

Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka

January – March 2018



Police assaulting a protestor at Thambuttegama protest (Video – Ada derana
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDqrULUGeb8>)

Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka: January, 2018 -March, 2018
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Issues Covered

- A. **Violence against female election candidates**
- B. **Obstacles and threats to Tamil activists in the North**
- C. **Repression of student activists**
- D. **Threats and obstructions against journalists**
- E. **Repression of protests**
- F. **Other threats and intimidations**
- G. **Freedom of Association**

INFORM was established in 1990 to monitor and document 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 level. INFORM also focused on working with other communities whose rights were frequently and systematically violated. Presently, INFORM is focusing on election monitoring, freedom 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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Methodology

This report provides general trends and details of some significant incidents related to repression of dissent in Sri Lanka from January to March 2018. Executive summary describes context and analyses the trends and some common findings including government and other related parties behaviour on the topic. Then, 22 specific incidents are described under 7 topics. Incidents reported to INFORM, observations and experience of INFORM staff and media have served as sources of information to the report.

Context and Executive Summary

In January 2018, President Maithripala Sirisena completed third year of his five year term. Though he and Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe's election campaigns were supported by many rights activists and social movements, progress on human rights continued to be disappointing in 2018 too.

Local Government Election which was held 10th February 2018 was one of the significant events during the first quarter of 2018. The most progressive feature of the election was the 25% quota for women candidates, despite the disappointment of it not being implemented in full. However, there was also widespread resistance to increased number of female candidates and violence that was based on gender. Female candidates of all ethnic groups across the country faced physical and other forms of violence, but attacks on social media and intimidation by family members were more intensely directed at Muslim female candidates.

The quarter also saw systematic attacks on the Muslim community in the Ampara and Kandy districts, by groups identifying themselves as Sinhalese – Buddhists. In Kandy, there some lives were lost, and the damage to properties, including Mosques, houses, shops, vehicles etc. was much more than in Ampara. In both places, survivors and eyewitnesses blamed the Police for watching by, delayed and inadequate responses. In some instances, the Special Task Force of the Police had physically and verbally abused Muslims.

The members to the Office of Missing Persons was finally appointed on 28th February. But the establishment of the other three transitional justice institutions promised in September 2015 – an Office for Reparations, a Truth Commission and Special Court - remained uncertain and indefinite, with not even draft legislations shared. Other measures to address war related issues, such as reducing military's role in the North, releasing military occupied lands, justice for political prisoners, equal opportunities for memorialization for war dead etc., have been painfully slow or non-existent. Progress on a new constitution has also been stalled. Cases against the military, on murder and disappearance of journalists and civilians under the previous regime dragged on without much progress.

Long term protest campaigns related to land occupation by the military and seeking answers about disappeared continued in the former war zones in the North. Protests intensified as they completed one year in February – March and also on Independence Day on 4th February, where some repressive actions by the military and police were reported.

In pre-dominantly Sinhalese areas, in some cases, angry protesters had turned violent against the police, but considering the unarmed nature of the protesters and provocations, police reactions

appear to be disproportionate. In one instance, protesters who had thrown stones were not only arrested, but reported to have been beaten in custody. Students and parents protesting against a private medical institution were attacked and university students who were opposing ragging of new students were also reported to have been attacked by the raggers.

Several incidents of threats, harassments and obstructions on journalists were reported from different parts of the country, with the military and supporters of a politician being accused. Office premises belonging to an NGO running a project to prevent HIV/AIDS were forcefully entered by some group of villagers, and two persons in the network of NGO were assaulted by them with presence of media and police. A female lawyer was reported to have been assaulted when she had come to give evidence before courts. A female school principal from Badulla was compelled to kneel down by the Provincial chief minister and she had complained of death threats after she had exposed this and complained against the incident. And staff of a Sri Lankan diplomatic mission was seen making threatening gestures towards protesters in London.

