sri Lanka's enforced disappearances

The Government of Sri Lanka needs to take effective measures to ascertain and reveal the fates and locations of tens of thousands of individuals who have been victims of enforced disappearance over the years, and to ensure that those responsible are held accountable, as stated in a report<sup>1</sup> by the UN Human Rights Office. The Government is urged to recognize the participation of State security forces and associated paramilitary groups, and to publicly apologise (UN OHCHR, 2024).

The report also mentioned that, although there have been certain positive official actions taken by various administrations, such as the endorsement of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the creation of the Office on Missing Persons, and the establishment of the Office for Reparations, actual advancements on the ground in effectively addressing individual cases have been minimal, according to the report (UN OHCHR, 2024).

### 2.2. Economic situation in Sri Lanka

Minister of State for Finance Shehan Semasinghe said in the debate on the Public Debt Management Bill that the purpose of this Bill is to transfer the responsibility of debt management to one central place and another objective of the Bill is to manage the country in such a way as to create debt sustainability (Hewajulige & Weerathne, 2024).

Recently Verité Research has stated that Sri Lanka continues to fail to fulfil important commitments related to governance under the International Monetary Fund's assistance program. Verité Research stated that out of the 63 commitments to be fulfilled by the end of last May under the International Monetary Fund's aid program, Sri Lanka has fulfilled only 32 commitments and Sri Lanka has failed to fulfil 16 commitments. They further said progress on another 15 commitments was classified as unknown due to insufficient information to measure progress. Of the 16 commitments that have failed to be fulfilled, 7 are related to financial management, 6 to financial transparency, and 3 to anti-corruption measures, indicating that Sri Lanka has continuously failed to develop the state of affairs related to its governance (Rodrigo, 2024).

The annual budget progress review conducted by Verité Research revealed that 49.3 billion LKR had been allocated to the 25 highest value spending proposals included in the 2023 budget speech, but the government has failed to provide information on the progress of the budget promises that had allocated 43.8 billion LKR (i.e. 89%) of that amount. According to their study, only seven, or 29%, had information to measure progress on the promises made in the 2023 budget (Mawbima, 2024; WHAT NEWS, 2024).

The International Monetary Fund announced in a statement that the Executive Board approved the release of \$336 billion to Sri Lanka as the third tranche under the Extended Credit Facility (WHAT NEWS, 2024). However recently Dr. Nishanda Mel, Executive Director of Verity Research stated that the International Monetary Fund is becoming a problem rather than a solution to Sri Lanka's economic crisis. He has made this criticism based on the International Monetary Fund's recently proposed tax on rental housing. Dr. Nishanda Mel also

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<sup>1</sup> chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sri-lanka/report-accountability-enforced-disappearances-sri-lanka-may2024-en.pdf>

pointed out that there is no analytical basis to identify the tax on the proposed rental houses as an effective and efficient tax for Sri Lanka. He further said that this is the case not only with the tax imposed on the proposed rental houses, but also with many other taxes that have been introduced based on the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund (News19, 2024).

### **2.3. New attempts to regulate NGOs**

According to the Doing Good Index used for the assessment of the social services delivery sector, the atmosphere for the operation of the NGOs (non-governmental organisations) has improved in Sri Lanka in 2024 compared to the previous years. According to this index, Sri Lanka has been categorised as 'Doing Okay' and this improvement has been attributed to the so-called recovery of the economy (Samarawickrama, 2024).

The National Secretariat for NGOs Director General Sanjeewa Wimalagunaratna stated that managing the country's NGOs poses a significant challenge for authorities due to the complexities involved in obtaining legal registration under different laws, hindering effective oversight and regulation (Chamara, 2024).

Wimalagunaratna added that the Secretariat is presently involved in various initiatives, which involve establishing networks that connect NGOs focused on specific causes, such as social welfare, health, and reconciliation, with government organisations that are also involved in similar activities. This is aimed at enhancing coordination, support, and results (Chamara, 2024). However, these statements were made in a context where the Sri Lankan government has been attempting to bring in new laws to regulate NGOs for several years, and civil society organisations have been raising their concerns over the potential of these laws leading to repression of civil society and dissent groups.

