

Human Rights Situation Report

January 2025



Unemployed graduates in the Northern Province, drawing attention to their ongoing struggle for employment while dressed in their graduation cloaks, the protesters carried broomsticks and swept the streets as a symbolic gesture of their plight, qualified graduates forced into menial tasks due to a lack of job opportunities. Source: Tamilwin.

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

Refugees: Sri Lanka's Public Security Minister, Ananda Wijepala, has announced a plan to send 100,000 illegal migrants, including Rohingya refugees, to the country. The Rohingyas have been linked to human trafficking, and over 100 currently held in Mullaitivu will be deported if they are determined that they were victims of human trafficking. Protests against the government's decision to deport Rohingya refugees have emphasized the potential harm to the country's international reputation and the need for refugees to be relocated from the Keppapulavu Air Force Base. Activists have urged international refugee standards and laws, and the Batticaloa Farmers' Federation has condemned deportation of Rohingya refugees in Sri Lanka. These protests have also called on UNHCR to put pressure on other nations to offer sanctuary.

Freedom of Assembly and Association: Recent events have demonstrated the government's involvement in protests through legal actions, court orders, and police actions. The CID's summons of Yartan Figurado in relation to the Rohingya asylum protest reveal a pattern of government efforts to suppress protests on controversial or sensitive issues.

The disruption of a Tamil political prisoners' release campaign in Sri Lanka highlights tensions between ethnic groups and the state's approach to curbing movements challenging laws. The police's actions in Northern province indicate a push to suppress campaigns challenging the status quo, particularly those addressing controversial issues like ethnic minority rights.

The University of Peradeniya cancelled a lecture on IMF austerity, despite approval, indicating direct or indirect government influence over academic spaces. Prime Minister Dr. Harini Amarasuriya denied involvement, stating she supports academic freedom and democratic engagement. However, the cancellation raises concerns about limitations on academic freedom.

The 2021 protest against the General Sir John Kotelawala National Defence University Bill, led by IUSF, CTU, and FSP, saw the release of 34 individuals, including Joseph Stalin, despite earlier arrests under quarantine regulations.

Former IUSF convener Lahiru Weerasekara and Bhikkhu Federation convener Tampitiye Sugathananda Thero were acquitted in a 2017 protest against SAIM University, indicating an improvement in dissent space and a judicial system's protection of peaceful assembly rights.

Cabinet Spokesman Dr. Nalinda Jayatissa acknowledged challenges in cases against Aragalaya individuals and promised government intervention. Justice Minister is set to discuss with Attorney General, committed to equitable resolutions based on merits.

Legal Reforms: The Anti-Corruption Act No. 9 of 2023 faced challenges in enforcement due to legal, interpretative, and technical issues. The Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption suggested amendments and new provisions. A committee was established to review the Act and make recommendations. The Women Parliamentarians' Caucus of Sri Lanka addressed legislative reforms to establish a uniform legal minimum marriage age and redefining 'child' to meet international standards. The Ministry of Environment discussed a Bill protecting the rights of Sri Lanka's indigenous community. The Cabinet of Ministers approved the publication of the Proceeds of Crime Draft Bill, aligning with the UN Convention against Corruption and the International Financial Action Task Force's standards on asset recovery.

Political Prisoners: The call for the release of Tamil political prisoners has gained momentum among Tamil leaders, civil society, and activists. They have urged President Anura Kumara Dissanayake to address the issue of Tamil political prisoners, and Tamil political parties and civil society groups have demanded their release by the Sinhala Hindu New Year. Critics have criticized past leaders, governments, and MPs for failing to take action and addressing the long-standing issue of Tamil political prisoners.

A signature campaign has been launched to demand the release of around 400 Tamil political prisoners, many of whom have been held for over 15 years since the end of the war. The campaign aimed to collect 100,000 signatures from various districts, with protests and petitions taking place in various locations. The government's slow action on the issue has sparked frustration.

Repression of Media and Journalists: Journalists in Sri Lanka face threats, including attacks and legal cases, for reporting sensitive topics like corruption and human rights abuses. The government has shown willingness to take punitive actions against media outlets, warning them of misleading the public. This highlights concerns over the use of legal tools to silence or control journalists, particularly in regions with ethnic minorities. Despite supporting media freedom, the government emphasizes the need for accountability and threats to take action against media outlets spreading malicious news.

Civil society organizations and international bodies have called for stronger protections for journalists and media outlets in Sri Lanka. They urge the police to swiftly investigate incidents of journalist assault, reopen investigations into past violence, cessation of harassment, and the establishment of an independent media commission. Ethical journalism is also a priority.

Land Rights of Tamils: President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has pledged to resolve a long-standing land dispute in the Northern Province, focusing on returning land to its rightful owners and ensuring alternative land for those affected by government acquisitions. He also promised projects that benefit local communities, such as repurposing the Jaffna President's House. Trincomalee MP Kathiravelu Shanmugam Kukathasan requested the release of lands around Kalamman Temple and raised concerns over land rights in the Fourth Continent. A petition demanding the release of land in Deravil, Kilinochchi, and the Martyrs' homeland in Vishwamadu, as well as the release of agricultural land, has been successful.

Student-led Protests: In January 2025, student protests at Jaffna University and Sri Lanka Bhikkhu University highlighted their ongoing struggles for fair treatment, freedom of expression, dissent, and fundamental rights. Students at Jaffna University launched a hunger strike demanding an end to unjust investigations and the right to free expression. Sri Lanka Bhikkhu University students protested the Vice-Chancellor's mismanagement and the government's privatization plan of state hospitals. These protests demonstrate their demand for greater autonomy, transparency, and accountability in academic and administrative affairs.