In 9 out of 22 incidents, the victims were female, while in about 7 incidents, such as in protests, victims were mixture of men and women. The 22 incidents are from 8 of the 9 provinces in the country. Two were from the capital Colombo, while others have been reported from Mullaitheevu, Jaffna, Batticaloa, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Puttalam, Hambantota, Galle, Moneragela, Badulla and Kandy districts. One was in London, while the last one, on proposed legal amendment to the Voluntary Social Services Organizations (VSSO) Act, would have negatively affected freedom of association in the whole country.

A. Violence against female election candidates

In a context of less than 2% of local government representatives being female, a compulsory quota of 25% of female representation in all local government bodies at the 2018 local government elections was welcomed by many women's groups, activists and politicians. But the lead up to elections saw many incidents of violence against female candidates, across the country. Muslim, Sinhalese and Tamil women from major national political parties, regional parties as well as independent groups have been victims. The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) was reported to have received 34 complaints regarding violence against women during elections, in a media report on the 2nd of February. However, activists point that this number could be more as many incidents go unreported due to fear of retaliation. The same report, as well as the Women's Action Network, mentioned violence and intimidation directed at female candidates, such as character assassination using social media, damage to private residences, threats, verbal abuse and beatings from husbands, a brutal physical attack that led to the female candidate being admitted to the hospital in a serious condition and another being physically assaulted and kept locked in a house. Women's rights activists have also noted the psychological trauma caused by sexist remarks and discouraging sentiments such as statements that women are unfit to enter into politics, spreading of gossip that female candidates are "loose women", and sometimes explicit allegations of illicit affairs which have negatively affected female candidates. A Muslim female candidate also reported that "Moulavis have said that Muslim women who contest are not proper Muslims. They have also said that women cannot get up on stage and speak in public"

Below are few examples of violence against female candidates.

1. Attack on female candidate in Mullaitheevu district

Manjula Pathmanathan was a Tamil ITAK candidate. She claimed to have been beaten by a loyalist of a local MP, and had her mouth gagged and taped, blind folded and tied up to a window in the assailant's house. She had complained to the Police, but claimed she was later pressured to withdraw the complaint as her and her family was threatened with being set alight using tyres¹.

2. Attack on female candidate in Moneragela district

A female candidate contesting from an independent group from Wellawaya Pradeshiya Sabha in Wellawaya electorate in the Monaragala district was reported to have been attacked brutally and admitted to hospital following a confrontation between the candidates of independent groups and the supporters of political parties².

¹ http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=178551 (Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

² <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/180128/news/intimidation-insults-attempt-to-deter-women-poll-candidates-278866.html> (Accessed 22nd of July 2018)

3. Attack on a female candidate in Batticaloa district

Aliyar Rahuman, a Muslim female candidate of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), had reportedly been assaulted in Eravur, Batticaloa district by a United National Party (UNP) candidate, when she was canvassing in the area, according to the Campaign for Free and Fair Elections (CaFFE). CaFFE Executive Director, Rajith Keerthi Tennakoon said female candidates had experienced trouble in Batticaloa since the beginning of the campaign³.

4. Sexual abuse of a female candidate in Polonnaruwa district

On 2nd February, a SLFP female candidate was reported to have been sexually abused by the driver of a UNP candidate at Welikanda, according to the CaFFE. She had been traveling after a campaign event when the suspect photographed and then squeezed her breasts. She had lodged a complaint with the Police. The suspect was reported to have fled the area⁴.

5. Female candidate's home invaded

A woman candidate of Tamil People's Liberation Tigers led by Karuna Amman was reported to have her house broken into on the 4th of January at Selva Nagar Batticaloa⁵.

6. Moulavi's video comments against Muslim female candidates



(Image- Moulavi Niyas Siddeeq Siraj, Photo -www.pinterest.com)

Moulavi Niyas Siddeeq Siraj of Tihariya had released a video message saying "Today, Muslim women in covered heads are contesting and showing their faces in posters to other men. Islam has no room for women to enter politics. These women are shaming the community and their husbands. They

³ http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=179412 (Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

⁴ http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=179412 (Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

⁵ http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=178551 (Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

are sinners and an insult to Islam. Having their poster up on walls and Whatsapp– It is disgusting! Husbands, what are you doing? The whole world is looking at their posters. Chee! You have no shame? In Islam it is said any society that is administered by women will never do well." As a result of the video many Muslim female candidates left their campaign⁶.

