

# Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka

## September 2024



Honourable Anura Kumara Dissanayake was sworn in as the 9th Executive President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. Photo courtesy: President's Media Division of Sri Lanka.

Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka in September 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:** President Anura Kumara Dissanayake was sworn in as the 9th Executive President of Sri Lanka. As NPP only had three parliament members in the Parliament, a three-member interim cabinet was appointed and the Parliament was dissolved calling for a new General Election. President Dissanayake committed to "renegotiating" a \$3 billion bailout loan with the International Monetary Fund, which is crucial for Sri Lanka in light of its severe economic crisis. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights presented the [report on the Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka](#) at the 57th Session of the UN Human Rights Council. Later that day Sri Lanka issued a [statement](#) opposing the proposed UNHRC draft Resolution which extended the mandate to establish an external war crimes evidence-gathering mechanism for another year. The then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ali Sabry, responding to a journalist, stated that Sri Lanka opposes an external mechanism investigating Sri Lanka's alleged war crimes during the civil war and also falsely claimed that 90% of those reported as having disappeared had been found. The stance of the new government on accountability for war crimes in Sri Lanka does not seem to be very clear at this point since this remains to be a transitional period. However, it raised concerns when the Minister of Foreign Affairs Vijitha Herath of the interim government appreciated Saudi Arabia's support to Sri Lanka at the UN Human Rights Council to oppose such mechanisms.

A number of commemorative events remembering the 37th anniversary of Lt Col Thileepan's hunger strike, 25th Anniversary of Air Force attack on Manthuvil in 1999, the 28th anniversary of the gang rape and murder of Krishanthi Kumarasamy, 34th anniversary of Eastern University massacre were held throughout the former war affected Northern and Eastern provinces.

**Case updates:** The Supreme Court decided to hear a human rights petition filed by human rights lawyer Senaka Perera against the placement of barricades equipped with deadly iron spikes against a march organised by the Inter-University Students' Union during people's protests in 2022. Sri Lanka's acting Inspector General of Police, Priyantha Weerasooriya, issued a circular instructing Police officers to withdraw from their duties in relation to the infamous anti drug initiative, *Yukthiya Meheyuma* (Operation Justice), while relevant Police stations were instructed to continue investigations into organised crime and drug trafficking and to take necessary measures. Details of skeletons exhumed last year in Kokkuthoduvai mass grave to be finally made public with the intention of eliciting information about the deceased from the public. Excavations at the mass grave in Sri Lanka's main harbour in Colombo were postponed.

New President assured a fresh probe into Easter Sunday attacks. The family of assassinated journalist Lasantha Wickrematunge made a formal appeal to the newly elected President, urging the reopening of an investigation into the assassination. Air Vice Marshal Sampath Thuyacontha, who was previously denied his retirement privileges for participating at political meetings of the NPP last year, assumed duty as the new Defence Secretary.

A Bill was presented to the House to establish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Eelam Tamils have consistently opposed the bill, contending that none of the mechanisms suggested by the Sri Lankan government would ensure a just investigation into war crimes. They have persistently called for an independent international mechanism to achieve justice for the atrocities that have occurred. The United Nations Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka, Marc-Andre Franche, emphasised the urgent necessity to uncover the truth and deliver justice to those affected by enforced disappearances.

The controversial [Puss Buddha](#) (Cat Buddha) Facebook page was accused of allegedly parodying the chronicles of Lord Buddha has resumed publishing its sarcastic content after the silence of almost a year, as the new government came into power.

**Election Situation:** The presidential election was held on the 21st of September. Among the 39 candidates who contested the election, there were no female candidates. The abuse of state power and resources, concerns regarding marginalised populations, and social media-related election law violations were some of the major trends observed during the pre-election period.

The election was considered relatively peaceful by both local and international election observers. The voter turnout of 79.46% was slightly less than in the previous presidential elections. As the leading candidate could not secure more than 50% of the votes, preferential votes were counted for the first time in the history of Presidential elections in Sri Lanka. Even though campaigning was illegal during the silent period, some candidates continued their campaigns during this period using social media including paid promotions. Issues relating to inadequate accessibility for persons with disabilities and the elderly, homophobic and ethnonationalist, and racist social media posts disparaging and ridiculing ethnic and queer minorities were observed during the post election period.

**Repression of Media and Journalists:** Reportedly, several members of the Presidential Media Unit threatened and forcefully deleted a few footages that local journalists recorded when a brawl occurred between groups in an election rally held in Kekirawa, in the Anuradhapura district. Foreign journalists covering the presidential election experienced difficulties in obtaining visas, including visa delays and outright refusals. A group of people threatened with death and arson attacks on the residence of a local journalist based in Galle.

**Freedom of assembly and association:** On the 30th of August, on the international day of the victims of the enforced disappearances, the Magistrate Court in Vavuniya issued an order preventing Tamil families of the disappeared from organising a protest in Vavuniya on the 1st of September. Police obstructed a campaign, arrested, interrogated and filed a legal case against the former MP, the General Secretary of Tamil National People's Front (TNPF) Selvarajah Kajendren for organising a campaign urging people to boycott the election as all major candidates from the South ignore the demands of Tamil people. The Police claimed the campaign was 'illegal'. Jaffna Police requested a court order to prevent commemorative events and memorials in remembrance of Lt Col Thileepan, a Tamil rebel leader who died during a hunger strike during the early days of Sri Lanka's civil war. It was reported that army personnel intimidated people who were involved in the installation of a new plaque on the old memorial commemorating the Saththurukondan massacre in Batticaloa by taking photographs of those who were doing the installation and questioning the residents in the neighbourhood. The Sri Lankan army was accused of killing more than 180 victims during the Saththurukondan massacre in 1990.

**Repressive Legal and Policy Action:** Two Gazettes notifications that were issued by (former) President Wickramasinghe made the supply of electricity and petroleum essential services. Declaration as essential services has been a common practice by the government to prevent trade union actions related to said services. Newly elected President Dissanayake also issued the monthly special order, same as the previous Presidents, calling the armed forces for the country's security, providing additional powers to the military to intervene in civilian affairs, indicating continuing militarization in the country. Similar gazettes have been issued almost each month since August 2019, after the emergency laws following the Easter bomb attack were lifted.

**Other Incidents:** Nuwara Eliya Government Agent made a Police complaint regarding threats made by a businessman demanding not to provide contracts to anyone other than the said businessman who claimed to be an ally of a politician linked to the then government in power.

## 2. Context

### 2.1. New Presidency, Interim Government, and New Developments

Honourable Anura Kumara Dissanayake took the oath of office as the 9th Executive President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka on 23 September (President of Sri Lanka, 2024). Soon after taking oaths, the newly elected President Anura Kumara Dissanayake visited the Temple of Tooth Relic in Kandy and met with the leading Buddhist monks there to receive their blessings. Later he also paid a visit to the Archbishop of Colombo, His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith. The Archbishop subsequently informed the media that the President expressed his dedication to conducting a comprehensive investigation into the Easter attacks and to taking measures aimed at revealing the truth (President of Sri Lanka, 2024).



*Figure 1: Soon after taking oaths, the newly elected President Anura Kumara Dissanayake visited the Temple of Tooth Relic in Kandy and met with the leading Buddhist monks. Courtesy: Presidential website*

On 24 September, President Dissanayake appointed a three-member cabinet, the smallest in Sri Lanka's history, as the Parliamentarian Dr. Harini Amarasuriya was sworn in as the new Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. (The Government Official News Portal, 2024; Economy Next, 2024)

On 25 September, the parliament was dissolved and the General Election was announced to be held on November 14. Nominations were accepted from 04th October to 11th October (Newswire, 2024).

In a letter to the newly elected President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva expressed her commitment to working with President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and his administration to build on Sri Lanka's progress towards recovery (Economynext, 2024; Newswire, 2024; Tamil Guardian, 2024). This letter arrived as Dissanayake committed to "renegotiating" a \$3 billion bailout loan, which is crucial for Sri Lanka in light of its severe economic crisis. Nevertheless, his election promise to renegotiate the painful terms of the loan seemed widely popular (Tamil Guardian, 2024).



## 2.2. Sri Lanka at the 57th session of the UNHRC

“I wish to once again emphasise Sri Lanka’s strong rejection of Resolution 51/1 and the external evidence-gathering mechanism established within OHCHR. This unproductive and unwarranted mechanism exceeds the Council’s mandate, contradicts its founding principles, and polarises the Council, undermining the progress we have made domestically. The selective and disproportionate focus on handpicked developing countries while ignoring critical situations elsewhere is unacceptable. We urge the Council to avoid politicisation and double standards, and to focus on dire humanitarian situations that require urgent action to maintain its credibility.”