Repressive Laws: Leader of the House, Bimal Ratnayake, has urged the government to repeal the controversial PTA law and replace it with a new Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) that aligns with international human rights standards. Justice Minister Harshana Nanayakkara is preparing a cabinet paper for reform. The European Union's Election Observation Mission has praised Sri Lanka's 2024 Presidential Election for transparency and democratic process, but urged for the repeal of restrictive laws. The EU EOM also recognized reforms in campaign finance and youth inclusion.

Police Brutality: The 1997 Tip Line, introduced by the Sri Lanka Police, aims to report crimes like drug trafficking and organized crime, but faces trust issues due to police abuse and corruption. Reports show misconduct by officers, such as sexual harassment, suspensions, and negligence. Physical abuse and unlawful detentions have also been reported, highlighting the need for improved crime prevention and national security.

Officers in Sri Lanka are often accused of impunity, leading to detainee abuse and critical reporting omissions. The Weligama man's case highlights the vulnerability of citizens under police authority, reflecting public dissatisfaction and a desire for accountability.

Families of the Forcefully Disappeared: The Mullaitivu District Association of Relatives of the Enforced Disappeared in Sri Lanka is urging for justice. They plan a protest in Kilinochchi for Independence Day and held a protest in Vavuniya demanding justice for their loved ones. Protesters call on the United Nations and the US administration to address their concerns and raise awareness for Tamil sovereignty.

Local Government Elections: Sri Lanka's Local Government Elections, delayed since 2018, are set to take place in April 2025. The government, led by President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, has announced the election, with the Supreme Court's verdict expected to be announced in Parliament. The Provincial Council Elections will be decided after the elections. The Supreme Court has reviewed petitions challenging the constitutionality of the Local Authorities Elections Special Provisions Bill, which proposed fresh nominations for local authorities.

Easter Sunday Attacks: The Supreme Court has overturned the acquittal of former IGP Pujith Jayasundara and former Defence Secretary Hemasiri Fernando in the Easter Sunday attacks case, annulling the previous judgment due to insufficient evidence and lack of defense witnesses.

The Catholic Church of Sri Lanka has urged for a thorough investigation into the alleged hand grenade incident at All Saints Church in Borella, marking its third anniversary.

Accountability for Past War Crimes: Human Rights Watch reported Sri Lanka's crises are linked to persistent rights violations, discrimination against minority communities, and silencing critics. President Dissanayake has the opportunity to make progress, but must address past conflicts and abuses.

Mass Graves: Sri Lanka's largest mass grave investigations in Mannar and Thiruketheeswaram have yielded over 150 boxes of skeletal remains, with 27 skeletons identified and further reports expected within six months. Exhumation work has been resumed at Colombo port site as well.

Questionable Appointments: The President appointed Ruwan Wanigasooriya as Chief of National Intelligence, despite his history of denying war crimes despite evidence of mass civilian casualties and sexual violence. As the Army spokesperson has dismissed allegations of cluster

bombing, child execution, and opposes Tamil remembrance activities, justifying military land occupation, and supporting nationalist narratives.

Protest against Sinhalization: Residents of Verugal, Trincomalee are protesting against the Department of Archaeology's designation of the "1 KM Vattavan Archaeological Zone," fearing it could lead to Sinhalization, land displacement, and increased militarization. They have submitted a memorandum demanding transparency, bans on Buddha statues and temple construction, and protection of agricultural lands.

Digital NIC: Sri Lanka is set to launch a Digital ID Project with India, modeled after India's Aadhaar Card system. The project aims to introduce electronic national identity cards for administrative and financial purposes. Critics argue that this could threaten national security, public safety, and sovereignty. Sri Lankan Minister Eranga Weeraratne assures Indian personnel and companies no access to biometric data. Activists remain skeptical, as India is funding half of the project.

State Accountability: The government has approved compensation for 17 patients who lost their vision after cataract surgeries at Nuwara Eliya Hospital due to substandard drug use, and is pursuing legal action against the supplier.

Other: Bodu Bala Sena General Secretary Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero was sentenced to nine months of simple imprisonment and a Rs. 1,500 fine for a 2016 defamatory statement, deemed to incite ethnic disharmony, and reportedly he plans to appeal.

The Sri Lankan Supreme Court has ended proceedings in a Fundamental Rights petition against Pastor Jerome Fernando, alleging hate speech and money laundering. The petitioners filed a lawsuit under the ICCPR Act, but the court assured that further complaints could be considered before a final determination. The petitioners also expressed dissatisfaction with the Criminal Investigation Department's handling of the case.

Members of the Association of Leasing and Debt Instalment Payers protested outside Colombo Police Headquarters, accusing the police of enabling illegal vehicle seizures. Held on January 31, the demonstration called for presidential intervention to stop the confiscations (Daily Mirror , 2025).

2. Rights of Refugees

According to intelligence inputs, there is a plot to send 100,000 illegal migrants, including Rohingya refugees, to Sri Lanka in the near future, Public Security Minister Ananda Wijepala stated in Parliament. In addition to confirming that police investigations showed the newly arrived Rohingyas had paid substantial sums to human traffickers, he called this a significant social issue (Siriwardana & Perera, 2025). More than 100 Rohingya people who are presently being held in Mullaitivu will be deported if it is determined that they were the victims of a human trafficking scheme, according to a statement released by Sri Lanka's Public Security Ministry. While discussions with Myanmar are ongoing, Wijepala emphasized that Sri Lanka cannot accommodate illegal immigrants due to economic and social concerns. However, if the individuals are verified as refugees, they will receive humanitarian assistance, according to international refugee laws until deportation (Daily Ft, 2025; Fazal, 2025).



Demonstration near the Presidential Secretariat calling on the government to refrain from sending Rohingya refugees back to Myanmar. Photo Credit: Waruna Wanniarachchi.