### **2.4. Upcoming elections**

Although claims were made that the presidential election would proceed as planned, there is widespread speculation in political circles that the government may attempt to utilise constitutional provisions to prolong the presidential term and the parliamentary period. Earlier, Palitha Range Bandara, the General Secretary of the United National Party (UNP), stated that the presidential and parliamentary elections ought to be delayed by a period of two years, subject to the approval of the public through a referendum (Bandara, 2024).

There is a growing concern regarding President Ranil Wickremesinghe's potential consultation with the Attorney General to seek advice on the feasibility of extending the current presidential term through a two-thirds majority vote. The argument being presented suggests that the six-year term limit for the President was shortened to five years under the 19th Amendment, during the Yahapalana government's tenure, without the necessary approval of the people through a referendum (Bandara, 2024).

Peter Brewer, the senior head of the delegation regarding Sri Lanka, said that when Sri Lanka takes steps to hold elections, he will discuss with the Sri Lankan authorities how to implement the program introduced by the International Monetary Fund for Sri Lanka. This was said in the special news conference held on June 14 by the International Monetary Fund's delegation on Sri Lanka in relation to the second evaluation of the extended credit facility for Sri Lanka and the 'Article IV' consultation (NEWSNOW, 2024).



## **2.5. New policy reforms**

Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena announced that the Supreme Court has ruled the Electricity Amendment Bill as incompatible with the Constitution, requiring a special majority in Parliament for its passage (Perera & Siriwardana, 2024).

During the Electricity Bill debate, National People's Power (NPP) MP Vijitha Herath said that the Sri Lanka Electricity Bill is an attempt by the government to hand over the country's power sector to India's Adani group, thus establishing a private sector monopoly in the electricity industry. The MP further added that the government intends to sanction Adani's unsolicited proposals through the Cabinet and establish the necessary legal framework by passing the Electricity Bill. He mentioned that privatising power generation posed no problem, while emphasising that transmission and distribution should remain under government control (Siriwardana, 2024). Later, on June 6, the Sri Lanka Electricity Bill was approved by Parliament after being amended. The Sri Lanka Electricity Bill passed during the second reading with a majority of 44 votes when the vote was conducted. The Bill received approval from 103 MPs, with 59 MPs voting in opposition (Siriwardana, 2024).

Another Bill that created a lot of discussion in recent times was the Gender Equality Bill. The Supreme Court has determined the Gender Equality Bill to be in conflict with the Constitution in its entirety. Therefore, it is required to be passed with a two-thirds majority and through a referendum (Perera & Siriwardana, 2024). After the Supreme Court determination, counsel for the intervening petitioner said there was very little reliance on the Supreme Court determination of the Private Member Bill to repeal Article 365. The jurisprudence of that determination was not properly assessed (Wijesinghe, 2024).

## **2.6. Other**

Secretary of the Ministry of Justice, Prison Affairs and Constitutional Reform M.N. Ranasinghe said that 2022-2024 will go down in history as the period in which the highest number of law reforms were carried out in Sri Lanka. Ranasinghe also mentioned that 59 legal reforms have been passed in the Parliament since 2022 and 44 other drafts and 44 legal amendments are to be passed in the future (Weeraratne, 2024).

## 3. Case Updates

### 3.1. Central Bank bond scam<sup>2</sup> - Geoffrey Aloysius's travel ban lifted

On the 21st, the Colombo Special Three-member High Court ordered the temporary lifting of the foreign travel ban of Jeffrey Aloysius, the 6th accused in the Central Bank Bond case. Geoffrey Aloysius is the father of Arjun Aloysius, the 4th accused in the case (Jayaweera, 2024).

### 3.2. Constitutionality of Economic Transformation Bill

The Economic Transformation Bill was recently introduced in Parliament, and special determination petitions were filed in the Supreme Court contesting the constitutionality of the said bill which was recently published in the government gazette (Sooriyagoda, 2024). One of the petitions was filed by the office bearers of trade unions seeking a declaration that the bill requires the approval by the people at a Referendum in addition to the  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority of the parliament.

The petitioners<sup>3</sup> claimed that the Economic Transformation Bill's provisions will negatively affect workers, especially young people. They also claimed that the government failed to consult workers, trade unions, and young people, who this bill will directly impact (Sooriyagoda, 2024).