[Statement by Sri Lanka as the country concerned, following the Presentation of the Comprehensive Report on Sri Lanka by the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#)  
09 September 2024

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights presented a [comprehensive report on the Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka](#) by OHCHR on 09 September 2024, at the 57th Session of the UN Human Rights Council.<sup>1</sup> Later that day Sri Lanka issued a [statement](#) opposing the proposed UNHRC draft Resolution 51/1 which extended the mandate to establish an external war crimes evidence-gathering mechanism for another year. Then Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Sabry during an interview with Deutsche Welle reiterated that Sri Lanka would not allow any external inference into investigations of enforced disappearances in Sri Lanka, and only believe in local mechanisms. It was also falsely claimed by him that 96% of those who disappeared had returned. He further trivialised the statistics of enforced disappearances that had taken place (Tamil Guardian, 2024). When questioned by the journalist regarding the figures presented, Sabry questioned the validity of the statistics. He characterised these statistics as "nonsense" and "Western propaganda," asserting that the Sri Lankan government had

established systems and gathered data from the United Nations and the Red Cross, which recorded merely 6,075 complaints, of which 5,776 had been addressed. Sabry had further claimed that 90% of those reported as disappeared had been found (Tamil Guardian, 2024). Nevertheless, the stance of the new government on accountability for war crimes allegedly took place during the war time seem to be quite vague. However, it raised concerns when the Minister of Foreign Affairs Vijitha Herath of the interim government appointed by freshly elected President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, issued a statement acknowledging Saudi Arabia’s support to Sri Lanka at the UN Human Rights Council,<sup>2</sup> while speaking at Saudi Arabia’s National Day event held in Colombo (Sankalana, 2024; Tamil Guardian, 2024). Vijitha Herath, a minister in the interim government of newly elected President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, underscored his party’s dedication to maintaining the unitary state of Sri Lanka and ensuring special protection for Buddhism under a government led by the National People’s Power (NPP), just days before the presidential elections. He additionally expressed that the provincial councils do not provide a resolution to the ethnic problem. Furthermore, he indicated that no amendments would be made to Article 9 of the Constitution<sup>3</sup> (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

<sup>1</sup> [1st Meeting - 57th Regular Session](#) and [2nd Meeting - 57th Regular Session](#)

<sup>2</sup> The latest UN Human Rights Council session was underway when this statement was being made, where a new resolution on Sri Lanka was due to be introduced and eventually rejected the resolution which was planned to extend the mandate of the external evidence gathering mechanism, also known as the Sri Lanka Accountability Project relating to the final phase of the armed conflict in Sri Lanka. Previous resolutions also called on Sri Lanka to cooperate with an international accountability mechanism to prosecute war criminals but successive governments refused to comply.

<sup>3</sup> Article 9 of the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka states that Buddhism should be given the highest priority, and that the state should protect and promote the Buddha Sasana.

### 2.3. Remembrance events in the North and East



**Remembering Thileepan:** A blood donation campaign occurred today in Nallur, Jaffna, commemorating the 37th anniversary of Lt Col Thileepan's hunger strike. This blood drive was conducted by the Thiyaga Thileepan Memorial Organising Committee (Tamil Guardian, 2024). Tamil families of the missing individuals also paid tribute to Lt Col Thileepan (Tamil Guardian, 2024). Commemorations were held in Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya, and Kilinochchi (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

**Remembering Air Force attack in 1999:** Tamils in Puthukkudiyiruppu convened to commemorate the victims of the Sri Lankan Air Force attack on Manthuvil in 1999<sup>45</sup>, observing the 25th anniversary of the tragic event. On September 15, 1999, two Kfir Jets from the Sri Lanka Air Force conducted airstrikes on a densely populated area in the Tamil town of Puthukkudiyiruppu, located in the Mullaitivu District. This action occurred despite the designation of the school in the vicinity as a safe zone for Eelam Tamils (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

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<sup>4</sup> During the incident, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) expressed its condemnation. ICRC spokesman Harasha Gunawardana remarked, "It is with deep regret and concern that we confirm the death of 21 civilians consequent to the air strike in Puthukkudiyiruppu yesterday. We deplore the fact that the air strike was in a civilian area."

<sup>5</sup> The airstrike drew significant criticism from Amnesty International, which issued a statement voicing its concerns regarding the incident. The spokesperson for the Sri Lankan military refuted claims that the raid, which resulted in the deaths of at least 21 Tamils in a densely populated marketplace, was a targeted assault on civilians. Amnesty also questioned the Sri Lankan military's adherence to the fundamental rules of the Humanitarian law which include the prohibition of direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects and the prohibition of attacks on military targets expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life ([amnesty.org](https://www.amnesty.org), 1999).

**Remembering Krishanthi Kumarasamy:** The 28th anniversary of the gang rape<sup>6</sup> and murder<sup>7</sup> of Krishanthi Kumarasamy<sup>8</sup> by Sri Lankan soldiers<sup>9</sup> was observed at Chemmani. The assembly also commemorated the tragic murder<sup>10</sup> and subsequent concealment involving those who sought out Krishanthi, including her mother Rasamma, her brother Pranavan, and their neighbour Kirupakaran 10 (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

The Eastern University located in Batticaloa commemorated the anniversary of the enforced disappearance of 158 Tamil civilians, who were apprehended by the Sri Lankan army while attempting to seek refuge on the campus 34 years prior<sup>1112</sup>(Tamil Guardian, 2024).

#### 2.4. Chinese government helps CID to tackle cybercrime in Sri Lanka



On 2nd September, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Sri Lanka Police was joined by a group of ten officers from the Special Criminal Investigation Division of China who planned to stay in Sri Lanka until the end of the month as the Sri Lankan and Chinese law enforcement authorities are collaborating for joint investigations to tackle cybercrime involving foreign nationals (Daily News, 2024; Times Online, 2024; The Sunday Times, 2024).

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<sup>6</sup> Sri Lanka Army Corporal Somaratne Rajapakse is currently on death row for his crime. This case stands out as the sole instance in which members of the Sri Lankan military have been convicted of raping a Tamil individual during the armed conflict, despite the existence of numerous documented cases of extensive sexual violence and murder perpetrated against Tamils by the Sri Lankan armed forces (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

<sup>7</sup> On September 7, 1996, Krishanthi was intercepted by Sri Lankan soldiers at the Kaithady military checkpoint while returning home from school. Investigations revealed that she was abducted by five soldiers at the checkpoint, subsequently subjected to gang rape, and ultimately murdered by an additional six soldiers.

<sup>8</sup> Krishanthi, a student at Chundikuli Girls High School, was preparing for her Advanced Level examinations at the time.

<sup>9</sup> The Sri Lankan government was compelled to detain the soldiers due to ongoing pressure from local human rights organisations, including Amnesty International and Women for Peace.

<sup>10</sup> One of the suspects, Corporal Somaratne Rajapakse, informed the authorities about supposed mass graves. Subsequently, Rajapakse and his accomplices revealed locations in Chemmani and Ariyalai where hundreds of victims were buried. This is now known as the Chemmani mass grave site.

<sup>11</sup> The event marked the anniversary of a mass disappearance that took place amid the peak of the armed conflict. On September 5, 1990, the Sri Lankan army entered a refugee camp situated on the Eastern University campus, instructing civilians to gather on the university premises. Numerous witnesses recounted their memories of observing masked individuals, brought in by the army, selecting specific persons and transporting them away in buses, totaling 158 individuals. These individuals have not been seen or heard from since.

<sup>12</sup> The government carried out an investigation through a 'Presidential Commission', which verified that witnesses reported the army's detention of 158 individuals on that particular day. Nevertheless, no subsequent actions have been taken regarding this matter.