The government's decision to deport Rohingya refugees has been the subject of multiple protests in Sri Lanka, calling on the authorities to conform to international norms. A protest near

the Presidential Secretariat emphasized the potential harm to Sri Lanka's international reputation, while another demonstration organized by the North East Coordinating Committee (NECC) in Mullaitivu, called for the relocation of refugees from the militarized Keppapulavu Air Force Base to the Mirihana Immigration Detention Centre.

Activists like Yardson Figurado and Ruki Fernando called for adherence to international refugee standards and the establishment of laws to protect refugees. The Batticaloa Farmers' Federation also organized a protest on January 17 to condemn the deportation and call on the government to abide by international law. The protesters also asked the UNHCR to put pressure on other nations to offer sanctuary. These protests generally highlighted growing concerns about the treatment and deportation of Rohingya refugees in Sri Lanka (Daily Mirror, 2025; Perera, 2025; Tamil Guardian, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025).

The UN has called the Rohingya the "world's most persecuted minority," and they should not be repatriated given their vulnerable situation in Myanmar. Sri Lanka is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention but serves as a transit point for refugees until the UNHCR resettles them in other countries. Activists have also petitioned to relocate the refugees from the Keppapulavu Air Force base, arguing that housing them under military supervision violates international humanitarian norms.

The leader of the All Ceylon Makkal Congress, Rishad Bathiudeen, has written to President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, pleading with him to provide the Rohingya refugees who are presently in Sri Lanka refugee status (The Island, 2025). MP Mujeebur Rahuman has also requested President Dissanayake to reconsider the decision to deport the refugees (Daily Mirror, 2025). The UNHCR has urged the Sri Lankan government not to deport 103 Rohingya refugees who recently arrived in Mullaitivu after a dangerous sea journey seeking asylum. In reference to a 2024 guidance paper on international protection for individuals fleeing Myanmar, UNHCR underlined that the country is still unsafe. UN Resident Coordinator Marc-André Franche confirmed that the UNHCR has written to the Sri Lankan government, expressing gratitude for the country's assistance to the refugees. He also highlighted the importance of allowing access to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) and requested permission to visit the refugees. UNHCR transitioned to a liaison officer role in Sri Lanka after closing its full operations in 2024 (Ali, 2025).

The circumstances surrounding the 116 Rohingya who were detained at the Mullaitivu Air Force Camp in Sri Lanka following their boat arrival in December 2024 are detailed in the HRCSL Report on Rohingya Asylum Seekers (January 2025). The detainees, included 57 children, a

pregnant woman, a breastfeeding mother, and a disabled man, face inadequate nutrition, limited medical care, and insufficient security for women.

Sri Lanka is not a party to international refugee conventions but must adhere to international human rights standards, including non-refoulement. After being denied entry at first, the HRCSL went to the camp, evaluated the situation, and pushed for improved welfare. Concerns over freedom of expression were raised as it interacted with state representatives and responded to civil society demonstrations. Key recommendations included appointing a focal point for aid distribution, allowing access to child welfare and UNHCR, facilitating media visits, ensuring security for female detainees, relocating them to better facilities, expediting asylum processing, protecting human rights defenders, and ratifying international conventions on refugees and statelessness (Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, 2025).

3. Freedom of Assembly and Association

Several recent occurrences show the government's interference in protests, either through legal action, court orders, or police actions. The CID's summons of Yartan Figurado in connection with the protest against the deportation of Rohingya asylum seekers suggest a pattern of government efforts to stifle protests concerning controversial or sensitive issues. The involvement of the CID's Human Trafficking and Maritime Crime Division indicated that the protest could have been deemed politically sensitive or disruptive by the authorities (Tamil Guardian, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025; The Island, 2025).



Yartan Figurado at the demonstration along with other protestors. Source: Tamilwin.

Despite court approval, several individuals, including MP Archuna Ramanathan, were prohibited from protesting within the Jaffna Police Division. While the court allowed the protest to take place in certain areas, the restrictions on access to high-security zones reflect the authorities' control over where and how protests can occur (Sukinthan, 2025; Ratugamage, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025). A court order restricting individuals like Madushan Chandrajith from entering key government premises during a planned protest is another example of how the authorities can

regulate where protests take place, thus limiting the expression of dissent in public spaces (Ada Derana, 2025; Daily Mirror Online, 2025; Newswire, 2025).

The disruption of a campaign demanding the release of Tamil political prisoners highlights tensions between ethnic groups in Sri Lanka and the state's approach to curbing movements that challenge long-standing laws such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). The actions of the police, particularly in the Northern province, point to an effort to quash campaigns seen as challenging the status quo, particularly when such campaigns address controversial topics like ethnic minority rights (Tamil Guardian, 2025).



Police, obstructing a signature campaign that was organized to call for the release of individuals detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). Source: Tamil Guardian.

The cancellation of a lecture on IMF austerity at University of Peradeniya, despite prior approval, signals direct or indirect government influence over academic spaces, especially when the event was expected to criticize the government's economic policies. However, Dr. Harini Amarasuriya, the Prime Minister and Minister of Education, denied any involvement in the cancellation of the IYSSE event, stating her support for academic freedom and democratic engagement. She emphasized that the decision to cancel the lecture was not influenced by her or her office (Prime Minister's Office, 2025). Despite her denial, the event's cancellation, especially after prior approval, suggests possible internal or external pressures that could have impacted the university's decision, raising concerns about the limitations on academic freedom (The Island, 2025).

The release of 34 individuals, including Joseph Stalin, from a 2021 protest against the General Sir John Kotelawala National Defence University Bill shows a favorable outcome for those exercising their right to protest, despite earlier arrests under the Quarantine and Prevention of Diseases Ordinance. The protest, which involved members of the Inter-University Students' Federation (IUSF), Ceylon Teachers' Union (CTU), and the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), was about the government's education policies. Initial arrests were based on quarantine regulations, which can sometimes be used to stifle dissent (Hiru News, 2025; Kumudhu Upul Shantha, 2025; Newswire, 2025).

