



Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka

August 2024

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Cover photo: The presidential election, scheduled to be held in September, brought so much hope and interest among the people, since this was going to be the first election to be held since the economic and political crisis in 2022. Subsequent people's uprising in response to the political and economic crisis resulted in then President Gotabaya Rajapaksa being ousted and Ranil Wickremesinghe taking over the top position to replace his predecessor. However, the local authority elections that were supposed to be held were postponed for two years, citing the economic crisis, despite the recommendations of the Election Commission and the Supreme Court. Nevertheless, all attempts to postpone the presidential election turned out to be futile.

Source: A [political meeting](#) held by NPP in Galle, a major city in Southern Sri Lanka.

Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka in August 2024.

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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. Currently, INFORM focuses 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 focus of this month was largely on the election as this was the first election happening after the economic and political crisis in Sri Lanka. 39 presidential *candidates*, including incumbent President contested. A significant number of election violations were reported on the abuse of state power, and resources, while a small number of incidents were related to election violence. It was reported that President Ranil Wickremesinghe misused a quote from the IMF chief to promote his election campaign. The Leader of the Opposition accused that centralised funds allocations made available to an MP supporting him in the upcoming election were withdrawn by the government, while new funds were allocated for another MP who expressed support to the incumbent President. Mothers of the victims of enforced disappearances stated that they will firmly disassociate themselves from the upcoming presidential election in Sri Lanka, asserting that none of the Sinhala candidates could be relied upon to provide justice. Several protest marches were held across the North and East to mark the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances (August 30). Authorities apprehended a private secretary to a State Minister while allegedly soliciting a bribe on behalf of the Minister. The current Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in Geneva was mandated by the Australian Federal Court to remit a total of \$543,000 in outstanding wages and interest to a domestic worker who was employed by her during her tenure as Deputy High Commissioner of Sri Lanka in Australia, as she had failed to pay the national minimum wage according to Australian law. The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka addressed a letter to the Minister of Justice asking the progress on proposed legal measures to decriminalise sexual relations between consenting same sex adults. The coastal Vedda community who organised the event highlighted a number of issues that they face including land rights, documentation issues and non-recognition by the state. Anura Kumara Disanayake, the presidential frontrunner of the NPP said that his administration would not punish anyone accused of human rights violations and war crimes.

Case Updates: The Supreme Court scheduled a review of the petition submitted by Shani Abeysekera, the former Director of the CID, who had requested sufficient protection due to threats to his life. The proceedings regarding the Kokkuthoduvai mass grave site took place at the Mullaitivu District Court and the court ordered that this request undergo a review. Emil Ranjan Lamahewa, the ex-Commissioner of Prisons, who had received a death sentence for the killings of inmates during the 2012 Welikada Prison riots, was acquitted by the Supreme Court.

Compensation payments to victims of the Easter attack were completed by all perpetrators except Former Director of State Intelligence Service. The Supreme Court scheduled October 14 for the hearing of petitions concerning the Adani wind power project in Mannar, which is supported by India. The Supreme Court issued an order nullifying the implementation of the recommendations made by the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Political Victimization (PCoI), appointed by former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The Supreme Court dismissed four fundamental rights applications filed by those who protested outside the private residence of former President Gotabhaya Rajapakse in 2022, while it granted Leave to Proceed for four similar petitions. Loved ones of the victims marked eighteen years since the Air Force bombed the Senchulai school in Mullaitivu. Another remembrance event was organised to pay tribute to the victims of the Thiraikerny massacre in Ampara district in August 1990. An event was held at the Jaffna Press Club to commemorate the 17th death anniversary of the journalist Sahadevan Nilakshan. The exhumation of the Kokkuththoduvai mass grave was completed and the case was presented at the Magistrate's Court in Mullaitivu. The magistrate gave the reporters a rundown of the next steps. A Fundamental Rights petition was submitted to the Supreme Court, requesting an order for the President to appoint an Acting Inspector General of Police. Regarding interrogations by TID over his literary work, writer Theepachelvam Piratheepan handed over a letter to Amnesty International, UNESCO and MP Shriharan Sivagnanam. Retired Senior DIG Ravi Senaviratne and retired SSP Shani Abeysekera filed a Fundamental Rights petition in the Supreme Court against the false allegations levelled against them. Families of the disappeared organised a demonstration at the Kokkuthoduvai mass grave site, calling for an international judicial investigation into the mass grave. The Supreme Court determined that the Elections Commission is accountable for its "insufficient planning and management of the electoral process, as well as its failure to exercise its authority to provide necessary directives" to hold local authority elections. Two judges of the Supreme Court withdrew from considering three petitions submitted by former Criminal Investigation Department Director Shani Abeysekera and two additional individuals. A.H.M. Fowzie, a former minister, received a sentence of two years of rigorous imprisonment, was suspended for a period of ten years, due to accusations of misusing a state vehicle.

Repression of Media and Journalists: Journalist Shanmugam Thavaseelan was summoned again by Mankulam police for interrogation. There is an ongoing legal case against Thavaseelan based on a complaint made by a Naval intelligence officer and he has been subjected to various intimidations for the last several years.

The journalists who had been invited from North and East to Colombo for a meeting with the President were barred from speaking and handing a letter to the president demanding justice for journalists who had either been disappeared or assassinated.

Participants of a silent demonstration in front of the court demanding justice regarding a case of gang rape of a female school student in Thanamalwila and a journalist covering that protest were threatened by a person claiming to be a father of a suspect.

Repression of Freedom of Assembly: An Intelligence officer threatened a group of protestors who held a demonstration at Mullaitivu Bus stand demanding justice and accountability on enforced disappearances during civil war. Maligakanda magistrate court issued three restraining orders against three protest marches organised by civil society activists, politicians, trade unions, and student activists in Colombo, preventing them from entering certain areas of the city, claiming that the protest marches would disturb the public. Police obstructed campaigns by Tamil political groups that urged Tamil people to refrain from participating in an election that would prioritise the interests of the majority within a unitary state. Association of the Tamil Families of the Disappeared alleged that representatives from Sri Lanka's Office of Missing Persons had threatened the families of the missing individuals, insisting that they cease their protests. Trincomalee Magistrate's Court issued an injunction order against a protest organised by the families of the forcibly disappeared. Police arrested an activist, Rajkumar Rajeevkanth for participating in protests organised by the Tamil Families of the Disappeared to mark the International Day of the Disappeared.