Date	Area	Confiscated items	Number of persons arrested
28 June 2024	Negombo	36 Computers and laptops, 54 mobile phones	30
24 June 2024	Negombo	15 Computers and laptops, 45 mobile phones	4
2 April 2023	Aluthgma	28 Computers and laptops, 174 mobile phones, 400 SIM cards, 1 drone	39

Table 1: Sri Lankan Police data on several recent raids where Chinese nationals were arrested for operating cybercrime-related centres in Sri Lanka. Source: Sunday Times

## 2.5. Plantation workers demand action from Sri Lankan presidential candidates

Over 2,500 Tamil plantation workers<sup>13</sup> in Nuwara Eliya organised a demonstration urging presidential candidates to create rural development societies, enhance educational facilities in hill country schools, upgrade government estate hospitals, and address persistent labour concerns (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

Despite former President Ranil Wickremesinghe's promises to increase the daily wages of plantation workers to Rs 1,700, they still need to receive their promised salary with estate companies claiming that they would not pay. Palani Digambaram, the Nuwara-Eliya District MP, said that the (former) government instructed plantation companies not to raise wages and they were false promises intended to deceive voters (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

## 2.6. Sri Lanka officials' sand mining plans thwarted by community resistance

On July 31, representatives from multiple public institutions visited Alampil Beach, located in the Maritimpattu region of the Mullaitivu district, to carry out assessments for a proposed mining initiative that would cover a 750-acre coastal area, thereby affecting the community's main source of livelihood. The initiative encountered strong opposition from residents as public officials attempted to carry out their field assessment (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

The officials proposed a plan to extract mineral sand from the area between Alampil and Theerthakarai, extending 300 metres inland from the beach. However, residents contended that decisions regarding land use should involve public consultation, asserting that the land is a communal asset (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

Former Northern Provincial Council Member Thurairasa Ravikaran blamed the government for attempting to forcibly relocate Tamil fishermen from their coastal residences without engaging in discussions with the impacted communities or their representatives. He raised alarms regarding the possible displacement of inhabitants along the suggested sand mining corridor stretching from Kokilai to Alampil and Theerthakarai, cautioning that these measures could incite significant protests (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

<sup>13</sup> AKA Malayaga Tamils, descendants of indentured labourers brought over from South India by the British to work on plantations.

## **2.7. Sri Lankan police brutality continues in Jaffna**

It was reported that the police forcibly entered an individual's residence in Chunnakam, Jaffna, on 28 August to apprehend him without any evident justification, subsequently subjecting him to assault with multiple weapons. When the family of the victim confronted the officers, they were all held at gunpoint and threatened by the police. The victim's pregnant wife later informed the media that her husband had been subjected to repeated assaults. Subsequently, he was blindfolded and forcibly taken to a three-wheeler that was stationed outside (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

The family visited the police station later that evening to seek information regarding the incident, only to be informed that the husband had been taken into custody "on suspicion" and was subsequently dismissed. The following morning, they approached the Jaffna District Police Commissioner to file a complaint regarding the wrongful detention. In response, they were met with a further threat of arresting her husband on charges of terrorism. He was then taken to an interrogation room where he was subjected to physical abuse with a metal pipe and wires, while police officers compelled him to kneel despite his vomiting from the agony (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

## **2.8. Businessman provides a statement at the court accusing several high profile Police officers for demanding ransom**

Viranjith Thambugala, Chairman of Aura Lanka Group of Companies, made an open statement before Anuradhapura Additional Magistrate where he detailed that to save himself from false cases involving his legally acquired wealth in foreign countries, the former Deputy Inspector General of CID Prasad Ranasinghe and the current Director of the CID's Illegal Assets Investigation Division Laksiri Geethal demanded a ransom of 300 million rupees and after reducing it to 50 million rupees, they took a ransom of 20 million rupees from him, and that the OIC of the Illegal Assets Investigation Division, Chief Inspector Sampath Rajakaruna, also took another 25 million rupees from him (Ceylon News Factory, 2024).

## 3. Case Updates

### 3.1. Supreme Court decides to hear the petition against the IGP

The Supreme Court decided to hear a human rights petition filed by human rights lawyer Senaka Perera against the placement of barricades equipped with deadly iron spikes against a march organised by the Inter-University Students' Union in conjunction with the Gota Go Gama peaceful protest on 24 April 2022 (Sri Lanka Brief, 2024).

This was contrary to the minimum force that the police should maintain when dispersing a public protest or public rally. The Inspector General of Police was named as the first respondent of this case (Sri Lanka Brief, 2024).

### 3.2. New President assures fresh probe into Easter Sunday attacks

The newly appointed President Anura Kumara Dissanayake pledged to exert every effort to reveal the truth regarding the Easter Sunday bomb attacks by initiating a new investigation (Perera, 2024).



Figure 4: Newly Elected President visited Archbishop of Colombo, His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith to receive his blessings and assured his commitment to investigate the Easter Sunday Bomb attacks. Courtesy: President Media

### 3.3. Family of murdered Sri Lanka editor seeks justice from new President

The family of assassinated<sup>14</sup> journalist Lasantha Wickrematunge<sup>15</sup> made a formal appeal on September 23 to the newly elected President, urging the reopening of an investigation into the assassination that has drawn international condemnation (The Hindu, 2024).

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<sup>14</sup> Wickrematunge was assassinated while commuting to work in January 2009. Eventually, police identified the assailants as individuals affiliated with a military intelligence unit closely associated with the formerly Rajapaksa family.

<sup>15</sup> Wickrematunge alleged that Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who was the secretary of the defence ministry at the time, received illicit payments in connection with arms acquisitions, which encompassed the procurement of used MiG jet fighters from Ukraine.

Wickrematunge's daughter Ahimsa stated, "Today, we stand with hope and unwavering determination in seeking justice for my father, whose life was unjustly taken for speaking truth to power. The pain still lingers 15 years on, but I remain resolute in my pursuit of the truth and accountability" (Daily Feature, 2024).

### 3.4. New Acting IGP Anti-drug Initiative

*"The Government reported that, as at 20 May 2024, among the 121,957 persons who had been arrested, 43,465 had been released on bail, 8,300 remained in custody, 4,344 had received judicial detention orders and 3,056 had been referred for rehabilitation..."*

*Most of those arrested were drug users or were drug-dependent, but they were not drug traffickers...*

*According to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, between the start of the operation and April 2024, it received 60 complaints, including 14 complaints of torture.*

*Furthermore, disturbing rhetoric from the Ministry of Public Security encouraging the use of excessive force during the operation raises significant concerns....*

*The military continues to manage (drug treatment and rehabilitation) facilities such as Kandakadu, where there have been reports of torture, ill-treatment and even deaths, as well as serious conflicts among inmates."*

*Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka: Comprehensive report of the OHCHR 27 August 2024*

Inspector General of Police (acting) Priyantha Weerasooriya ordered the immediate release of Police officers deployed on the island's infamous anti-drug initiative, *Yukthiya Meheyuma*<sup>16 17</sup>(Operation Justice), while the relevant Police divisions and stations were instructed to continue their investigations on organised crime and drug trafficking, and to take necessary measures (Samaraweera, 2024).

In January 2024, HRCSL issued a statement saying that it received a number of complaints concerning torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and arbitrary arrests and detention associated with the 'Yukithiya' Operation (HRCSL, 2024). Numerous other reports and statements by local and international rights groups, and United Nations experts indicated that both during and following these operations, a range of human rights violations<sup>18</sup> took place. These included unauthorised searches, arbitrary arrests and detentions, mistreatment, torture, and even public strip searches. (Amnesty International et al. 2024; HRCSL, 2024; OHCHR, 2024).

<sup>16</sup> *Yukthiya Meheyuma*, which was revealed just one day prior to its commencement on December 17, 2023, was launched under the guidance of the then Minister of Public Security, Tiran Alles, and Acting Inspector General of Police, Deshabandu Tennakoon. The operation received assistance from the Special Task Force (STF) and the Sri Lankan Army. During extensive nationwide raids, thousands of individuals suspected of drug possession and other criminal activities were apprehended. In spite of appeals from both domestic and international organisations to halt the operation, the former government continued, claiming that the issues of drug trafficking and organised crime could be eradicated within a matter of months.

<sup>17</sup> The previous government asserted that the aim of *Yukthiya Meheyuma* was to control criminal activity; however, the initiative encountered significant backlash due to its aggressive methods, resulting in the apprehension of more than 30,000 people. Reports indicated that security forces conducted raids without obtaining search warrants, apprehending individuals suspected of drug-related offences and subsequently transferring hundreds to military-operated rehabilitation facilities.

<sup>18</sup> United Nations experts affiliated with the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council expressed their disapproval of the operation, asserting that "Drug users have human rights. They deserve to live with dignity, without facing further discrimination and stigmatisation. The current climate of severe repression against suspected drug offenders is deeply troubling".

### **3.5. Bill to appoint Truth and Reconciliation Commission presented to House**

A Bill was presented to the House to establish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission shall consist not less than seven members and not more than 21 members appointed by the President on the recommendation of the Constitutional Council (Perera and Siriwardana, 2024).

Former Minister of External Affairs Ali Sabry stated during a session in Parliament the proposed Truth and Reconciliation Commission will lack the authority to impose penalties on individuals. The Minister stated that the Reconciliation Commission will not possess the authority to impose penalties on individuals. Its establishment is solely intended to uncover the truth. It was said that the commission will be authorised to propose recommendations concerning institutional, administrative, and legislative policies, as well as measures for resource allocation. These recommendations should be implemented to prevent and ensure the non-recurrence of any alleged damage or harm inflicted upon individuals, policies, properties, and the loss of life (Perera and Siriwardana, 2024).