The acquittal of former Inter-University Student Federation (IUSF) convener Lahiru Weerasekara and Bhikkhu Federation convener Tampitiye Sugathananda Thero for their involvement in the 2017 protest against the SAIMT University reveals an improvement in the space available for dissent. The protest demanded the abolition of SAIMT University, which was a controversial topic in Sri Lanka at the time. The court ruling to acquit the protesters suggests that the judicial system may be more inclined to protect the right to peaceful assembly, especially when there is no direct threat to public order (Abeynayake, 2025; Hiru News, 2025).

Cabinet Spokesman Dr. Nalinda Jayatissa acknowledged issues with the cases filed against individuals involved in the People's Struggle 2022 (commonly known as *Aragalaya*). He stated that the government would intervene to provide a reasonable solution, with the Justice Minister set to discuss the matter with the Attorney General. Dr. Jayatissa highlighted that although certain cases present challenges, the Attorney General is committed to finding an equitable resolution by considering each case on its own merits rather than treating them collectively (Gamage, 2025; Siriwardana, 2025).

4. Legal Reforms

In light of the legal, interpretative and technical difficulties encountered in the enforcement of the Anti-Corruption Act No. 9 of 2023, the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption suggested amendments and the introduction of new provisions to the Act. The Cabinet endorsed President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's initiative to establish a committee, which would be chaired by a Commissioner from the Bribery or Corruption Allegation Commission and will comprise senior officials from the Ministry of Justice, the Attorney General's Department, and the Legal Draftsman's Department. This committee was tasked with reviewing the Act and making recommendations for essential modifications. (Jayawardena, 2025; Office of the Cabinet of Ministers, Sri Lanka, 2024). The Women Parliamentarians' Caucus of Sri Lanka, headed by Minister Saroja Paulraj, addressed legislative reforms to establish a uniform legal minimum marriage age for all communities (Withanage, 2024). The Caucus also considered redefining 'child' to meet international standards for improved child protection. (Ceylon Today, 2025; Samarawickrama, 2025).



Prime Minister Dr. Harini Amarasuriya meeting with Uruwarige Vanniyalaththo, the leader of Veddha community and others in the Parliament Complex. Source - Prime Minister's Media Division.

A discussion led by the Ministry of Environment at the Parliament Complex addressed a Bill to protect the rights of Sri Lanka's indigenous community. Uruwarige Vanniyalaththo from the Veddha community spoke about their importance and ongoing struggles.

Prime Minister Amarasuriya stated that indigenous people must have equal rights and urged officials to resolve legal and technical issues within three months (The Official Government News Portal of Sri Lanka, 2025).

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake announced the government's plans to implement the Economic Transformation Act with amendments after its initial presentation on May 22, 2024. He mentioned the need for further changes before implementation during the Colombo Economic Summit (Ada Derana, 2025; Daily FT, 2025). The Cabinet of Ministers approved publishing the Proceeds of Crime Draft Bill for Parliament approval. The decision was made on December 9, 2024, and the Attorney General cleared the draft. This Bill was part of an action plan linked to an IMF corruption diagnostic report, with an expected passage by April 2024. It aligned with the UN Convention against Corruption and the international Financial Action Task Force's standards on asset recovery (Economynext, 2025). The Cabinet approved changes to the Code of Criminal Procedure Act to update court processes, allowing remote appearances (Office of the Cabinet of Ministers, 2025: The morning, 2025).

5. Political Prisoners

The call for the release of Tamil political prisoners has gained significant momentum among Tamil political leaders, civil society, and activists. Murugaiah Komagan, coordinator of *Voice of the Voiceless*, urged President Anura Kumara Dissanayake to address the issue during his visit to Jaffna on Independence Day. Tamil political parties and civil society groups in the North have demanded the release of these prisoners by the Sinhala Hindu New Year, with the Jaffna University General Students' Union launching a petition in support. K. Sivajilingam, Secretary of the Tamil National Party, criticized past leaders for neglecting the issue and warned that failure to release the prisoners would lead to a strike. His counterpart, M.K. Sivajilingam further condemned successive governments, from Mahinda Rajapaksa to the current administration, for failing to take action, despite multiple changes in leadership. Batticaloa District MP N. Srinesan questioned the government's inconsistency, pointing out that while amnesty had been granted to other groups, Tamil political prisoners, particularly those detained under the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act, remained incarcerated.



People taking part in the signature campaign organized by the Fighters' Welfare Association in Kilinochchi.
Source: Tamilwin.

Reverend M. Sakthivel echoed calls for MPs to pressure the government for their release. These voices collectively stress the urgent need for the government to honor its promises and address the long-standing issue of Tamil political prisoners.

The signature campaign demanding the release of Tamil political prisoners, organized by the Fighters' Welfare Association and supported by various other groups such as the Villagers Welfare Association and the Workers' Welfare Association, took place across Sri Lanka's Northern and Eastern regions. The campaign aimed to collect 100,000 signatures from districts such as Vavuniya, Mannar, Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi, and Jaffna, with a deadline set before Sri Lanka's Independence Day. It called for the release of around 400 Tamil prisoners, many of whom have been held for over 15 years since the end of the war. The campaign highlighted the plight of those who were rehabilitated and released by the courts, only to be re-arrested and detained again. Signature collection efforts were held in locations like the Thenmarachchi area, Kilinochchi Depot Junction, and Pudukkudiyiruppu, with protests and petitions in support of the campaign taking place in these regions as well. Despite assurances from President Anura Kumara Dissanayake during his election campaign, the government's slow action on the issue has sparked frustration.