Repressive Legal and Policy Action: A gazette notification was issued making the supply of electricity and petroleum essential services. 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 President issued an order calling out the armed forces for the country's security, indicating continuing militarization in the country.

Dilith Jayaweera, a presidential candidate and a business tycoon, promised to abolish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act, which his Sarvajana Balaya party claimed was "aimed at handing over Sri Lanka security force officers to international jurisdiction."

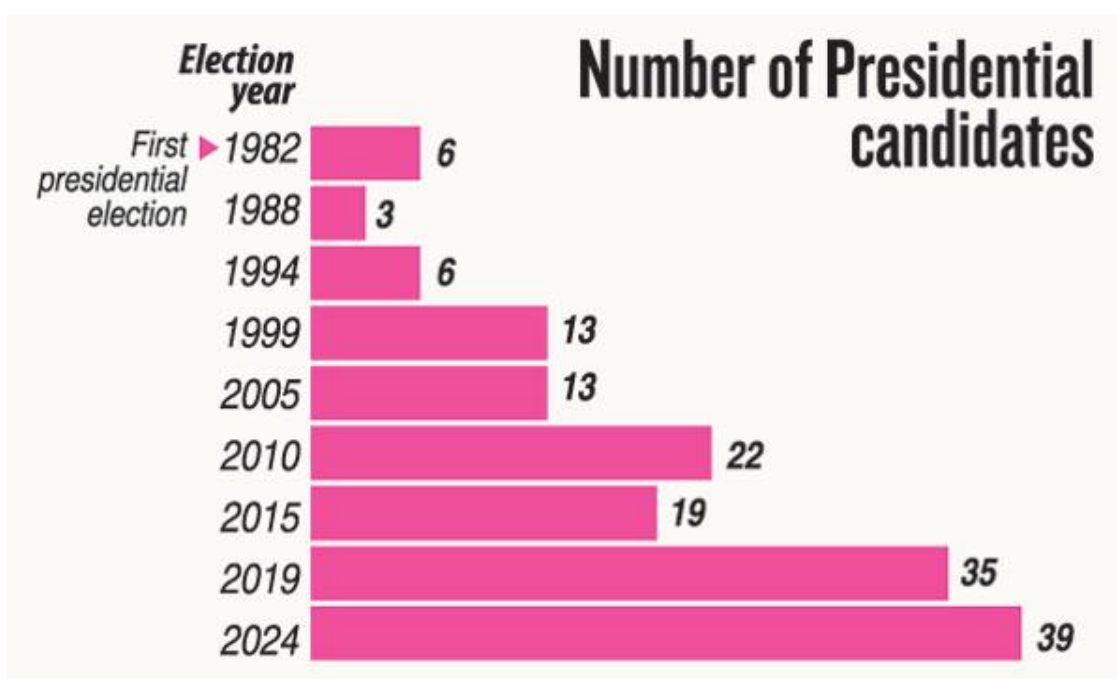
Other incidents: Activists advocating for the accountability on enforced disappearances were intimidated by the state intelligence officers and questioned them at the Mullaitivu court premises when they attended court hearings related to enforced disappearances. Randimal Gamage, a member of Ruhunu People's Front, filed a complaint with the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, claiming that he was unjustly arrested when he attempted to file

objections against the nominations of two presidential candidates. The JMO of the Hambantota General Hospital has allegedly threatened and attempted to assault an underage, rape victim causing her to severe distress. Extensive probes had been conducted by the anti-terrorism police summoning and interrogating the school's principal, teachers, and students of the Konavil Tamil College in Kilinochchi regarding an art installation done at an inter-house sportsmeet event held six months ago. Reportedly the structure of the art installation had highlighted the traditional habitats of Tamils in Sri Lanka adorning the entrance to one of the sports houses. A person claiming to be the husband of a former Governor of Central Province has made a threatening phone call to a Regional Secretary in Nuwara Eliya demanding to provide government land or to face reprisals following the election.

2. Context

The most recent Sri Lanka Opinion Tracker Survey conducted by Institute for Health Policy (IHP) in July 2024 revealed that 72% of Sri Lankans maintain that the nation is moving in an unfavourable direction, whereas merely 8% are of the opinion that it is progressing positively (Kumara, 2024).

Sri Lanka Opinion Tracker Survey conducted by IHP from April to July 2024 revealed that a significant majority of Sri Lankans identify the economy and inflation as their primary concerns as they approach the September Presidential Election. Nevertheless, there has been a noticeable increase in worries regarding unemployment since the beginning of the year (Fonseka, 2024).



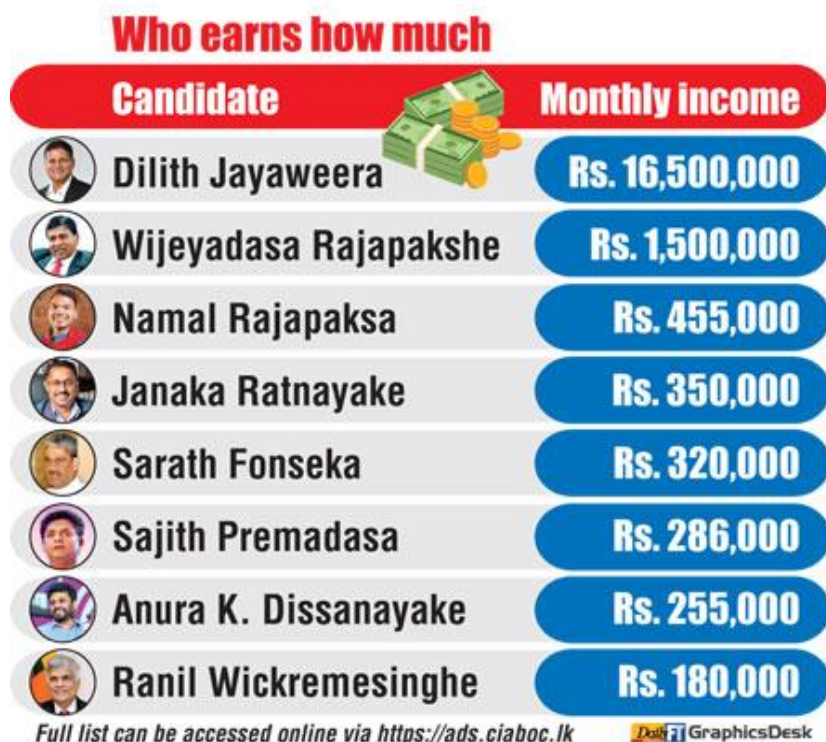
The highest number of candidates in a presidential election in Sri Lanka. Photo courtesy: [SundayTimes](#)