Director General of the Interim Secretariat for Truth and Reconciliation Mechanism (ISTRM), Dr Asanga Gunawansa reportedly stated that the key objective of the proposed CTUR law was not to punish (so-called) war heroes as alleged by some but to identify root causes for the conflict and recommend measures for promoting and establishing unity and reconciliation. He further stated that in doing so, if the proposed commission discovers incidents of crimes and violation of human rights, such incidents will be referred to the relevant law enforcement authorities for investigation, prosecution or whatever the necessary action.

Gunawansa's statement emerged in response to criticism from Sinhala nationalist factions, such as the Sarvajana Balaya, which contend that the proposed legislation might expose military leaders to allegations of war crimes. Additionally, Wimal Weerawansa, a member of the National Freedom Front (NFF), expressed apprehensions that the timing of the bill's introduction, particularly if it would coincide with the presidential elections, could undermine the morale and strength of the military (Ferdinando, 2024).

Eelam Tamils have consistently opposed the bill, contending that none of the mechanisms suggested by the Sri Lankan government would ensure a just investigation into war crimes. They have persistently called for an independent international mechanism to achieve justice for the atrocities that have occurred (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

### **3.6. UN Resident Coordinator says 'critical need to establish the truth' for victims of enforced disappearances**

The United Nations Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka, Marc-Andre Franche, emphasised the urgent necessity to uncover the truth and deliver justice to those affected by enforced disappearances, in a statement commemorating the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

He urged the Office of Missing Persons (OMP) to make full use of its extensive legal authority to prioritise the search for individuals who forcibly disappeared. Even since it was founded eight years ago, it has failed to find a single missing individual. Families of the disappeared from the Tamil community have consistently dismissed the office, labelling it an "ineffective mechanism" (Tamil Guardian, 2024; United Nations Sri Lanka, 2024).



### 3.7. Excavations at Mass grave in Sri Lanka's main harbour postponed

The excavations of the mass grave at Colombo Port, which began on September 5, were halted at noon on September 13, revealing at least four human skulls visible at the gravesite. Human skeletal remains were initially discovered at the former Secretariat site of Colombo Port on 13 July. This discovery took place during the excavation activities associated with the construction of a new expressway leading to the Colombo Port (Lanka Files, 2024; Wickramasinghe, 2024).

### 3.8. Details from skeletons exhumed last year in Kokkuthoduvai mass grave to be finally made public

Over a year has passed since skeletons believed to belong to Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fighters were discovered in a mass grave in Kokkuthoduvai. The details regarding these findings were now set to be disclosed to the public following numerous delays and allegations of a cover-up (Tamil Guardian, 2024).



Figure 5: Excavations of Kokkuthoduvai mass grave in Mullaitivu District. July 2024. Courtesy: Kumanan

A court in Mullaitivu mandated the release of information regarding the identification tags of Tamil Tiger fighters found among 52 skeletons, with the intention of eliciting information about the deceased from the public. It was believed these skeletons were interred between 1994 and 1996 and were inadvertently uncovered in June 2023 by construction workers from the National Water Supply and Drainage Board in Kokkuthoduvai, a small locality in the northeastern district of Mullaitivu (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

### **3.9. Air Vice Marshal Sampath Thuyacontha (Retd) assumed duty as the new Defence Secretary**

Air Vice Marshal Sampath Thuyacontha (Retd) was designated as the new Secretary of the Ministry of Defence by President Anura Kumara Dissanayake (Ministry of Defence Sri Lanka, 2024). In March 2023, he was arbitrarily blacklisted by the Air Force for expressing his political stance at a meeting organised by NPP's Collective of Retired Veterans. According to this ban, he could not enter any of the SLAF camps and enjoy the facilities given by the SLAF (Tennakoon, 2024). In response to the situation, then State Minister of Defence Premitha Bandara Tennakoon said in Parliament that retired Air Vice Marshal Sampath Thuyacontha was blacklisted as his statement urged armed forces personnel to join hands with him, which could result in a conflict of interest for officers in duty and lead to animosity against the nation's leader and properties, which is deemed a threat to national security (newswire, 2024). In September 2023, the Supreme Court ordered the restoration of his retirement privileges based on a fundamental rights petition filed by him (Shantha Kumudu Upul, 2023).

### **3.10. Paramilitary aide remanded over sexual abuse charges in Batticaloa**

Gopinath, a coordinator and trusted associate of Pillayan, a notable paramilitary leader associated with the Sri Lankan government, was apprehended last month on allegations of sexually assaulting a schoolgirl at a prominent educational institution in Batticaloa (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

### **3.11. Puss *Buddha* starts publishing content after a year**

The controversial [Puss Buddha](#) (Cat Buddha) Facebook page was accused of allegedly parodying the chronicles of Lord Buddha has resumed publishing its sarcastic content after the silence of almost a year, as the new government came into power. This indicates a sense of freedom of expression having broadened for certain segments of the Sri Lankan society with the new regime change. Last year, the Criminal Investigation Department initiated an investigation into the said social media accounts and a young man who was said to be the creator of these pages was arrested and remanded for allegedly insulting Buddhism and later released on bail. According to the latest reports, an FB page under the same name resumed publishing content.

## 4. Election situation



Figure 6: Sri Lanka's Presidential Election was held on 21st September 2024. Election officials at the gates of a polling station, in Mullaitivu, Northern Province. Photo courtesy: Kumanan

The presidential election was held on the 21st of September. Amongst 39 candidates who contested the election, there were no female candidates. The abuse of state power and resources, concerns regarding marginalised populations, and social media-related election law violations were some of the major trends observed during the pre-election period.

The election was considered relatively peaceful by both local and international election observers. The voter turnout of 79.46% was slightly less than in the previous presidential elections. As the leading candidate could not secure more than 50% of the votes, preferential votes were counted for the first time in the history of Presidential elections in Sri Lanka.

Year	Total Number of candidates	Female candidates	Voter share of winner	Voter Turnout
<b>2024</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>42.31%</b>	<b>79.46%</b>
2019	35	1	52.25%	83.72%
2015	19	0	51.28%	81.52%
2010	22	0	57.88%	74.50%
2005	13	0	50.19%	73.73%
1999	13	1	51.12%	73.31%
1994	6	1	62.28%	70.47%
1988	3	1	50.43%	55.32%
1982	6	0	52.91%	81.06%

Table 2: : Voter turnout in Presidential Elections in Sri Lanka. Data: Reports of Election Commission

#### 4.1. Election-related violence

The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) stated that the overall voting environment on election day was relatively peaceful, although there were 223 recorded incidents of varying seriousness across the country. The most troubling incidents on election day included 01 incident of attempted murder, 01 incident of grievous hurt, 02 incidents of hurt, 05 incidents of threat and intimidation, and 04 complaints of discrimination against persons with disabilities.

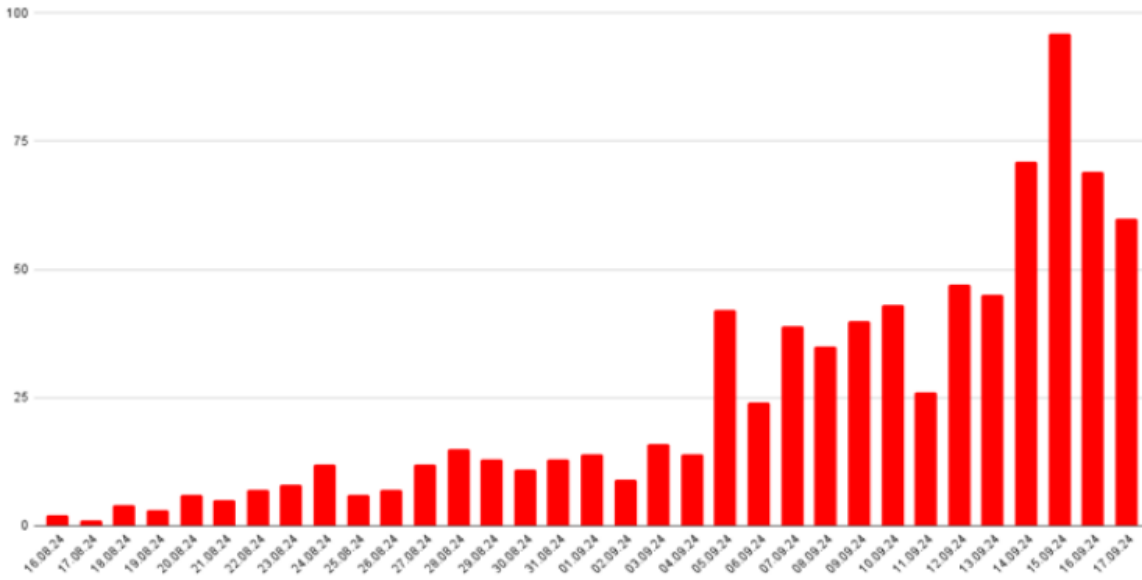


Figure 7: Number of incidents vs date, from 16th August to 17th September. Source: CMEV:

Source	Complaints on Violence	Legal Violations	Other violations	Total Complaints Received
Election Commission	3	202	3	208
CMEV	19	204		223

Table 3: Total number of election violations reported during the election day. source: CMEV and EC

Despite the relatively peaceful situation on election day, a curfew was declared by the President from 10 pm on election day until noon on the following day.<sup>19</sup>

Source	Complaints on Violence	Legal Violations	Other violations	Total Complaints Received
Election Commission	34	4804	34	4945
CMEV	125	729		854

Table 4: Total number of election violations reported during the pre-election period. source: CMEV and EC

<sup>19</sup> [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/9/2402-23\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/9/2402-23_E.pdf)  
[http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/9/2402-24\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/9/2402-24_E.pdf)

125 serious incidents of election violence were reported to the CMEV in the pre-election period. According to CMEV, even though the public election campaign was largely peaceful at the beginning, it later escalated into a relatively contentious and potentially troubling situation, especially during the last two weeks. See the Figure 7 above.