6. Repression of Media and Journalists

Journalists in Sri Lanka, especially those covering sensitive topics such as corruption, social challenges, and human rights abuses, continue to face threats. For instance, journalist Subramaniam Bhaskaran was attacked in Kilinochchi after exposing corruption within a farmers' federation (Tamil Guardian, 2025), while journalist Murugaiyah Thamilselvan was assaulted and nearly abducted due to his reporting (Tamil Guardian, 2025). Several journalists are involved in ongoing legal cases, highlighting a trend of using legal actions to deter journalistic freedom. For example, 30 individuals who were arrested in Batticaloa during a protest, including journalists, were pressed charges for road blocking (Tamilwin, 2025). Moreover, journalist Maria Seelan Thilex was investigated for attempting to report on an incident in Jaffna without prior permission (Tamilwin, 2025). These cases reflect broader concerns over the use of legal tools to silence or control journalists, particularly in regions with ethnic minorities.



Journalist Achala Upendra, whom police said was assaulted while covering an illegal sand mining case in Ampara. Source: Colombo Gazette.

The government has shown a willingness to take punitive actions against media outlets as well. The government issued a stern warning to a newspaper owned by a Parliamentarian for

publishing false reports about the 'Clean Sri Lanka' national programme, accusing the media outlet of misleading the public (Newswire, 2025). While the government insists it supports media freedom, it has emphasized the need for accountability and threatened to take action against media outlets that spread malicious news (Newswire, 2025).

Civil society organizations and international bodies have called for stronger protections for journalists and media outlets in Sri Lanka. The Free Media Movement urged the police to expedite legal action against those attacking journalists (Lanka Leader, 2025), and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) emphasized the need for a swift investigation into the assault on Tamil journalist Murugaiyah Thamilselvan (Tamil Guardian, 2025). Additionally, a letter from 25 civil society organizations called for the reopening of investigations into past violence against journalists, a cessation of harassment, and the establishment of an independent media commission (Amnesty, 2025). In this context, the issue of ethical journalism has also come to the forefront. Dr. Hansaka Wijemuni, the Deputy Health and Mass Media Minister, announced that the CID would investigate journalists allegedly paid by pharmaceutical companies to spread false information on social media (Daily FT, 2025).

7. Land Rights of Tamil

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake emphasized the importance of returning land to its rightful owners, particularly in the Northern Province, and pledged to resolve this long-standing land dispute. He ensured alternative land for those affected by government acquisitions, and projects that benefit local communities, such as repurposing the Jaffna President's House (Withanage, 2025; Daily News, 2025).



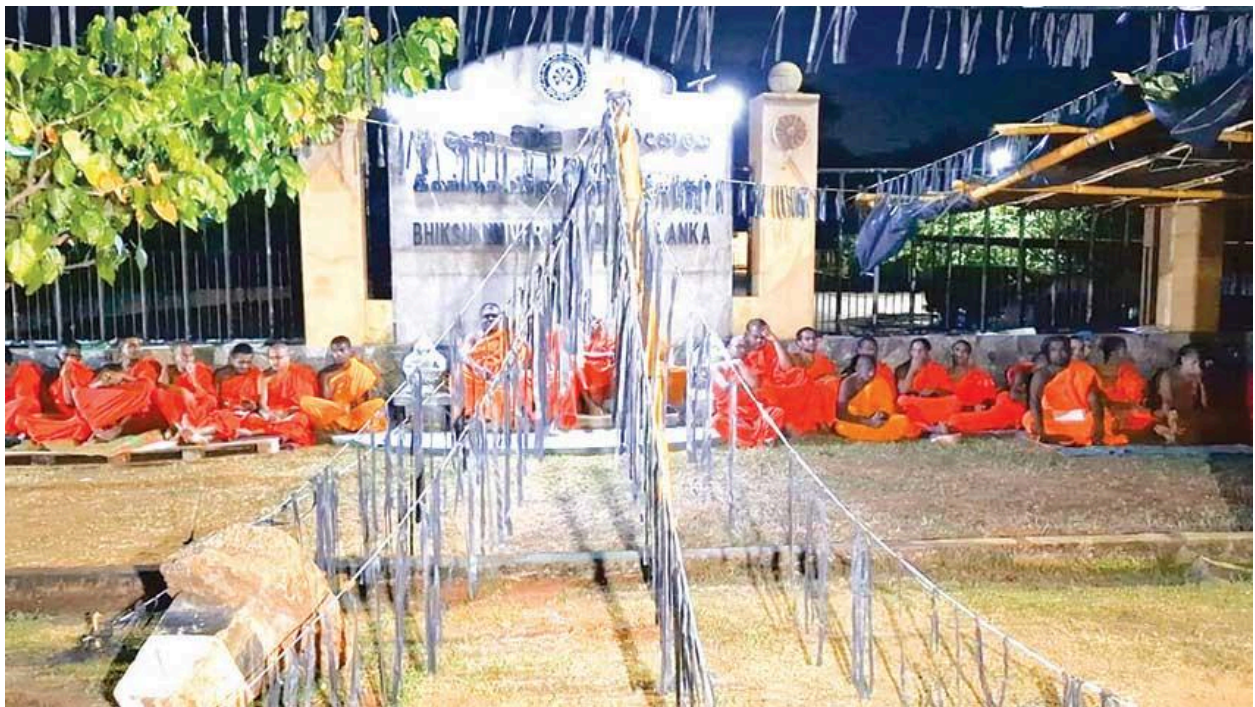
President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, addressing the issues related to land ownership during the Jaffna District Coordination Committee (DCC) meeting held at the Jaffna District Secretariat. Source: Daily News.