As the Sri Lankan Presidential Election was scheduled to be held in the following month, the focus of this month was largely on the election. A significant number of election violations were reported on the abuse of state power, and resources (Bandara, 2024).

The election watchdog Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL) examined the inappropriate use of public resources for electoral campaigning in the context of the 2024 Presidential Election. It emphasised that the Government's recent pre-election declarations regarding the provision of various subsidies and salary increases represent a clear and deliberate infringement of electoral regulations. It also submitted over 80 complaints concerning allegations of misuse of public resources as of 23rd August 2024 (Mudalige, 2024).

Only a small number of incidents—10 out of 1745 complaints—were related to election violence, as reported to the Election Commission in the month of August. The media only reported a few incidents, such as making death threats to a party member and an arson attack on a party office, etc. (Election Commission, 2024).

The Election Commission announced 39 of the 40 contestants who placed deposits to contest the 2024 Presidential Election handed over their nomination papers (Ceylon Today, 2024; The Island, 2024).



The monthly income of some of the presidential candidates according to their asset declarations they made to the election commission. The lowest in the above list is declared by President Wickramasinghe (less than 600 USD).

Courtesy: [FT](#)

CIABOC¹ has publicly released the asset declarations of all 39 Presidential candidates on its official website, revealing considerable financial differences among them (Borham, 2024).

The Election Commission announced that postal voting may take place on September 4 at the District Secretariats and the offices of the Election Commission. On September 4 and 6, uniformed personnel and civilian employees attached to Senior DIG and DIG Offices, SP and ASP Offices, Police Stations, Special Task Force (STF) Camps, Special Police Units, and VIP Security Divisions were able to mark postal votes. Postal voting was available for marking in Tri-Forces camps and all other government institutions on September 5 and 6. Furthermore, September 11 and 12 were designated as supplementary dates for postal voters who were unable to cast their votes on the original dates (Ada Derana, 2024).

The Election Commission issued a Gazette notice outlining the maximum amount a presidential candidate can spend per voter, and the total budget of a candidate's election campaign (The Morning, 2024).

The highest permissible expenditure for a presidential candidate per registered voter is Rs. 109.00. Additionally, the overall budget for a candidate's election campaign must not surpass

¹ Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption

Rs. 1,868,298,586.00. Furthermore, candidates are required to submit their expenditure reports related to the election campaign to the Election Commission within 21 days following the declaration of the election results (The Morning, 2024).

President violates election regulations

It was reported that President Ranil Wickremesinghe misused a quote from the IMF chief to promote his election campaign (Pathirana, 2024).



Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, Kristalina Georgieva's image and statements have been used in the campaign materials of the incumbent President Ranil Wickremesinghe

Photo Courtesy: <https://x.com/sarojpathi>

The Election Commission has prohibited Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa from carrying out the Sakwala and Husma initiatives aimed at providing IT equipment to educational institutions and medical supplies to healthcare facilities. This decision was made just two days following the Commission's announcement of the 2024 presidential elections. Ranjith Madduma Bandara, the General Secretary of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), expressed his discontent with the ruling and urged the Commission to maintain impartiality in its actions (Deshapriya, 2024; Perera, 2024).

The Leader of the Opposition Sajith Premadasa revealed in parliament that centralised funds allocations made available to Rishad Bathiudeen were withdrawn upon his decision to support the SJB in the Presidential Election. He also highlighted an incident where the government allocated 300 million LKR following special instructions from the President (Manthri.LK_Watch, 2024; The Sunday Times, 2024).

The Sri Lanka Liquor Licensees Association filed a complaint with the Election Commission alleging that President Ranil Wickremesinghe issued 200 new liquor licences violating a Supreme Court order following the presidential election announcement (Bhasura, 2024).

The TNPf communicated in a letter to SJB presidential candidate Sajith Premadasa, stipulating a condition for reevaluating its choice to abstain from the election and to offer him its support. Gajendra Kumar Ponnambalam, the leader of TNPf urged Premadasa to incorporate a provision in his policy manifesto stating that the nation's development can only be achieved through the elimination of the unitary status and the establishment of a federal constitution to unite all communities (Lanka Files, 2024; The Leader, 2024).

Bribery and corruption



Arrested suspect Yoganathan Roshman, with the President Wickramasinghe at an event. Photo Courtesy: <https://x.com/ShanakiyanR>

Authorities apprehended Yoganathan Roshman, the private secretary to State Minister S. Viyalendran, in Batticaloa. It was reported that Roshman was taken into custody during a sting operation conducted by the Bribery Commission, where he was accused of soliciting a bribe amounting to 6 million LKR on behalf of the Minister in relation to a mining licence (Rasamanickam, 2024; Rasamanickam, 2024; Rasamanickam, 2024).

The Supreme Court of Sri Lanka suspended a contract awarded to the private consortium IVS-GBS and VFS Global for visa issuance, following the filing of eight Fundamental Rights cases challenging the decision to grant the contract without a competitive tender process (economynext, 2024).

The TISL² which had filed its petition in the public interest called for action against the procedural violations and abuse of public trust by officials in the procurement of IVS-GBS and VFS Global to handle the Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) system for the issuance of visas for tourists visiting Sri Lanka (economynext, 2024).