#### 4.2. Misuse of state power and resources

Date	Incident	Source
13th September	Appointing the State Minister of Health, Women and Child Affairs	<a href="http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/9/2401-32_E.pdf">http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/9/2401-32_E.pdf</a>
13th September	The cabinet's decision to lift the ban on vehicle import	<a href="https://www.dgi.gov.lk/news/cabinet-decisions/4488-cabinet-decisions-2024-09-13">https://www.dgi.gov.lk/news/cabinet-decisions/4488-cabinet-decisions-2024-09-13</a>
13th September	Decision on the personal income tax relief	<a href="https://www.dgi.gov.lk/news/cabinet-decisions/4488-cabinet-decisions-2024-09-13">https://www.dgi.gov.lk/news/cabinet-decisions/4488-cabinet-decisions-2024-09-13</a>
10th September	Dismissal of five state ministers by the President	<a href="http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/9/2401-18_E.pdf">http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/9/2401-18_E.pdf</a>
9th September	Cabinet decision to increase Mahapola scholarship premium and bursary of the university students	<a href="https://www.dgi.gov.lk/news/cabinet-decisions/4487-cabinet-decisions-09-09-2024">https://www.dgi.gov.lk/news/cabinet-decisions/4487-cabinet-decisions-09-09-2024</a>
6th September	Dismissal of four state ministers by the President	<a href="http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/9/2400-41_E.pdf">http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/9/2400-41_E.pdf</a>
2nd September	Decision on salary increments for public service	<a href="https://www.news.lk/news/political-current-affairs/item/36904-public-servants-salaries-will-increase-by-24-to-50-from-january-2025">https://www.news.lk/news/political-current-affairs/item/36904-public-servants-salaries-will-increase-by-24-to-50-from-january-2025</a>
3rd September	Decision on salary increments for military personnel	<a href="https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-announces-pay-hike-for-military-personnel-178685/">https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-announces-pay-hike-for-military-personnel-178685/</a>
26th August	Southern Provincial Governor removing three officials of the provincial authorities	<a href="https://www.dailynews.lk/2024/08/28/local/618043/three-provincial-road-and-transport-authority-officials-removed/">https://www.dailynews.lk/2024/08/28/local/618043/three-provincial-road-and-transport-authority-officials-removed/</a>
23rd August	Western Provincial Governor removing two officials of the provincial authorities	<a href="http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/8/2398-42_E.pdf">http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/8/2398-42_E.pdf</a> <a href="http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/8/2398-43_E.pdf">http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/8/2398-43_E.pdf</a>
19th August	Appointing former Ministers as advisors to the same ministries after losing their parliamentary seats (Harin Fernando, Minister of Tourism and Sports, Manusha Nanayakkara, Foreign Employment)	<a href="https://www.newswire.lk/2024/08/19/harin-and-manusha-appointed-presidential-advisors/">https://www.newswire.lk/2024/08/19/harin-and-manusha-appointed-presidential-advisors/</a>
August - September	Eastern Provincial Governor campaigning for the independent candidate, incumbent president	<a href="https://ceylontoday.lk/2024/08/19/cwc-to-back-ranil-in-presidential-race/">https://ceylontoday.lk/2024/08/19/cwc-to-back-ranil-in-presidential-race/</a>
August - September	Sabaragamuwa Governor engaging election campaign in favour of the independent candidate, incumbent president	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AxkaZ_LjkJ8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AxkaZ_LjkJ8</a>

Table 5: Some problematic incidents relating to abuse of state power during election

During the campaign period, there were notable instances of misuse of state resources, which raised serious questions regarding the integrity of the electoral process. Government vehicles including those of the state-owned Sri Lanka Transport Board (SLTB) and the Sri Lanka Air Force, were appropriated for campaign activities, and public welfare and infrastructure initiatives were expedited in critical constituencies, ostensibly to sway voter opinions. The

public officers, including those in senior categories who have only limited political rights, actively campaigning for political parties both in person and on social media. Despite the presence of established laws and codes of conduct, the extensive misuse of state resources significantly undermined the enforcement capabilities of the Electoral Commission of Sri Lanka (ANFREL, 2024; CMEV, 2024).

Other major incidents included the announcement of taxpayer relief measures, salary increases for government personnel, and various development programs during the campaign, which further called into question the fairness of the process. Although the ECSL attempted to rectify some of these concerns by confiscating government vehicles, the pervasive abuse continued, underscoring the urgent need for more robust regulations and enforcement strategies to promote transparency and accountability in future elections (ANFREL, 2024; CMEV, 2024).

The recently enacted Campaign Finance Law, designed to govern political expenditures and promote enhanced transparency, raised additional concerns too. Election monitoring groups highlighted several challenges associated with its implementation, such as ambiguous guidelines, regulatory loopholes, and obstacles in tracking campaign spending. Furthermore, the law enforcement timeline experienced delays, permitting candidates and political parties to undertake substantial campaign expenditures beyond the specified timeframe (ANFREL, 2024).

### 4.3. Social media-related election violations

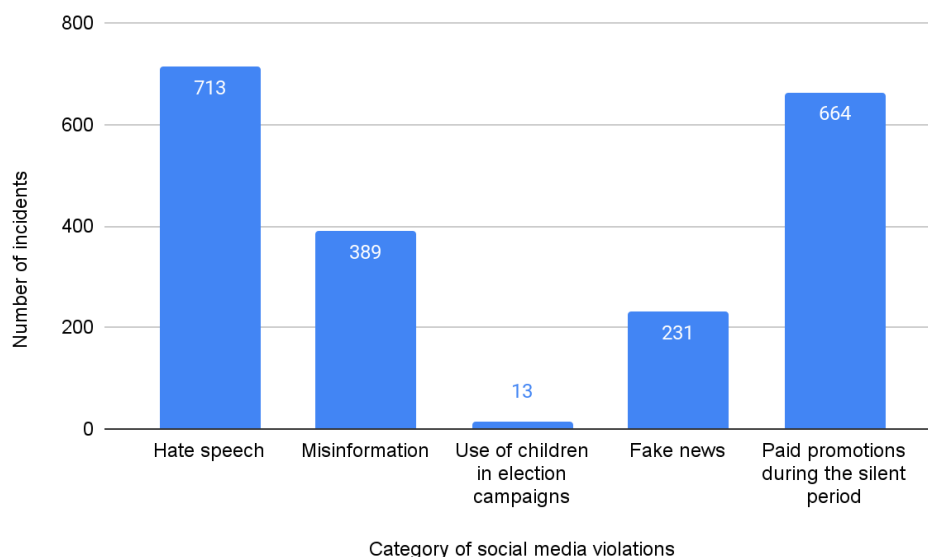


Figure 8: Types of social media-related election violations and number of incidents reported to the Election Commission. Source: Election Commission

As the Election campaigning activities for the 2024 Presidential Election ended on 18th September, the pre-poll silent period was in effect until the Election held on 21 September. Even though campaigning was legally prohibited during this period, some candidates continued their campaigns during this period. Over 60% of the social media-related election law violations were reported during the silent period.

Of these incidents, around 35% of the incidents were related to hate speech. Around 33% were related to paid promotions during the silent period. Around 20% were related to misinformation. Around 11% were related to fake news.