A long-standing issue involving land including military occupation of lands originally occupied by Tamil civilians or repurpose civilian-owned land for government use, which often displaced local communities from their lands. Trincomalee MP Kathiravelu Shanmugam Kukathasan requested the release of lands around Kaliyammann Temple in Parayankulam and raised concerns over land rights in the Fourth Continent. The Forest Department agreed to review the issue (Tamilwin, 2025). A petition, signed by 2,500 people, was submitted to the President, demanding the release of land in Deravil, Kilinochchi, where Tamil freedom fighters were buried. The petition stressed the emotional distress caused by the military presence and called for legal restoration of the land (Tamilwin, 2025). A signature campaign was launched demanding the release of the Martyrs' homeland in Vishwamadu from military control. The campaign called for unrestricted

commemoration of Martyrs' Day (Tamilwin, 2025). Vanni District MP M. Jagatheeswaran successfully intervened to have a plot of land in Kanagarayankulam, Vavuniya North, previously used by the police, released. The police were instructed to return the land (Tamilwin, 2025). Farmers in Muthu Nagar, Trincomalee protested against the allocation of agricultural land to a solar power company. They also raised concerns over the halt in pond renovations under the Wari Chaupakiya project (Tamilwin, 2025; Lanka Files, 2025). NPP Vanni District MP C. Thilaganathan announced that the army had agreed to release the Vavuniya Cooperative Training Center after 15 years. He also promised to reopen the Vavuniya Economic Center and provide Mahaweli Ganga water to the Vanni region (Tamilwin, 2025).

8. Student-led Protests

In January 2025, protests at Jaffna University and Sri Lanka Bhikkhu University highlighted students' ongoing struggles for fair treatment, freedom of expression, dissent, and fundamental rights. At the University of Jaffna, students launched a hunger strike demanding an end to unjust investigations and ensuring the right to free expression and protest (Tamilwin, 2025). The protest was a response to disciplinary actions, including class bans and investigations outside university regulations. Student monks at Sri Lanka Bhikkhu University protested the Vice-Chancellor's mismanagement and unfair suspension of ten monks, claiming the administration failed to address their grievances (Kuruneru & Perera, 2025).



The student monks began a continuous ‘Satyagraha’ in front of the new premises of the university on the New Puttalam Road in Anuradhapura calling on the Vice-Chancellor of the Sri Lanka Bhikkhu University, Senior Professor Kanathhegoda Saddharathana Thero to resign from his post. Source: Divaina.

Students of Sri Jayewardenepura Medical Faculty protest against the government's privatization plan of state hospitals, expressing concerns over the commercialization of education (Daily Mirror, 2025). Students view this decision as detrimental to medical education quality and accessibility, as it may lead to profit-driven motives overriding educational and healthcare

objectives. Protests took place in Gampaha Wickramarachchi Indigenous Medical University due to the absence of basic study facilities (Dissanayake, 2025).

President Dissanayake visited Jaffna on 31 January to attend several events, including a public gathering. MP Ramanathan, along with the Northern Province Unemployed Graduates' Association and other groups, had called for protests during this visit. In this context, Jaffna police summoned the Northern Province Unemployed Graduates' Association leader to appear before the Magistrate. The protesters were dispersed after the summons, and the Magistrate issued notices to five other protesters, including independent MP Dr. Ramanathan Archchuna. The parallels between these protests are the continuous student resistance toward decisions made by university administrations or the government they perceive as unjust or harmful. These student protests further demonstrate their demand for greater autonomy, transparency, and accountability in academic and administrative affairs.

9. Repressive Laws

Bimal Ratnayake, Leader of the House has acknowledged the controversial nature of the PTA law and expresses a desire to replace it with more balanced legislation. The government has pledged to repeal the PTA and replace it with a new Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) that aligns with international human rights standards (Siriwardana & Perera, 2025; Jayammanne, 2025). Justice Minister Harshana Nanayakkara has confirmed that a cabinet paper is being prepared to establish a committee for a significant reform in this regard (Lanka News Web, 2025; Newsfirst, 2025). The PTA has faced widespread criticism for alleged human rights violations, a concern, further emphasized by the European Union's Election Observation Mission (EU EOM), which praised Sri Lanka's 2024 Presidential Election for its transparency and democratic process but also urged for the repeal of restrictive laws such as the PTA (Tamilwin, 2025; Daily FT, 2025). The EU's call for repeal aligns with global concerns about the balance between national security and the protection of fundamental rights. Furthermore, the EU EOM's recognition of reforms in campaign finance and youth inclusion signals a positive trend in Sri Lanka's political landscape, though the need for improvements in women's political participation and preventing state resource misuse suggests ongoing challenges (Tamilwin, 2025; Daily FT, 2025). On January 24, 2025, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake invoked the Public Security Ordinance to deploy Armed Forces to maintain public order in specified areas starting with effect from January 27, 2025. This reflects the continued military interventions to civil affairs (The Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 2025).

10. Police Brutality

The Sri Lanka Police introduced the 1997 Tip Line, providing a confidential method for reporting crimes such as drug trafficking, organized crime, and financial fraud. The initiative aims to enhance crime prevention and national security, but it also requires addressing trust issues between the public and law enforcement due to police abuse and corruption. Several reports point to a disturbing trend of police officers engaging in various forms of misconduct, such as the Officer-in-Charge of Medirigiriya Police was arrested for allegedly sexually harassing a Woman Police Constable, highlighting the power abuse and misogynistic nature within the police (Ada Derana, 2025). The suspension of the Acting OIC of Daulagala Police and the transfer of other officers for their failure to respond promptly to the abduction case highlights the issue of police negligence. Despite receiving information, the officers failed to act, which allowed a serious crime to unfold (Seneviratne, 2025; Kuruluwansha, 2025). Multiple instances of physical abuse by police have also been reported, including the assault of a woman at the Periya Neelavana Police Station, resulting in hospitalization (Tamilwin, 2025). A three-wheeler driver was allegedly stripped, beaten, and unlawfully detained at Dematagoda Police Station, leading to a court notice against the OIC (Newswire, 2025; Sri Lanka Collective Against Torture, 2025).