7. Woman Candidate's house raided by Police

Rinuza Ilma, candidate of Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, had her residence suddenly raided by four police officers who were attached to the Norochholei police station on the 15th of January. The police said that they received a phone call through the emergency 119 hotline which complained that Rinuza had weapons. However, the police carried out the surprise raid without a police woman present which is against their code. Police officers were unable to find anything suspicious. After the incident, the victim went to the police station with another female candidate and tried to make a complaint but the police refused to accept the complaint and said that the officer who is responsible for accepting complaints is on leave. In this situation, the victim contacted the election commission and made the situation known. As a result of the involvement of the Election Commission, the complaint was accepted⁷.

⁶ http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=178551 (Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

⁷ http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=178551 (Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

B. Obstacles and Threats to Tamil Activists in North

Even after the end of the war in 2009 and the change of government in 2015, Tamils, in the war ravaged Northern Province, have been protesting on multiple issues such as enforced disappearances of citizens and land matters. The protests have been mostly led by women, from victims' families and affected communities and they have been peaceful. But the protesters and those supporting them have been subjected to continuing surveillance, intimidation, threats, assaults and arrests. Some such incidents, reported during this quarter, are mentioned below.

8. Tamils protesting on land in Kayts threatened by Navy intelligence



(Image- Protesters at Kayts, Photo -Tamil Guardian)

Tamil civilians of Kayts who were engaged in a protest had been threatened by Sri Lankan Navy intelligence officers on the 25th of January. The protesters said that they had been residing in a small 3 acres portion of land surrounding a naval base. The base was built on their private lands and the Navy had been occupying it for 10 years, so they did a protest and demanded that their lands be released. It was a peaceful protest, but Navy intelligence personnel who had come without uniforms were reported to have threatened protesters to stop the protest, the protesters claim⁸.

⁸ <http://www.tamilguardian.com/content/navy-intelligence-officers-threaten-tamils-protesting-against-land-grabs-kayts> (Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

9. Police action against Tamils protesting against land occupation in Keppapulavu



(Image- Protest at Keppapulava being obstructed by the police, Photo - Tamil Guardian)

Villagers in Keppapulavu in the Mullaitheevu district had been continuously protesting for the release of their land, occupied by the Army, since March 2017. On the 4th of February which was the 70th Independence Day of Sri Lanka and the 339th day of the protest, the protesters used Black Flags and said that we do not have the freedom, even to live freely, and questioned what the meaning of such an Independence Day is. They had engaged in a peaceful protest march and tried to hold a demonstration in front of the Sri Lankan Army Base which had been their village. However, the police had ordered them to stop the demonstration and the use of black flags. Later, the police filed a case in Mullaitive Magistrate Court against 5 Tamils who were engaged in the demonstration and they have been ordered to appear before the courts⁹ 10..

10. Northern Provincial Council Member Arrested after joining a protest



Image- Provincial council member is taken to the Courts, Photo- www.tamilguardian.com

Northern provincial council member, Thurairasa Ravikaran, was arrested by the police on the 28th of February and produced to Mullaitivu Magistrate Courts. Mr. Ravikaran was accused of disrupting government officials and damaging public property during a protest held on the 22nd of February at Vaddavakal, Mullaitivu. He denies the charge and was later released on bail. According to the protesters, 600 acres of private lands were going to be taken over to build a Navy base and the decision had been already published in the government gazette. The government officials, including surveyors, came to the site but were turned back by the protesters who were led by the provincial councilor¹¹.

⁹ <http://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-police-file-case-against-keppapulavu-protesters-independence-day-black-flag>(Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

¹⁰ <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/police-attempt-stop-keppapulavu-families-holding-black-flag-protest> (Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

¹¹ <http://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-police-arrest-npc-councillor-over-land-grabs-protest> (Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

C. Repression of Student Activists

Throughout last few years, student activists have been arrested, assaulted and obstructed by the police. There was at least one such incident reported this quarter. Ragging of new students by senior students has been a problem with Sri Lankan Universities for years and in this quarter, there was a report of some student activists standing against such ragging being attacked by fellow students.