By the end of the polls, based on the requests made by the Election Commission, around 43% of these social media contents were removed, and around 47% of the contents were still being reviewed by the social media platforms, Around 10% of the contents that was seen as violating election regulations were refused to be removed by the platforms. (Media release by EC [PRE/2024/106](#))

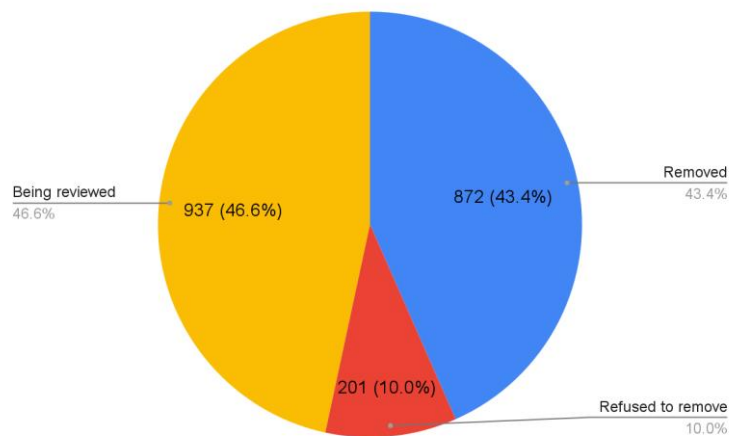


Figure 9: Social media content that violated election regulations. Source: Election Commission

#### 4.4. Discrimination against minorities

While the Election Commission issued guidelines on disability inclusion in advance,<sup>20</sup> CMEV reported 04 complaints of discrimination against persons with disabilities on election day, while Anfrel also mentioned issues relating to inadequate accessibility for persons with disabilities and the elderly.

Soon after the election results were announced there was a wave of ethnonationalist, and racist social media posts disparaging and ridiculing ethnic minorities by equating them with cattle as constituencies with a majority of ethnic minorities were not won by the winning candidate. Some of these posts are still not removed from the social media platforms.<sup>21</sup>

There was a lot of homophobic content in social media targeting National People’s Power (NPP) and their party members for supporting decriminalisation of same-sex relationships between consenting adults.

<sup>20</sup> [https://elections.gov.lk/web/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/MR\\_PRE\\_2024\\_103\\_S.pdf](https://elections.gov.lk/web/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/MR_PRE_2024_103_S.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> [Ayesh M Senadheera](#), [Nipun Dilshan](#), [S O U L](#) , [හමන් බුද්ධික/ Samanali Udagedara](#), [සංචිතේ](#), [Roshan Sujith Kumara](#)

# 5. Repression of Media and Journalists

## 5.1. Presidential Media Interrupts Journalists

It was reported that several members of the Presidential Media Unit intervened and threatened local journalists covering an election rally in Kekirawa, which was held in support of former President Ranil Wickremesinghe, who was standing as a candidate in the 2024 presidential election (Ariyadasa, 2024; Sri Lanka Brief, 2024). As the journalists recorded the events relating to a quarrel that had suddenly occurred during the propaganda meeting, the officials from the Presidential Media Unit threatened the journalists, forcefully obtained their cameras, and deleted the footage they had. The Working Journalists Association issued a statement condemning the incident. (Sri Lanka Brief, 2024)



**ශ්‍රී ලංකා වෘත්තීය ජනමාධ්‍යවේදීන්ගේ සංගමය**  
**இலங்கை உழைக்கும் ஊடகவியலாளர்கள் சங்கம்**  
**Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association**

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**NO.276/3, PRADEEPA MAWATHA, MALIGAWATTA, COLOMBO – 10, SRI LANKA.**

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2024-09-03

**මාධ්‍ය නිවේදනයයි - ජනාධිපති මාධ්‍ය ආයතනය මාධ්‍යවේදීන්ට කළ තර්ජන හෙලා දැකීමු**

ජනමාධ්‍යවේදීන් අතුරුදහන් කිරීම්, සාහසික කිරීම්, පහරදීම් සහ හිංසනයට පත්කිරීම් සිදුකළ එමෙන්ම ඒවාට නිසියාකාර පරීක්ෂණ හෝ යුක්තියක් ඉටු නොකළ අදුරු අතීතයකට ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ රාජ්‍ය පාලනය උරුමකම් කියනු ලබයි. එවැනි පසුබිමක් තුළ මාධ්‍යවේදීන්ගේ වෘත්තීයභාවය මෙන්ම ජීවිතද තවදුරටත් අනාරක්ෂිතව පවතින බව මෑතකදී සිදුවූ සිද්ධීන් කිහිපයක් මගින් පෙන්වුම් කෙරේ.

එහි නවතම සිදුවීම කැකිරාව ප්‍රදේශයෙන් වාර්තා වේ. පසුගියදා කැකිරාව ප්‍රදේශයේ පැවති ජනාධිපති රනිල් වික්‍රමසිංහගේ ජනාධිපතිවරණ ප්‍රචාරක රැස්වීමකදී ප්‍රාදේශීය මාධ්‍යවේදීන් කිහිප දෙනෙකු ඉලක්ක කර ගනිමින් ජනාධිපති මාධ්‍ය ඒකකයේ නිලධාරීන් විසින් සිදුකළ තර්ජනය කොට බිය වැද්දීම මගින් රට තුළ මාධ්‍ය නිදහසට එල්ල වී ඇති බරපතල තර්ජනය යළිත් තහවුරු කරනු ලබයි. එම අවස්ථාවේදී රැස්වීම් භූමිය තුළදී එකම පාර්ශවයේ දෙපිරිසක් අතර ඇති වූ ගැටුමක් ප්‍රාදේශීය මාධ්‍යවේදීන් කිහිප දෙනෙකු විසින් තම කැමරා තුළ සිදුකළ පටිගත කිරීමක් මුල් කරගෙන මෙම සිද්ධිය සිදුව ඇති බව වාර්තා වේ. ජනාධිපතිවරයාගේ අනුදැනුම ඇතිව හෝ ඔහුගේ උපදෙස් පරිදි ජනාධිපති මාධ්‍ය ඒකකයේ නිලධාරීන් විසින් ප්‍රදේශීය මාධ්‍යවේදීන්ගේ කැමරා බලහත්කාරයෙන් පැහැර ගනිමින් පටිගත කළ අදාල ගැටුමේ දර්ශන මනා දමා ඇත්තේ මෙම මාධ්‍යවේදීන් වෙත තර්ජනයද කරමිනි. මෙවැනි තත්වයන් දැඩි පිළිකුලෙන් අප හෙලා දැකින අතර මෙය භාෂණයේ හා ප්‍රකාශනයේ නිදහසට එල්ල කළ තර්ජනයක් ලෙස වෘත්තීය ජනමාධ්‍යවේදීන් වශයෙන් අප සලකන්නෙමු.

පානලය, පැරා මිලිටරි කණ්ඩායම් මෙන්ම ආරක්ෂක සේවාවන් මගින්ද ඇතැම් අවස්ථාවල බියවැද්දීම්, තර්ජන හා සාහසිකයන්ද සිදුවන සමාජයක ජනමාධ්‍යවේදීන් ඇතුළු සමස්ත පුරවැසියන් අනාරක්ෂිතභාවයට ගොදුරු වී තිබීම කණගාටුදායක තත්වයකි. විශේෂයෙන් ජනාධිපතිවරණයක් අභියස ඇති ලාංඡනය සමාජය ගොදුරු වෙමින් පවතින මෙම අනාරක්ෂිත තත්වයෙන් මුදවා සමස්ත සමාජයේ ආරක්ෂාව තහවුරු කිරීම වගකිවයුතු රජයක යුතුකම වේ. ජනතාව වෙනුවෙන් අපක්ෂපාතීව තොරතුරු සන්නිවේදනය කරනු ලබන මාධ්‍යවේදීන් ඉලක්ක කොට ගනිමින් සිදුවන මෙවැනි අතීතක තර්ජන පිළිබඳව අපක්ෂපාතී පරීක්ෂණයක් පවත්වන මෙන් බලධාරීන්ගෙන් ඉල්ලා සිටිමු.

**ප්‍රවෘත්ති කර්තෘ/ කර්තෘ/ ප්‍රවෘත්ති අධ්‍යක්ෂක,**

ඉහත දක්වා ඇති මාධ්‍ය නිවේදනය ඔබ පුවත්පතෙහි/ රූපවාහිනී නාලිකාවෙහි/ලුවන් විදුලියෙහි/ වෙබ් මාධ්‍යයෙහි ප්‍රවෘත්තියක් ලෙස ප්‍රචාරය කොට දෙන්නේ නම් කෘතඥ වෙමු.

ස්තූතියි !



දුමින්ද සම්පත්  
සභාපති



රංග බණ්ඩාරනායක  
ලේකම්

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Figure 10: Letter issued by the Working journalist Association condemning the incident. Courtesy: SriLanka Brief



## 5.2. Journalist Dharmadasa Siriwardena receives death threats

A group of people threatened to burn down the residence of Dharmadasa Siriwardena, a veteran journalist in the Galle district, and kill him on the night of 22 September. He said that his daughter informed the police emergency number 119 at the time of the incident and that the police had not taken any action in this regard until 24 September (Liyanage, 2024).