The frequent instances of officers acting with impunity, such as detainee abuse and critical reporting omissions, highlight a significant lack of accountability within law enforcement. The Weligama man's case, where he was allegedly assaulted and falsely charged by Midigama Police, underscores the vulnerability of citizens under police authority (Sri Lanka Collective Against Torture, 2025). The condemnation of police behavior by Sri Lanka Tamil Arasu Party (SLTP) MPs and the filing of complaints with the Human Rights Commission by victims and their families reflect a growing public dissatisfaction and the desire for accountability.

11. Families of the Forcefully Disappeared

The Mullaitivu District Association of Relatives of the Enforced Disappeared has pledged to persist in their fight for justice and truth following the January executive committee elections. A major protest was planned in Kilinochchi for Independence Day, with a call for widespread support for the cause (Tamilwin, 2025). On December 30, 2024, Tamil families of the disappeared held a protest in Vavuniya, organized by the Vavuniya District Families of the Disappeared organization, demanding justice for their loved ones. Despite 16 years since the end of Sri Lanka's armed conflict, thousands of Tamils remain unaccounted for, many believed to have been abducted by state forces. Protesters in Sri Lanka have called on the United Nations to demand justice for the disappearances, which are viewed as acts of genocide (Tamil Guardian, 2025). On Thai Pongal, relatives of the disappeared in Vavuniya held a protest demanding justice for their abducted loved ones and the release of Tamil political prisoners. They called on the incoming US administration, led by Donald Trump, to address their concerns. The protest highlighted the ongoing struggle of Tamil mothers, marking the 2886th day of their efforts to seek the return of their disappeared children. Their aim is to raise awareness, prevent future genocides, and gain international support for Tamil sovereignty (Tamil Guardian).



Loved ones of the disappeared, protesting in Vavuniya, demanding justice and calling on US President Donald Trump to address their concerns. Source: Tamil Guardian.

12. Local Government Election

Sri Lanka's Local Government (LG) Elections, initially delayed since 2018 under various political, economic and legal circumstances, are now expected to take place in April 2025. The government has made multiple announcements regarding the elections, and legal proceedings surrounding an amendment to the Local Authorities Elections Act have added further complexities. The government, led by President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, has announced that the LG Elections will be held before April (Newswire, 2025). Cabinet Spokesman Dr. Nalinda Jayatissa confirmed April 2025 elections, stating the Supreme Court's verdict has been received by the Speaker and will be announced in Parliament (Ada Derana, 2025). He added, the Provincial Council Elections will be decided once the LG Elections are being held (Ada Derana, 2025). The Supreme Court has reviewed petitions challenging the constitutionality of certain clauses in the Local Authorities Elections Special Provisions Bill. The Bill proposed fresh nominations for certain local authorities where elections were previously called and postponed. Petitioners argued that nullifying previous nominations would violate fundamental rights, requesting a ruling requiring a two-thirds majority in Parliament and a public referendum (Abeynayake, 2025). A draft bill amending the Local Authorities Elections Act has been submitted to Parliament and reviewed by the Supreme Court, with the court's decision expected to be announced soon (Ada Derana, 2025).

13. Easter Sunday Attacks

The Colombo High Court Trial-at-Bar informed former IGP Pujith Jayasundara and former Defence Secretary Hemasiri Fernando that the Supreme Court had overturned their acquittal in the Easter Sunday attacks case. The Supreme Court's ruling, issued on November 5, 2024, annulled the previous judgment, which had acquitted the accused due to insufficient evidence and without summoning defense witnesses. (Nanayakkara, 2025; Tharaka, 2025).



Catholic community, protesting at a demonstration held in Borella calling on the government to probe the placing a hand grenade inside the All Saint's Church. Source: Kithsiri de Mel.

The Catholic Church of Sri Lanka has renewed calls for a proper investigation into the hand grenade incident at All Saints Church, Borella, on January 11, 2022. During a protest marking the third anniversary of the event, Catholic clergy and lay people criticized the flawed investigation, wrongful arrest of the church caretaker, and failure to apprehend the real culprits. Protesters suspect the incident was an attempt to intimidate the Church in its pursuit of justice for the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings. They called on the current government to conduct a thorough probe, particularly scrutinizing the actions of former officials and security forces, whom they accused of conspiracy and negligence (Perera, 2025; Daily Mirror, 2025; The Island, 2025).

14. Accountability for Past War Crimes

Human Rights Watch reported that Sri Lanka's crises are linked to persistent impunity for rights violations, discrimination against minority communities, and laws and institutions aimed at silencing critics, according to Human Rights Watch. It further claimed President Dissanayake has the opportunity to make significant progress on rights if he fulfills his campaign pledges, but must also address the legacy of past conflicts and ongoing abuses against Tamils and Muslims (Human Rights Watch, 2025).

15. Mass Graves

Sri Lanka's largest mass grave investigations in Mannar and Thiruketheeswaram continued, with over 150 boxes of skeletal remains handed to medical experts for further forensic investigation. Investigation into Thiruketheeswaram mass grave continues, revealing 27 skeletons, age, gender, and potential causes of death. Further reports expected within six months (Tamil Guardian, 2025). Exhumation work at Colombo port mass grave site resumed after a halt due to lack of funds, with three human skeletons discovered and more observed after site expansion six months ago (Lanka Files, 2025).