² Transparency International Sri Lanka

The inhabitants of Navatkadu village, located in the Eastern district of Batticaloa, have pledged to persist in their protest until the complete closure of the nation's inaugural agrovoltaic solar power plant, citing concerns that its operation would jeopardise their means of livelihood and inflict permanent harm on the environment (Lanka Files, 2024).

Himalee Subashini Arunatilaka, who currently holds the position of Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in Geneva, has been mandated by the Australian Federal Court to remit a total of \$543,000 in outstanding wages and interest to a domestic worker who was employed by her during her tenure as Deputy High Commissioner of Sri Lanka in Australia as she had failed to pay national minimum wage according to the Australian law (ABC News, 2024; economynext, 2024; Tamil Guardian, 2024).

Justice, Accountability and Remembrance

The fifty-seventh session of the Human Rights Council was scheduled to be held from 9 September to 9 October 2024, in which Sri Lanka's situation is to be discussed. OHCHR published a report on the human rights situation in Sri Lanka, providing a comprehensive overview of the civil and political rights situation in Sri Lanka and the need for transformational changes relating to accountability and reconciliation. The report also included statistics on the number of persons arrested under *Yukthiye Meheeyuma*³ - the heavy-handed operation, with the stated aim to control the "drug menace" that was subjected to many criticisms for gross violations of human rights. Out of 121,957 persons arrested, 43,465 were released on bail; 8,300 remain in custody, while 4,344 were issued judicial detention orders and 3,056 referred to rehabilitation as of 20 May 2024. According to HRCSL, since the start of the operations until April 2024, it has received 60 complaints, including 14 cases of torture. While most of those arrested are drug users or are drug dependent, but not drug traffickers, the concerns over alleged arbitrary arrests and instances of torture and ill-treatment during 'Yukthiya', and the detention of hundreds in compulsory military-run rehabilitation centres. In April, the Minister of Public Security made a statement encouraging Police to use excessive force on suspects (Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, 2024; Lanka Files, 2024; OHCHR; 2024; Sri Lanka Brief, 2024).

While Sri Lankan Catholic church leaders met with a number of election candidates advocating justice for the victims of the Easter Sunday bomb attack, the Catholic Bishops Conference in Sri Lanka also issued a public statement requesting the public not to vote for those responsible for the Easter Sunday Bomb attack, corruption and other gross human rights violations, and those who may obstruct the justice process (news.lk, 2024; Perera, 2024; Sandran, 2024; Sri Lanka Brief, 2024).

Anura Kumara Dissanayake, the leading candidate for the National People's Power in the 2024 Presidential Election, affirmed that Buddhism will maintain its preeminent status as enshrined in the constitution under their administration (Lanka Files, 2024).

³ In English reads 'Operation Justice'.



Dissanayake made this statement at the 'Sangaruvane Maha Pelahara', a convention of the Bhikkus organised by the National Bhikku Peramuna at the Maharagama Youth Center Auditorium, located in Colombo suburbs.
 Courtesy: NPP

Anura Kumara Dissanayake, the presidential frontrunner of the NPP⁴ said that his administration would not punish anyone accused of human rights violations and war crimes while he launched his manifesto (Francis & Mallowarachchi, 2024; Tamil Guardian, 2024). He added, "on the question of accountability, it should not be in a way to take revenge, not in a way to accuse someone, but only to find out the truth." In a context where Tamils in the North and East demand an international accountability mechanism, Dissanayake claimed that "even the victims do not expect anyone to be punished." However, the NPP manifesto stated that its administration would investigate and "do justice" to the political killings, disappearances and abductions in the North-East as well as functioning of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate acts of violence committed due to "racism and religious extremism" (Tamil Guardian, 2024).



On 30th August, Tamil families of the disappeared marked the International Day of the enforced disappearances by organizing various protests across the North and East, demanding justice, accountability, and international investigations. Photo Courtesy: [kumanan93](#)

⁴ National People's Power

Mothers from the Tamil community in Vanni, who symbolise the victims of enforced disappearances, conveyed a powerful message by firmly disassociating themselves from the upcoming presidential election in Sri Lanka, asserting that none of the Sinhala candidates could be relied upon to provide justice (Lanka Files, 2024).



Mothers of family members who were forcibly disappeared marching in protest and calling for Justice. Photo

Courtesy: [kumanan93](https://www.kumanan93.com)

Tamil families and loved ones of the forcibly disappeared, civil society activists along with the students of the University of Jaffna staged protest marches across the North and East to mark the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances (August 30). In Jaffna, mothers bearing flaming pots sought truth, justice and accountability for their loved ones who had forcibly disappeared (Kumanan, 2024; Kumanan, 2024; Kumanan, 2024; Lanka Files, 2024; LankaFiles, 2024; Lanka Files, 2024).

Other

On 13 August 2024, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) addressed a letter to the Minister of Justice, Prison Affairs, and Constitutional Reforms, following up on a previous correspondence sent to the ministry on 22 November 2023. This earlier letter referenced sections 365 and 365A of the Penal Code (Chapter 19), which pertain to 'unnatural offences' and 'acts of gross indecency between individuals.' These provisions have been employed to criminalise sexual relations between individuals of the same sex (Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, 2024).

On August 9, a cultural event was held in Manaimundal—a village located in the Mutur divisional secretariat area in Trincomalee—to mark the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. The coastal Vedda community who organised the event handed over a letter to the government representatives, detailing the issues they face, such as the failure of

the government to enact a domestic law to ensure the indigenous community's existence and freedom, encroachment of indigenous farming lands by the government entities, business entities, and other communities, non-recognition of their identities in state documents such as birth certificates, and many other socio-political and economic issues (Lanka Files, 2024).

Former Health Minister Keheliya Rambukwella, along with three additional suspects involved in the purported importation of substandard human immunoglobulin vials had been remanded further until September 11 (Ada Derana, 2024).