### 3.3. The Supreme Court revokes the presidential pardon to Royal Park murder convict and ordered Maithripala Sirisena to pay 1M to petitioner



Royal Park murder convict Don Shamantha Jude Anthony Jayamaha. Photo courtesy: Asian Mirror.

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<sup>2</sup> The Attorney General has filed this case under 23 indictments against ten defendants including former Central Bank governor Lakshman Arjuna Mahendran, his son-in-law Arjun Aloysius, Perpetual Treasuries Company and its executive Kasun Palisena for misappropriation of 688 million LKR belonged to the government in a central bank bond auction held on 27 February 2015, including aiding and abetting.

<sup>3</sup> According to the petitioners, the Bill minimises the role of the Cabinet and Parliament in determining economic policy by shifting that authority to the Economic Commission and other bodies established under this Bill. It also encourages the free flow of capital and unrestricted foreign investments. According to the petitioners, the bill creates a number of Commissions, Companies, and Institutions, and it does not explain why these various establishments are necessary for so-called 'economic transformation.'

The petitioner<sup>4</sup> in the Fundamental Rights petition challenging former President Sirisena's decision to grant a Presidential pardon to Royal Park murder convict Don Shamantha Jude Anthony Jayamaha has been directed by the Supreme Court to receive Rs. 1 million from former President Maithripala Sirisena (Sooriyagoda, 2024).

The Supreme Court delivered this landmark judgement regarding the extent of the executive president's pardon power. It was declared that the decision of former President Maithripala Sirisena to pardon Don Shamantha Jude Anthony Jayamaha<sup>56</sup>, who was convicted of the Royal Park murder, was arbitrarily and legally invalid (Sooriyagoda, 2024).

Accordingly, the Supreme Court three-judge-bench comprising Justices S. Thurairaja, Yasantha Kodagoda and Janak de Silva ordered to set aside two Presidential pardons granted to Shamantha Jude Anthony Jayamaha<sup>78</sup> for not following the Constitutional provisions (Sooriyagoda, 2024).

### **3.4. Court order for four members of SYU to appear before the government analyst**

The Fort Magistrate ordered four members of the Socialist Youth Union to appear before the Government Analyst in connection with the incident of trespassing and damaging the Temple Trees<sup>9</sup> during the democratic people's struggle (Rodrigo, 2024).

### **3.5. Former District Secretary of Ratnapura apologises to a journalist before the Supreme Court**

Former Ratnapura District Secretary Malani Lokupothagama and the former Officer-in-Charge (OIC) of the Ratnapura Police apologised to a journalist in the Supreme Court for an incident in which the journalist was attacked for allegedly wearing a hat into the Ratnapura District Secretary's office (Katugampola, 2024; Mawrata News, 2024; Wijesinghe, 2024).

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<sup>4</sup> The Court ruled that the petitioner, Women & Media Collective organisation, is required to hold the funds in trust and utilise them for the benefit of female victims of crime.

<sup>5</sup> Jude Anthony Jayamaha was charged by the Attorney General in front of the High Court for the homicide of Yvonne Jonsson, who was 19 years old at the time, on or around 01.07.2005 under Section 294 of the Penal Code and punishable under Section 296 of the Penal Code. Yvonne's body was found on July 1st, 2005, in a pool of her own blood, on the 19th floor stairway of the Royal Park Apartment Complex, where her family resided.

<sup>6</sup> Jude Anthony Jayamaha stood trial before a sole judge of the High Court, presiding without a jury. On 28.07.2006, the High Court judge delivered a verdict of culpable homicide not amounting to murder, leading to the conviction of the defendant and imposition of a 12-year term of rigorous imprisonment along with a fine of Rs. 300,000. Following that, the Attorney General lodged an appeal in the Court of Appeal citing the insufficiency of the sentence. Additionally, the appeal aimed to overturn the ruling of culpable homicide not amounting to murder and instead have it changed to murder, with the defendant being sentenced to death.

<sup>7</sup> The ruling states that in May 2016, Jude Jayamaha's death sentence was changed to life imprisonment through a Presidential Pardon (1st Pardon), allegedly following the suggestions of the former Minister of Justice, Dr. Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe, PC.