## 5.3. Foreign journalists experience difficulties in obtaining visas to cover the Sri Lankan election

International journalists who were attempting to travel to Sri Lanka and cover the upcoming presidential elections faced visa delays or even outright refusals (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

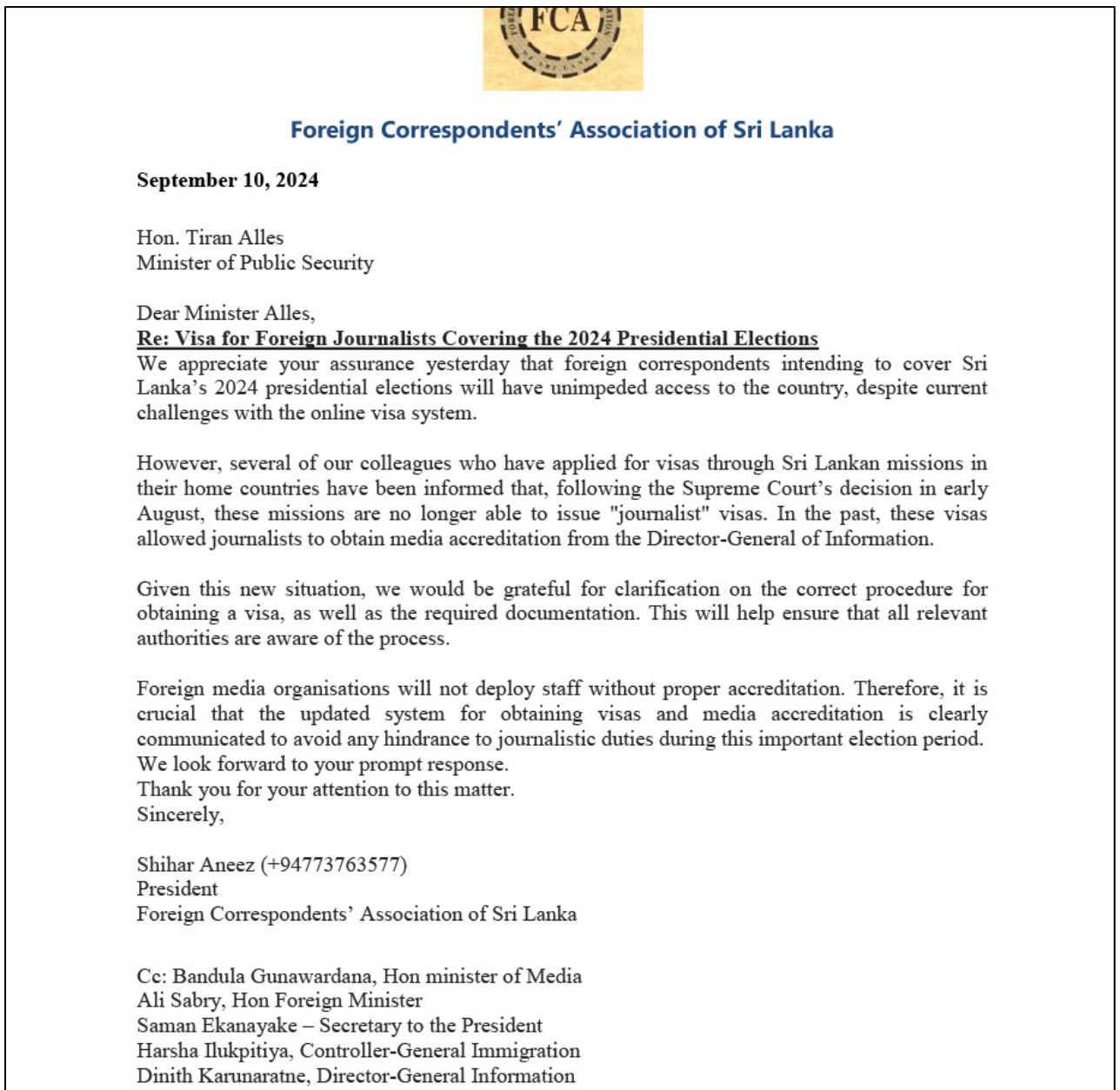


Figure 11: Letter issued by the Foreign Correspondents' Association. Courtesy: Tamil Guardian

## 6. Freedom of assembly and association

### 6.1. Court order prevents Tamil families of the disappeared protesting in Vavuniya

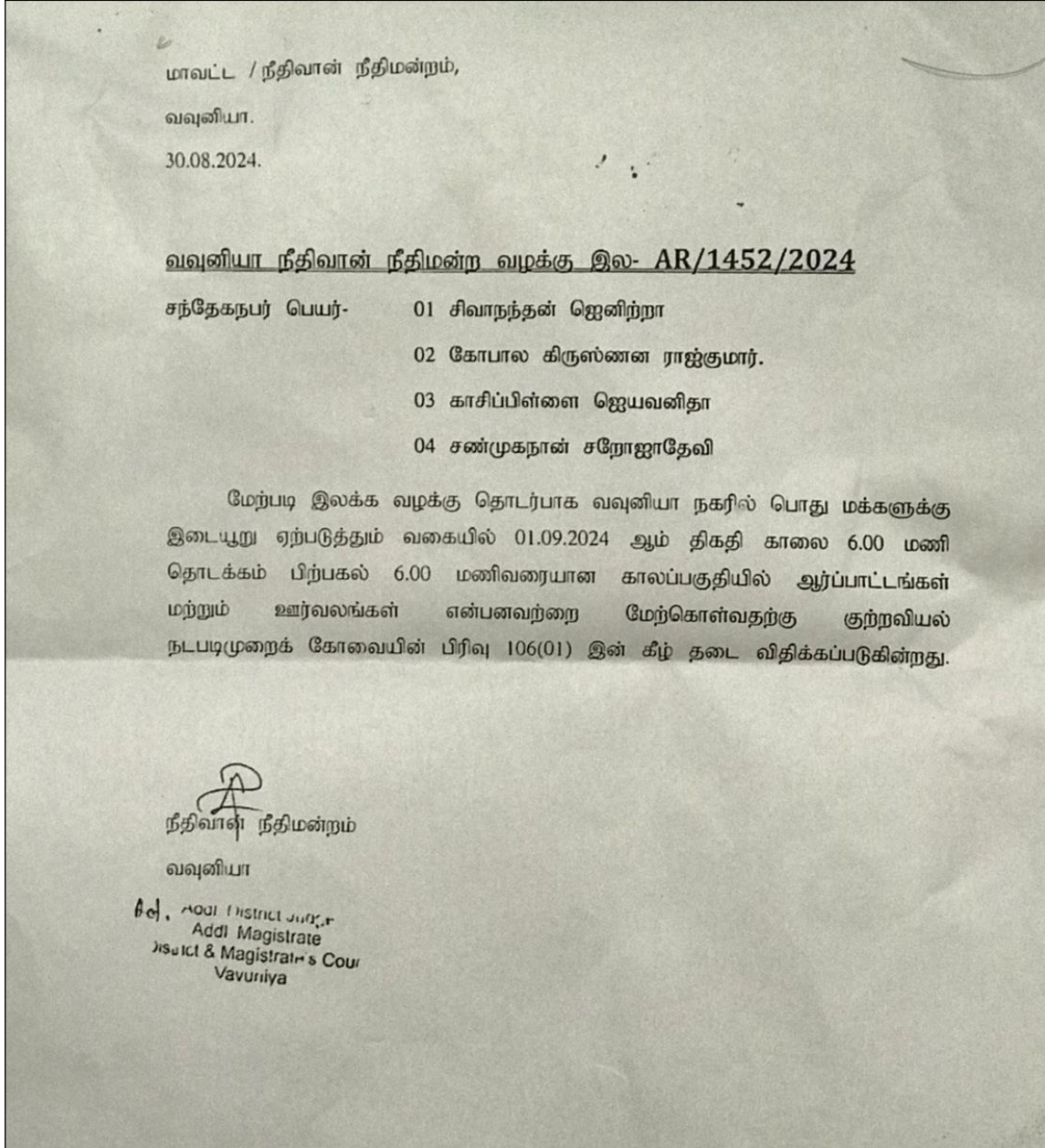


Figure 12: The court order issued by the magistrate court in Vavuniya banned the protest against the enforced disappearances scheduled to be held on 1st September. courtesy: Tamil Guardian