3. Case Updates

3.1. Plot to assassinate Shani Abeysekera

The Supreme Court scheduled a review of the petition submitted by Shani Abeysekera, the former Director of the CID⁵, who had requested an order for sufficient protection due to threats to his life (Ada Derana, 2024).

The Supreme Court directed the Attorney General to submit to the court the report pertaining to the conspiracy to assassinate Abeysekera (News First, 2024). President's Counsel Upul Jayasuriya representing Shani Abeysekera, presented evidence indicating that a report from the Police team of the National Authority for The Protection of Victims of Crimes and Witnesses had disclosed a plot to kill his client through a staged car accident. The court additionally mandated that notifications be dispatched to the petition's respondents, including Deshabandu Tennakoon, the former Inspector General of Police, and Defence Secretary Kamal Gunaratne, requiring their presence in court on the specified date (Ada Derana, 2024).

3.2. Proceedings of the Kokkuthoduvai mass grave case

The proceedings regarding the Kokkuthoduvai mass grave site took place at the Mullaitivu District Court on August 8. During the hearing, attorneys representing the families of the Enforced urged that the identification tags retrieved from the mass grave excavation be disclosed to the public and published in newspapers. The court mandated that this request undergo a review, followed by the necessary actions being implemented as deemed appropriate (Kumanan, 2024).

3.3. Former prisons commissioner acquitted in Welikada Prison riot case⁶

“As already observed in this judgement the prosecution had heavily relied on the evidence of witness Kuda Bandara against both the 1st and the 2nd Accused before the High Court Trial, but when accepting the said evidence, the Trial at Bar was not in favour of accepting the said evidence against the 1st Accused (Neomal Rangajeewa, the former OIC of the Sri Lanka Police Anti-Narcotics Division).... , **the Court had failed to consider whether there is any compelling reason to apply the divisible rule and accept their evidence only against the Appellant....”**

Quote from [court judgement on 8th August 2024](#)

Emil Ranjan Lamahewa, the ex-Commissioner of Prisons, who had received a death sentence for his role in the fatalities of inmates during the 2012 Welikada Prison riots, was exonerated by the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka (Asia Mirror, 2024).

The Supreme Court, composed of a five-judge panel, annulled the earlier death sentence that had been imposed by a three-member bench of the Colombo High Court. This ruling followed the examination of an appeal submitted on behalf of Lamahewa challenging the death penalty (Asia Mirror, 2024).

3.4. Updates on compensation payments to victims of Easter attack

Compensation payments to victims of the Easter attack were completed by all perpetrators except Former Director of State Intelligence Service (SIS). In July 2023, after the Supreme

⁵ Criminal Investigation Department

⁶ https://www.supremecourt.lk/images/documents/sc_tab_01_2023.pdf

Court⁷ inquired into the National Police Commission's failure to take appropriate legal action against the former Chief of the State Intelligence Service, National Police Commission ordered to send Director of State Intelligence Service Nilantha Jayawardena on permanent leave and also informed that there is pending investigation against him (Office for Reparations Sri Lanka, 2024; Times Online, 2024; Times Online, 2024).

Perpetrator	Court ordered to pay	Amount completed	Last payment	Additional notes
Former President Maithripala Sirisena	Rs. 100 million	Rs. 100 million	16 Aug 2024	
Former IGP Pujith Jayasundara	Rs. 75 million	Rs. 75 million	30 Aug 2024	
Former SIS Director Nilantha Jayawardena	Rs. 75 million	Rs. 10 million	16 Aug 2024	Jayawardena was sent on permanent leave as ordered by the National Police commission from 18 July 2024, based on a pending disciplinary inquiry against him by the commission.
Former Defense Secretary Fernando	Rs. 50 million	Rs. 50 million	28 June 2024	
Former National Intelligence Director Sisira Mendis	Rs. 10 million	Rs. 10 million	11 July 2023	
State	Rs. 1 million	Rs. 1 million	9 June 2023	

Source: <https://www.reparations.gov.lk>

3.5. Sri Lankan Supreme Court sets date for Mannar wind power project case

The Supreme Court of Sri Lanka scheduled October 14 for the hearing of petitions concerning the Adani wind power project in Mannar, which is supported by India (Tamil Guardian, 2024). Five essential rights petitions were submitted by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), contending that the proposed project poses a threat to biodiversity and migratory bird populations. The court established September 13 as the final date for all respondents to submit their objections. The participants consist of the government of Sri Lanka, the Board of Investment, and the Central Environmental Authority. The Wildlife and Nature Protection Society (WNPS), among the organisations that submitted a petition, contested the decision made by Minister of Environment Pavithra Wanniarachchi to remove the Viddathalathivu region in the Mannar district from the designation of a forest reserve. This removal was aimed at enabling the development of a wind power project (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

3.6. SC quashes recommendations by the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Political Victimization

The Supreme Court of Sri Lanka issued an order nullifying the implementation of the recommendations made by the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Political Victimization (PCoI) led by retired Supreme Court justice Upali Abeyratne, appointed by disgraced former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The Commission comprised retired Supreme Court Judge Upali Abeyratne, retired Court of Appeal Judge Daya Chandrasiri Jayatilake, and retired IGP Chandra Fernando. They were tasked with examining political victimisation and related issues

⁷ https://supremecourt.lk/images/documents/sc_fr_163_2019.pdf

stemming from investigations carried out by the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption, the Financial Crimes Investigation Division (FCID), the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), and the Special Investigation Unit of the Police between 8 January 2015, and 16 November 2019 (Abeynayake, 2024; Daily Feature, 2024; Medagedara, 2024).

The order was issued by the Supreme Court after considering the petitions filed by several petitioners including Presidential Secretary Saman Ekanayake, former Navy Commander Travis Sinniah, former Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Susith Bandara Weerasekara, former CID Director Shani Abeysekara, former Senior Deputy Inspector General of Police Ravi Seneviratne, former High Court Judge Padmini Ranawaka Gunathilake, former Secretary of the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption Ananda Wijepala, former President of the Bar Association of Sri Lanka President's Counsel Upul Jayasuriya, and Sandhya Eknaligoda (Abeynayake, 2024; Daily Feature, 2024; Medagedara, 2024).