16. MP Privilege Violation of Tamil MP

Sri Lanka Tamil Arasu Party Acting Leader and MP Sivagnanam Shritharan has condemned the detention and questioning of MP Shritharan at Katunayake International Airport while he was traveling to India. He, was stopped and questioned by immigration officials due to passport issues and a possible travel ban. Sivagnanam raised concerns over the incident, arguing it could be retaliation for Shritharan's criticism of the government's Sinhala settlement plans (Tamilwin, 2025). After Shritharan's return, no travel ban was confirmed. MP Shritharan and Opposition MP Rauf Hakeem raised concerns in Parliament, with Shritharan accusing the government of violating his privileges, while MP Rauf Hakeem questioning the government's stance on the Prevention of Terrorism Act (Lanka Files, 2025). The NPP government,, expressed regret over this particular incident, assured their privileges, requested a report from immigration officials, and stressed the need for careful handling of existing laws.

17. Questionable Government Appointments

The President appointed Ruwan Wanigasooriya as Chief of National Intelligence, despite his history of denying war crimes despite evidence of mass civilian casualties and sexual violence. As the Army spokesperson has dismissed allegations of cluster bombing, child execution, and opposes Tamil remembrance activities, justifying military land occupation, and supporting nationalist narratives (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

18. Protests against Sinhalization

Residents of Verugal, Trincomalee protest against the Department of Archaeology's designation of the "1 KM Vattavan Archaeological Zone," fearing it could lead to Sinhalization, land displacement, and increased militarization. The area already hosts several military installations, mainly in Tamil regions, sparking concerns about further Sinhala Buddhist colonization. Protestors, including local residents, civil society groups, and human rights activists, have criticized the ongoing land displacement and conversion of cultural sites into Buddhist religious sites. The group submitted a memorandum to local authorities, demanding transparency in Gazette Notifications about an archaeological site and a ban on constructing Buddha statues or temples in the vicinity. Protection of nearby agricultural lands from government seizure. Discussion of these concerns in the Verugal Divisional Development Committee meetings, with a firm commitment to addressing them (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

19. Digital NIC

Sri Lanka is launching a Digital ID Project in collaboration with India, modeled after India's Aadhaar Card system, to introduce electronic national identity cards (e-NICs) for administrative and financial purposes (The Sunday Times, 2025). The People's Struggle Alliance has criticized the decision to allow an Indian company to issue digital ID cards, arguing that it threatens national security, public safety, and sovereignty. The government is urged to reconsider granting foreign entities access to citizens' data due to potential negative consequences (Newswire, 2025). Sri Lankan Minister Eranga Weeraratne assured Indian personnel and companies no access to biometric data, stating data collection and storage will be managed by the government (Sunday Observer, 2025). Similarly, Deputy Minister of Digital Economy Eranga

Weeraratne stated that the agreement was modified to ensure that control of the system would be transferred to a local entity, with a transparent and competitive selection process for the platform developer (Jayawardana, 2025). Activists remain skeptical of the government's intentions and India's financial involvement in the project, as India is funding half of it. They speculate that the digital ID could be used for governmental control, including suppressing uprisings, given its inclusion of biometric data (The Morning, 2025).

20. State Accountability

The government has approved compensation for 17 patients who lost their vision after cataract surgeries at Nuwara Eliya Hospital due to substandard drug use, and is pursuing legal action against the supplier (Daily FT, 2025; Sunday Times, 2025; The Morning, 2025).

21. Other

The Colombo Magistrate's Court sentenced Bodu Bala Sena General Secretary Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero to nine months simple imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 1,500 for a 2016 defamatory statement. The case was filed under Section 291 of the Penal Code for the comment, "Islam is a cancer, it must be eradicated," which was deemed to incite ethnic disharmony. The court stressed the need for ethnic harmony and condemned his inflammatory remarks. Gnanasara Thero's legal team plans to appeal the verdict (BBC, 2025; Thajudeen, 2025; Thajudeen, 2025).

Members of the Association of Leasing and Debt Instalment Payers protested outside Colombo Police Headquarters, accusing the police of enabling illegal vehicle seizures. Held on January 31, the demonstration called for presidential intervention to stop the confiscations (Daily Mirror , 2025).



Members of the Association of Leasing and Debt Instalment Payers, protesting outside the Colombo Police Headquarters. Photo Credit Nisal Baduge.

Colombo Additional Magistrate urged prison officials to treat remanded suspects humanely, addressing overcrowding, poor conditions in the prison system and delays in court proceedings. Human rights groups and the UN's Nelson Mandela Rules, which Sri Lanka has ratified also call for humane treatment (Daily Ft, 2025; Daily Mirror, 2025).

The Supreme Court of Sri Lanka has terminated proceedings in a Fundamental Rights petition filed by a group of religious leaders, including Ven. Bengamuwe Nalaka and Elle Gunawansa Theros, seeking action against Pastor Jerome Fernando for allegedly insulting other religions. The petitioners filed a lawsuit against the pastor under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Act No. 56 of 2007. The Senior Deputy Solicitor General, speaking on behalf of the Attorney General, ensured the court during the hearing that any further complaints might be brought forward for consideration prior to a final independent determination concerning any action against Pastor Fernando. According to the Supreme Court's record, Sanjeeva Jayawardena, the President's Counsel, has the authority to transmit these concerns on the petitioners' behalf. The petitioners also expressed dissatisfaction with the way the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) handled Pastor Fernando's alleged money laundering. The petitioners believed the inquiry was insufficient, even though he was arrested and appeared in court under the ICCPR Act and the Penal Code. The Supreme Court then ended the proceedings after all parties agreed to the Attorney General's assurance to consider further complaints (Sooriyagoda, 2025).

Pastor Jerome Fernando criticized Sri Lankan journalism for not reporting on a recent Supreme Court ruling that ended proceedings on a Fundamental Rights petition against him. He claimed that after 20 months of media narratives against him, no news outlet covered the verdict (The Morning, 2025).

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