A court granted a restraining order against four individuals associated with the Association for the Families of the Disappeared, prohibiting them from engaging in protests within the town of Vavuniya. The order was issued to Sivanandan Jenita, president of the Vavuniya Association; Gopalakrishnan Rajkumar, coordinator of the Tamil Disappeared Association; Jayavanitha, president of that association; and Shanmuganan Sarojadevi, a member of the Families of the Disappeared Association (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

## 6.2. Sri Lankan police obstruct TNPF boycott campaign in Jaffna



Figure 13: Police obstructed the small group of people who were distributing leaflets to boycott the election Mullaitivu, Northern Province. Courtesy: Tamil Guardian

On September 10, former MP of Tamil National People's Front (TNPF) Selvarajah Kajendren and other members were stopped by police in Maruthankerny, Jaffna, as they campaigned for a boycott<sup>22</sup> of the presidential elections. Police officers confiscated pamphlets and blocked the TNPF members' path while questioning them about their campaign (Tamil Guardian, 2024). Police in Puthukkudiyiruppu, Mullaitivu, blocked former MP Kajendren and his team again on September 12, as they campaigned for a boycott of the upcoming presidential elections (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

Police arrested Kajendren as he and his team campaigned again on September 13 in Kilinochchi. He was released on the following day after hours of questioning. But the police claimed that his party's boycott of the presidential election campaign was 'illegal'. Subsequently, the Kilinochchi Magistrate court issued a summons for Kajendren to appear at the court on September 18 regarding the boycott campaign (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

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<sup>22</sup> The TNPF had been advocating since May of this year, for Tamils to abstain from participating in the forthcoming presidential election. In a statement issued earlier this year, the TNPF condemned the Sri Lankan government, asserting: "The Sri Lankan government perceives the Tamil homeland as an adversary. They persist in their strategies of Buddhization, militarization, and structural genocide within the homeland. As long as the majority representation is maintained by them, they will view Tamils not as their own citizens but as opponents."

### 6.3. Sri Lanka police seek a court order to halt Thileepan memorials again

Police requested a court order<sup>23 24</sup> to prevent commemorative events and memorials in remembrance of Lt Col Thileepan, a leader of the political wing of the LTTE, whose 37th death anniversary is observed on September 26. He died by fasting as a form of protest, urging the Indian government to fulfil commitments made to the Tamil community (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

### 6.4. Sri Lankan Army intimidates Tamils over Saththurukondan massacre memorial



Figure 14: Military officials observing the people who were involved in the installation of a new plaque at the site

On September 9, police and army officials visited the Tamils who were involved in the installation of a new plaque<sup>25</sup> on the old memorial commemorating the Saththurukondan massacre<sup>26</sup>.

Several army officers took photographs and questioned the residents. An officer who reached the location informed the Tamils that the plaque indicated the army's accountability for the massacre, which he claimed was an unlawful act, asserting that no murders had ever occurred at that site. He then engaged in a dispute with the Tamils and the organising committee responsible for the plaque's installation. When residents attempted to clarify the situation, the police officers responded by stating that they would report the matter to their superiors and take necessary measures (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

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<sup>23</sup> The Jaffna police, submitting a motion to courts, said that they were aware of commemorations that would take place from the 15th to the 26th of this month, marking the beginning and end of his fast, and sought an order to ban all such events.

<sup>24</sup> The petition was filed at Jaffna Magistrate Courts on Friday, September 13, by the Jaffna Police Division. The Magistrate ordered that a hearing be conducted and it was fixed on September 18th. Accordingly, former MP Selvarajah Kajendren of TNPJ and former Jaffna Mayor Visvalingam Manivannan were named in the petition. They were also expected to appear before courts for the hearing.

<sup>25</sup> It was reported that the plaque started, "1990.09.09 We Remember the Massacre of 186 Innocent Civilians Brutally Killed by the Srilankan Armed Force, Muslim Armed Gangs And Paramilitary Groups who worked with the Srilankan soldiers."

<sup>26</sup> This year marks the 34th anniversary of the massacre, during which 186 civilians lost their lives in the regions of Saththurukondan, Panichchayadi, Kokkuvil, and Pillaiyaradi.

## 7. Repressive Legal and Policy Action

### 7.1. Two Gazettes have been issued making several public services essential

Two gazette notifications<sup>27</sup> were issued on 5th of September and 20th of September making the supply of electricity and petroleum essential services. The first gazette notification was issued when President Wickramasinghe was about to remove the four state ministers including the State Minister of Power and Energy from their portfolios apparently because they did not support him in the Presidential Election. The second gazette notification was issued the day before the Presidential election. In Sri Lanka, declaration of public services as essential services has been a common practice by the government to prevent trade union actions enabled by trade unions related to said services (The Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 2024). Punishments for refusing, impeding, obstructing, delaying or restricting essential services or inciting, inducing or encouraging workers not to attend work relating to essential services could result in 2-5 years of rigorous imprisonment, forfeiture of all property, and removal of professional licences of a person, according to the [Essential Public Services Act](#), No 61 of 1979.

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

The President issued a special order<sup>28</sup> 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 (The Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 2024).

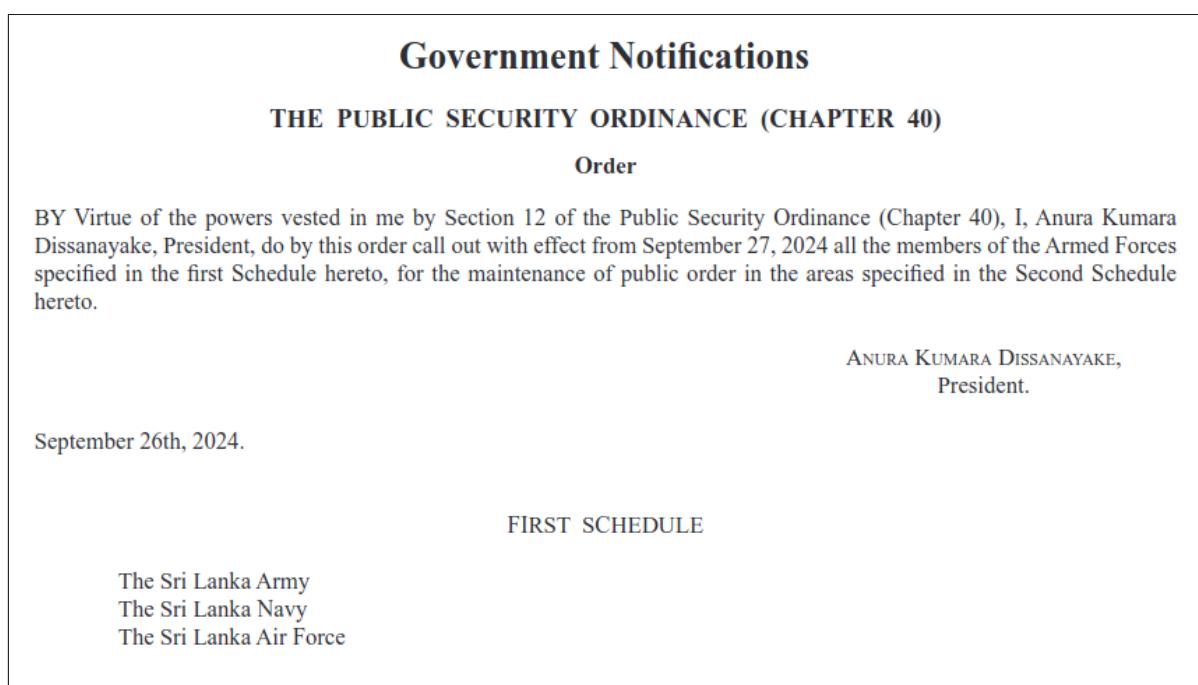


Figure 15: Calling for Armed Forces was one of the very first gazette notifications issued by the newly elected president, soon after appointing the highest state officials under the new government.

<sup>27</sup> [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/9/2400-21\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/9/2400-21_E.pdf); [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/9/2402-20\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/9/2402-20_E.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/9/2403-47\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2024/9/2403-47_E.pdf)

## 8. Other

### 8.1. Threats to Nuwara Eliya District Secretary

Nuwara Eliya District Secretary had been threatened by a businessman who claimed to be an ally of a former minister of the previous government. His has allegedly disturbed the duties of officers on election duty by video recording the events in front of District Secretary office, has made derogatory content in social media targeting the District secretary staff and threatened and made undue influences demanding to give him the construction contract of the planned trade building for low income female entrepreneurs in Nuwara Eliya district. Following this incident, Nuwara Eliya police started an investigation after a complaint made by the District Secretary. It also revealed that this businessman was disturbing the election duties of public officials (Hewajulige, Sujith and Norwood Ranjith Rajapakse, 2024; Rathnayake, Nalaka, 2024).



Figure 16: Newspaper report on the incident. Lankadeepa newspaper on 16th Sep 2024

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