3.7. SC dismisses FR petitions by Mirihana protesters

The Supreme Court dismissed four fundamental rights applications filed by those who protested outside the private residence of former President Gotabhaya Rajapakse at Pangiriwatte in Mirihana in 2022, while it granted Leave to Proceed for four similar petitions. Eleven FR petitions were filed following the protests, which started peacefully as a candlelit vigil at the Jubilee Post junction on March 31, 2022. Four of them were dismissed and three were dismissed earlier (Padmasiri, 2024).

the Chief of Defence Staff, General Shavendra Silva; the Army Commander, Lieutenant General Vikum Liyanage; the Inspector General of Police; the Commandant of the Special Task Force (STF); along with various other high-ranking police officials were among the respondents named in the applications. The petitioners contended that their fundamental rights had been violated due to their unlawful arrest and the torture they experienced during the protests (Padmasiri, 2024).

Senior State Counsel (SSC) Shaminda Wickrema informed the court that the petitioners had engaged in multiple illegal activities, which included participation in an unlawful assembly, vandalising public property, and inflicting serious injuries on over 60 officers from the Special Task Force and the police. He additionally requested that the court reject the petitions on the grounds that they were submitted significantly beyond the designated time limit. He claimed that during this period, the petitioners fabricated evidence intended for their applications, leading to numerous misrepresentations and falsehoods (Padmasiri, 2024).

In reply, attorneys Thishya Weragoda and Thanuka Nandasiri, representing certain petitioners, stated that they had initially approached the Human Rights Commission, and their applications remain under consideration. They further stated that their clients participated in the protest in a peaceful manner, yet they were arrested and subjected to violence without justification. Additionally, they informed the court that an initial case had been presented, demonstrating that the rights of the petitioners had been infringed upon (Padmasiri, 2024).

3.8. Victims, survivors and their families of the Senchulai massacre remembered the event in Mullativu

Family members of the victims marked the passage of eighteen years since the Mullaitivu Senchulai tragedy. The bomb attack on the Senchulai school by the Sri Lankan Air Force, resulted in the deaths of 53 Tamil schoolgirls and 8 staff members. However, justice continues to be unattainable, even after nearly two decades (Kumanan, 2024).



Sri Lankan Air Force bombed the Sencholai school premises, resulting in the deaths of 53 Tamil schoolgirls and 8 staff members. Courtesy: Kumanan

3.9. A tribute to the victims of the Thiraikerny massacre

Another remembrance event was organised to pay tribute to the victims of the Thiraikerny massacre in Ampara district where more than 50 Tamil civilians were killed by the mobs, allegedly supported by the state security forces, on the 6th of August 1990 (Lanka Files, 2024; Lanka Files, 2024).

3.10. 17th death anniversary of the journalist Sahadevan Nilakshan



Journalists based in the North gathered at the Jaffna Press Club on 1 August 2024 to pay floral tributes and light lamps in commemoration of Sahadevan Nilakshan, who was murdered on 1 August 2007. Photo Courtesy: <https://lankafiles.medium.com>

An event was held at the Jaffna Press Club on 1 August, 2024 to commemorate the 17th death anniversary of the journalist Sahadevan Nilakshan, who was murdered on 1 August, 2007 (Lanka Files, 2024).

3.11. Sri Lanka commences identifying remains from Kokkuthoduvai mass grave

The exhumation of the Kokkuthoduvai mass grave, which lasted for a year, was completed on 15 July 2024, resulting in the recovery of 52 skeletons. The excavation process was carried out in three distinct phases (Lanka Files, 2024).

After the case was presented at the Magistrate's Court in Mullaitivu on August 8th, Magistrate Dharmalingam Piratheepan addressed journalists. Judicial Medical Officer (JMO) Kanagasabapathy Vasudeva explained that the objective of the investigation was to ascertain various details, including the sex, age, height, and specifics of the injuries sustained (Lanka Files, 2024).

Out of the exhumed skeletons, 25 were forwarded to the Jaffna Teaching Hospital's forensic examination department. The complete reports from the Judicial Medical Officer are anticipated within six months, while a detailed report is expected to be available by early next year (Lanka Files, 2024).

3.12. FR petition filed seeking appointment of Acting IGP

A Fundamental Rights petition was submitted to the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka, requesting an order for the President to appoint an Acting Inspector General of Police (IGP). The petition for the FR was submitted by Attorney-at-Law R. S. P. Ranasooriya, with President Ranil Wickremesinghe and the Attorney General designated as respondents (Newswire, 2024).

The petitioner asserted the interim order issued by the Supreme Court in July, which restricted Deshabandu Tennakoon from performing the powers, functions, and duties associated with the position of Inspector General of Police (IGP), and it did not inhibit the President's ability to appoint an Acting IGP (Newswire, 2024).

The petitioner contended that the President was in breach of the Constitution and was improperly exercising the powers granted to him. He asserted that the failure to appoint an Acting Inspector General of Police was jeopardising public safety, and he argued that a President who had violated the Constitution was unfit to run for the presidential election. The petition sought a ruling from the Supreme Court declaring that the President had infringed upon the fundamental rights of the citizens, and it also requested that he be mandated to appoint an appropriate senior Police officer to serve as the Acting Inspector General of Police (Newswire, 2024).

3.13. Writer Theepachelvam Piratheepan submits a letter regarding the interrogations by TID⁸

Regarding incessant interrogations by TID over his literary work and other related issues Tamil writer Theepachelvam Piratheepan handed over a letter to the District Secretary S. Muralitharan in Kilinochchi. He previously submitted copies of this letter to Amnesty International, UNESCO and MP Shriritharan Sivagnanam (Tamil Guardian, 2024; Tamil Guardian, 2024).