<sup>8</sup> Less than ten years into the convict's death sentence imposed by the Court of Appeal, former President Sirisena, in the last weeks of his presidency, granted the Presidential Pardon (2nd Pardon) to the convict, purportedly exercising his powers under Article 34 of the Constitution. Consequently, the Respondent was released from prison on November 8th, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> The official residence of the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka.

### **3.6. The police carry out an inquiry into the doctors and civil society activists who allegedly placed a flower wreath in front of Rambukwella's residence**

Trade Union and civil society<sup>10</sup> delegates paid a visit to the former Health Minister Keheliya Rambukwella's official residence, where they placed a floral wreath outside the gate of the residence (Jayamanne, 2024). In this context, Chamithri Rambukwella, the daughter of ex-Health Minister Keheliya Rambukwella, has lodged a formal complaint with the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL), alleging that her father's fundamental rights have been infringed upon (Newswire, 2024).

The Kurunduwatta Police have notified the court that they are carrying out a thorough inquiry regarding the doctors and civil activists who reportedly placed floral wreaths in front of the former Health Minister Keheliya Rambukwella's official residence (Mawrata News, 2024).

According to Colombo Chief Magistrate Prasanna Alwis, the charges brought by the Cinnamon Garden Police against Chamal Sanjeewa, the President of the Medical and Civil Rights Professional Association of Doctors (MCPA), and any other leaders of civil organisations for placing a floral wreath in front of the residence of former Health Minister Keheliya Rambukwella on January 1, 2024, have been dismissed. President's Counsel Maithri Gunaratne stated that the Police had insufficient grounds to press charges against Dr. Sanjeewa or any other civil activists for voicing their opinions, especially considering that Rambukwella, in his capacity as Health Minister, had jeopardised the safety of the general public. In this regard, The Police were infringing upon the freedom of speech as outlined in the Constitution (Jayamanne, 2024).

### **3.7. Court of Appeal appoints five-judge bench to hear Karannagoda's writ petition**

The Writ Petition brought by former Navy Commander Admiral-of-the-Fleet Wasantha Karannagoda against the Colombo High Court Trial-at-Bar on the alleged abduction and forced disappearance of 11 youths from Colombo in 2008 will be heard by a five-judge bench appointed by the Court of Appeal (Daily News, 2024; Lankadeepa, 2024).

### **3.8. The Supreme Court determines the Gender Equality Bill is inconsistent with the constitution**

The Supreme Court determined that the Gender Equality Bill ought to be passed by a two-thirds majority and through a referendum because it is inconsistent with the Constitution as a whole (Perera & Siriwardana, 2024).

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<sup>10</sup>The Medical and Civil Rights Professional Association of Doctors (MCPA) and Civil Rights Organizations have called for a public debate with Rambukwella regarding the numerous bribery and corruption cases that took place while he served as the Minister of Health.

## 4. Repression of Media and Journalists

### 4.1. TV journalist Dhanushka Seneviratne gets assaulted

It is reported that Dhanushka Seneviratne, a television journalist, was attacked by a group of unknown people (Dasatha Lanka News, 2024). On the 21st at around 03.00 in the morning at the accommodation in the Kelaniya area where he is staying. Dhanushka Senaviratne, who was injured in the attack, has been admitted to the Colombo National Hospital (Rathnaweera, 2024).

The Free Media Movement has also issued a statement demanding a speedy investigation regarding this attack (Asia Commune, 2024).



Assaulted journalist Dhanushka Senavirathna. Photo courtesy: Asia Commune.

## 5. Repression of Freedom of Assembly

### 5.1. Police fire tear gas to disperse a protest organised by unemployed graduates

On June 18, the Police fired water cannons to disperse a protest organised by unemployed graduates near the parliament entry road at Polduwa Junction (Daily Mirror Online, 2024).



Police disperse the unemployed graduate protest which was staged near the Polduwa junction using water cannons. Photo courtesy: The Morning.

### 5.2. Police fired tear gas and water at the school teachers' and principals' protest

A protest organised by school teachers and principals was attacked by the police with water and tear gas (Harshana & Sooriyarachchi, 2024). It was reported that the court had also issued an order to hold this protest peacefully (News19, 2024).