3.14. Ravi and Shani to the Supreme Court against former DIG⁹ Palitha Roshan and former SSP Senaka Kumarasinghe

Retired Senior DIG Ravi Senaviratne and retired Senior Superintendent of Police Shani Abeysekera filed a Fundamental Rights petition in the Supreme Court, alleging that Palitha Roshan, a former DIG, and Senaka Kumarasinghe, a former Assistant Superintendent of

⁸ Terrorism Investigation Division

⁹ Deputy Inspector General of Police

Police held a press conference and made false allegations against them. The petition stated that the two retired police officers held a media briefing and said that Ravi Senaviratne and Shani Abeyssekera were responsible for the inevitable Easter attack (Piyawardena, 2024). The Fundamental Rights Petition jointly filed by Ravi and Shani stated at length the facts necessary to show that these allegations were false (Piyawardena, 2024).

3.15. Tamil families of the disappeared held a protest at the Kokkuthoduvai mass grave site

Families of the Tamil individuals who disappeared organised a demonstration at the Kokkuthoduvai mass grave site, calling for an international judicial investigation into the mass grave. They also criticised the Office of the Missing Persons (OMP) for exerting pressure on the relatives of the disappeared to accept compensation and death certificates (Kumanan, 2024; Lanka Files, 2024).

Tamil mothers from the Northern province organised a demonstration at the Kokkuthiduvai mass grave which was recently sealed based on a court order, calling for an international inquiry into all mass graves located in the North and East, as well as a revelation of the military's involvement in the burials (Kumanan, 2024; Lanka Files, 2024).

3.16. Muslim Congress opposes the appointment of the Acting Chief Epidemiologist

Rauff Hakeem, the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, called for the cessation of Dr. Hasitha Tissera's appointment as the acting chief epidemiologist in the Ministry of Health. Dr. Tissera is a member of the committee that proposed an unscientific and Islamophobic policy regarding the cremation of deceased Muslim individuals who succumbed to COVID-19, disregarding established international protocols (Lanka Files, 2024).

3.17. SC¹⁰ determination on the postponement of Local Government Elections

On February 7, 2023, the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) and its Executive Director submitted a Fundamental Rights petition contesting the inaction or refusal of various government departments to undertake the essential measures required to conduct the local government elections (Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2023).

On January 30, 2023, it was declared that the election for local government would take place on March 9, 2023. However, on February 13, 2023, the Elections Commission revealed that the Government Printer had communicated its inability to produce the ballots needed for postal voting unless adequate funding was allocated. Additionally, it was reported that the Government Printer cited insufficient police security as a reason for their inability to print the necessary ballot papers (Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2023).

The Petitioner further asserted that the President, acting in his role as the Minister of Finance, along with the secretary to the treasury, failed to communicate any issues regarding the allocation of funds for the elections until the final moments of 23rd February 2023. Such conduct was detrimental to the fundamental rights of both the Petitioners and the citizens of Sri Lanka (Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2023).

On August 22, 2024, the Supreme Court issued its ruling¹¹ in this matter. The Court determined that the failure to conduct the Local Government Elections as mandated by law constituted a

¹⁰ Supreme Court

¹¹ chrome-

extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.supremecourt.lk/images/documents/sc_fr_69_23.pdf

breach of Article 12(1) and 14(1)(a) of the Constitution. The Supreme Court specifically held the Elections Commission accountable for its “insufficient planning and management of the electoral process, as well as its failure to exercise its authority to provide necessary directives.” Additionally, the Court found that Ranil Wickremesinghe’s “arbitrary and unlawful actions” in his roles as Minister of Finance and President led to “the failure to conduct the Local Government Elections 2023,” thereby infringing upon the rights of citizens as outlined in Article 12(1) and 14(1)(a) of the Constitution (Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2024).

3.18. Two SC judges recuse from hearing Shani’s, two others’ petitions

Two judges of the Supreme Court withdrew from considering three petitions submitted by former Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Director Shani Abeysekera and two additional individuals (Medagedara, 2024).

The petitioners asserted that their basic rights were infringed upon as a result of their arrest and subsequent remand related to the alleged fabrication of evidence against former Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) Vaas Gunawardena, who was found guilty of murdering millionaire businessman Mohamed Shiyam (Medagedara, 2024).

The petitions were submitted by Shani Abeysekera, the former Director of the Criminal Investigation Department, along with former Sub-Inspectors S.D.N. Premathilaka and Sugath Mendis. The parties named as respondents in these petitions were the Inspector General of Police (IGP) and the Attorney General. Attorneys Hafeez Farisz, Santha Jayawardena, and Shanaka de Silva provided legal representation for the petitioners (Medagedara, 2024).

3.19. Suspended two-year prison sentence imposed on former Minister A.H.M. Fowzie

A.H.M. Fowzie, the former Minister of Disaster Management, received a sentence of two years of rigorous imprisonment, was suspended for a period of ten years, due to accusations of misusing a state vehicle during his time in office in 2010 (Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption, 2024).

According to the allegations, the luxury vehicle, valued at Rs. 20 million, was provided to the Disaster Management Centre by the Netherlands, and an amount of Rs. 1 million from the ministry's budget was allocated for its maintenance (Newswire, 2024).

5. Repression of Freedom of Assembly

5.1. Intelligence officer threatens protestors in Mullaitivu

A member of the intelligence unit intimidated the families of the missing individuals who were demonstrating at the Mullaitivu bus stand by subjecting them to harassment and photographing each participant. He further pursued the protesters, insisting that they disperse and return to their homes (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

5.2. Maligakanda Court issues order against protestors

The Maligakanda Magistrate's Court issued a directive prohibiting a group of demonstrators from accessing specific areas of Maradana during an upcoming protest march. The Police reported that a court order was issued against eleven individuals, which included MP Sarath Fonseka, Venerable Pagoda Vijithavansa Thero, and journalist Tharindu Uduwaragedara (Newswire, 2024).

5.3. Maligakanda magistrate issues a restraining order against protestors

The magistrate of Maligakanda issued a restraining order to prohibit K.D. Lalkantha, Mahinda Jayasinghe, Ranjan Jayalal, Chandana Sooriyaarachchi, and other demonstrators from disrupting public order (Hiru News, 2024).

5.4. Court order issued over protests organised by health students and graduates

The Maligakanda Magistrate's Court mandated a prohibition on health sector trade unions and the Inter-University Students' Federation (IUSF) from conducting protest marches, accessing the Ministry of Health (MOH), and causing disturbances to the public (Ada Derana, 2024; News First, 2024; The Morning, 2024).

5.5. Sri Lanka police obstruct Tamil campaign to boycott presidential election



Police ordered not to distribute any leaflets with messages asking not to vote, as it is unconstitutional and prohibited. Photo Courtesy: <https://lankafiles.medium.com>

TNPF¹² initiated its campaign in the Tamil-speaking regions of the north and east, urging citizens to refrain from participating in an election that was expected to result in the election of a president who would purportedly prioritise the interests of the majority within a unitary state. Thirukkivil police, located in the Ampara district, intervened to prevent TNPF general secretary Selvarajah Kajendran from handing out flyers alongside a group of TNPF supporters (Lanka Files, 2024)

Subsequently, MP Kajendran called for disciplinary measures against the Officer in Charge (OIC) of the Thirukkivil police station, alleging that the police engaged in unlawful obstruction in complaints submitted to the Election Commission and the Human Rights Commission (HRCSL) (Lanka Files, 2024).

5.6. OMP¹³ officers threaten Tamil families of the disappeared

Speaking at a media briefing, Mariyasuresh Eswari, the Chairperson of the Mullaitivu District Association of the Tamil Families of the Disappeared, disclosed that representatives from Sri Lanka's Office of Missing Persons issued threats to the families of the missing individuals, insisting that they cease their protests (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

5.7. Injunction order to stop a protest by Tamil families of the disappeared

The Trincomalee police obtained an injunction from the Trincomalee Magistrate's Court to stop the protest by Tamil families of the forcibly disappeared, scheduled to be held in Trincomalee on August 30, citing it as a security threat (Kumanan, 2025; Tamil Guardian, 2024).

5.8. Police arrest activist Rajeev Kanth at a protest

Police arrested Rajkumar Rajeevkanth, an activist with the People's Struggle Alliance in Trincomalee. It was reported that he was participating in protests organised by the Tamil Families of the Disappeared, who were staging demonstrations across the North-East to mark the International Day of the Disappeared (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

¹² Tamil National People's Front

¹³ Office of Missing Persons

6. Repressive Legal and Policy Action

6.1. Gazette has been issued making several public services essential

A special gazette notification¹⁴ was issued making the supply of electricity and petroleum essential services. 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.

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

The President issued a special order¹⁵ to call the armed forces for the country's security. The decision was made according to the powers assigned by Section 12 of the Public Security Act which is the 40th authority.

6.3. Dilith led Sarvajana Balaya vows to abolish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act

With the support of former ministers from the disgraced Gotabaya Rajapaksa government, business tycoon Dilith Jayaweera promises to abolish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act, which his Sarvajana Balaya party claims is "aimed at handing over Sri Lanka security force officers to international jurisdiction" (Lanka Files, 2024).

¹⁴ http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/8/2396-04_E.pdf

¹⁵ http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/8/2399-20_E.pdf

7. Other

7.1. Intimidating questioning by state intelligence officers

Tamil victim activists were fearful for their lives as a result of state intelligence operatives' invasive questioning inside Mullaitivu court premises regarding the disappearances of militants following the surrender to the Sri Lankan military in 2009 and the Kokkuthoduvai mass grave proceedings (Lanka Files, 2024).

7.2. Unfairly arrested when objections were filed against presidential election candidates

Randimal Gamage, a member of Ruhunu People's Front, filed a complaint with the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, claiming that he was unjustly arrested when he protested against the nominations of the presidential candidates of the "Sri Lanka People's Front" and the "Socialist People's Forum". He was arrested when he went to the Election Commission to lodge a complaint regarding Sri Lanka People's Front's presidential candidate Namal Rajapakse and Nuwan Bopage of the Socialist People's Forum for allegedly misleading voters by engaging in their presidential election campaigns respectively as 'the youth representative of the Aragalaya' and the 'candidate of the Aragalaya' (Mohomed, 2024).

7.3. JMO¹⁶ intimidates a minor victim of rape

The school girl who was raped by 22 students in Thanamalwila was referred to the Hambantota General Hospital for medical examination by the Thanamalwila Police, the JMO of the Hambantota General Hospital threatened the girl and subjected the girl to severe distress and tried to attack as well. A complaint was submitted on the 11th to the headquarters police and the Colombo National Child Protection Authority (Jayasekara, 2024).

The doctor who had examined the girl threatened the victim's mother and even changed the victim's statement as per his wishes (Daily News, 2024).

7.4. Tamil school in Kilinochchi harassed by CTID¹⁷ over an art installation

A Tamil school in Kilinochchi was under duress due to extensive probes conducted by CTID into an art installation at an inter-house sports meet. The principal, teachers, and students of the school were called in by the police for questioning concerning the matter at hand (Lanka Files, 2024).

It was reported that these probes were conducted regarding the inter-house sports meet held at the Konavil Tamil College on 14 March 2024, where a structure, highlighting the traditional habitats of Tamils in Sri Lanka adorned the entrance to one of the houses (Lanka Files, 2024).

7.5. A former Governor's husband threatens a Regional Secretary demanding government land

Nuwara Eliya Regional Secretary Prageeth Daransuriya said that a man claiming to be the husband of the former Governor of Central Province made a threatening phone call saying that if he does not provide an acre of land allocated for an investment project in the Ambewela area of Nuwara Eliya, a strict decision will be made against him after the election.

After the sale of a plot of land that the former governor's husband claimed to have owned on a lease basis to another person, the governor's husband had requested in writing from the

¹⁶ Judicial Medical Officer

¹⁷ Counterterrorism Investigation Division of the Police

Regional Secretary to give this land adjacent to the said land with an area of about one acre. The regional secretary responded that he holds no legal authority to do so. The Regional Secretary said that upon this notification, the governor's husband had threatened him over the phone that he would make a tough decision about him after the presidential election, and he had complained in writing to the Nuwara Eliya Headquarter Police and the Nuwara Eliya District Assistant Election Commissioner regarding this incident (Lanka C News, 2024).

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