The police disperse the school principals' and teachers' union protest using tear gas. Photo courtesy: Daily Mirror.



## 6. Repression Activists and Whistleblowers:

### 6.1. A writer received summoned by CTID

P. Deepachelvan, a well-known Tamil writer hailing from Kilinochchi, and the President of the Tamil Literary Forum, underwent a 3-hour interrogation on June 16 for the second occasion within a span of 2 months, conducted by the CTID Unit in Paranthan, regarding a fictional character in his second book titled "*Terrorist*" (Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka, 2024; Vikalpa, 2024).



President of Tamil Literature Forum P. Deepachelvan. Photo Courtesy: JDS Lanka.

## 7. Repressive Legal and Policy Action

### 7.1. Gazette issued making several 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<sup>11</sup> 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.

### 7.2. Armed forces are being called up to maintain the Public Security Ordinance

Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena informed the Parliament that the President issued a special order<sup>12</sup> to call the armed forces for the security of the country. The President has taken this decision according to the powers assigned by Section 12 of the Public Security Act which is the 40th authority.

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<sup>11</sup> chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/[http://www.documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/6/2387-11\\_E.pdf](http://www.documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/6/2387-11_E.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/[http://www.documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/6/2389-27\\_E.pdf](http://www.documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/6/2389-27_E.pdf)



## 8. Other

### 8.1. Minister Harshada de Silva insists on death threats

The chairman of the Committee on Public Finance and SJB<sup>13</sup> MP, Dr. Harsha De Silva, said before parliament that he was receiving unwarranted threats<sup>14</sup> in relation to a visa issuing procedure worth millions of dollars (News First, 2024). He further said that the speaker should also be responsible if there would be any damage to his life (Mawbima, 2024).

During the upcoming week, Dr. De Silva promised to give Parliament a thorough report on the visa problem. Opposition leader Sajith Premadasa raised concerns during the parliamentary session with regard to the threats Dr. De Silva had to deal with, while doing his inquiry into the VFS deal. He also mentioned that he was being singled out by state MPs, which put him in a dangerous situation (News First, 2024).

### 8.2. The minister of water supply and plantation infrastructure threatens the CEO of the Kelani Valley plantation company

News sources reported that Water Supply and Plantation Infrastructure Minister Jeevan Thondaman along with a group of people barged into the office of the CEO of Kelani Valley Plantation Company in Pedro Estate, Nuwara Eliya. It was reported that the Minister and his mobs kept Kenaly Valley CEO Anura Weerakoon and other official's hostage and threatened them to reinstate two plantation workers who had been suspended, while demanding the company administration to increase the wages of plantation workers. The police allegedly did not take the necessary actions following the Minister's involvement (Kankasara, 2024).

It has been talked about that the life and safety of the managers of the estate companies have been seriously threatened as this minister has raided the estate properties belonging to the estate companies on several occasions and tried to take the law into his own hands (Mawbima, 2024).

The minister had also threatened that the products of Kelani Valley Plantation Company would not be allowed to be presented at the Colombo Tea Auction (Lankasara, 2024). Sources in the industry said that due to these threats, attention has been paid to boycott the tea auction in Colombo (Mawbima, 2024).



The Minister of Water Supply and Plantation Infrastructure threatens the Kelani Valley Plantation Company's CEO and holds him hostage. Source: News First.

<sup>13</sup> Smagi Jana Balawegaya.

<sup>14</sup> Although the threats were not explicit, the chairman of the Committee on Public Finance confirmed that they were nonetheless extremely concerning.

### **8.3. Mother who has complained about her son's disappearance receives threats**

A mother has filed a complaint with the Ahangama Police on the 15th that she was threatened by a phone call after she complained to the Attorney General about her missing son (Lanka Truth, 2024).

Her son had been missing for about 25 days after he was abducted by a group of people who claimed to be from the Police Special Task Force on March 27. It was stated in her complaint to the police that she received this threat in the midnight on the 14th after she complained to the Attorney General on the 13th asking for an investigation into this (Gamage, 2024).

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