11. Attack on two anti-ragging students



(Image- University of Peradeniya, Photo - newsfirst.lk)

Two students of Peradeniya University were attacked by another group of students on the 14th of January in university premises. According to the victims, they had been attacked by students of the Faculty of Management, as they had objected to ragging of fresh students. The victims are third year students of the faculty of Science and were hospitalized. University authorities claim to be undergoing investigations¹².

¹² http://island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=178255 (Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

12. Protest of University Students and Parents Dispersed



(Image- Police firing teargas at the protesters, Photo- Nisal Baduge- [www. dailymirror.lk](http://www.dailymirror.lk))

A protest march, organized by the Inter University Students' Federation (IUSF) and the Parents' Union of the Medical Students (PUMS) was dispersed by the police at Kollupitiya Junction on the 25th of January. The protest was held against the government decision to convert the South Asian Institute of Technology and Medicine (SAITM) into the Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology (SLIIT). The Protesters tried to advance towards Temple trees, the residence and office of the Prime Minister, but the police blocked them, using barricades at the Kollupitiya Junction. Later, the police dispersed the protestors using teargas and water cannons¹³.

¹³ <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/Anti-SAITM-protest-teargassed-144624.html> (Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

D. Threats and obstructions against Journalists

Unlike previous years, the period since 2015 has seen a relatively less threatening environment for journalists in Sri Lanka. However, as has been the case for the last few years, this quarter also saw journalists – Sinhalese, Tamil and foreign journalists - being threatened, harassed and obstructed by the Army, Navy and supporters of a politician. Below are three such reported incidents.

13. Threats against two TV journalists

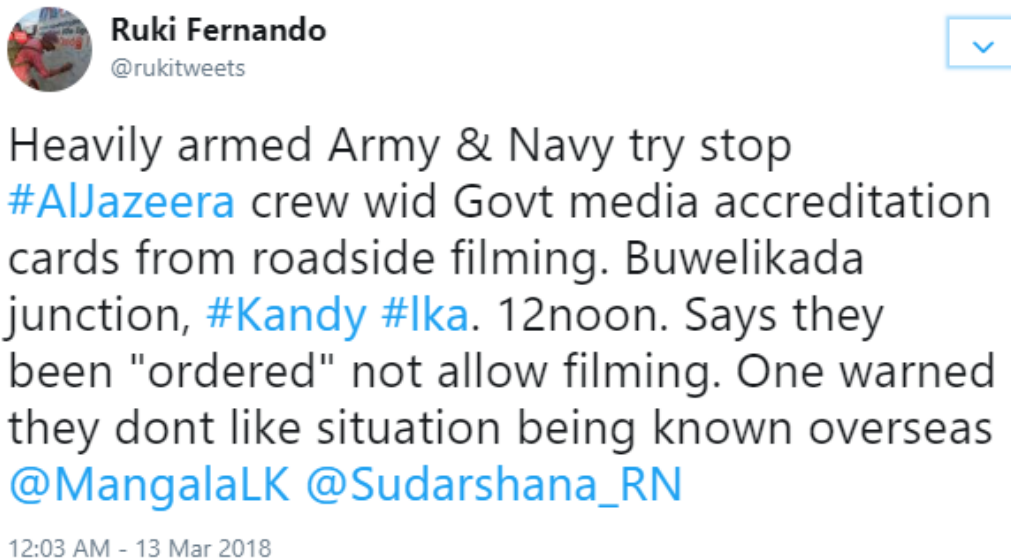


(Image- Journalist who claimed they were threatened- Photo - www.bbc.com)

Two Journalists, named Kapila Kuruppuarachi and Jayalath Dissanayake, from Sirasa and Derana private TV stations were threatened on the 28th of January 2018. Transport Minister, Nimal Siripala de Silva's Public relations officer Ajith Hikkaduwa Liyanage, is reported to have threatened the journalists at a Sri Lanka Freedom Parties (SLFP) rally in Badulla where President Maithreepala Sirisena was present. "The Officer threatened us on reporting attack on school principal of Badulla Tamil Ladies Collage by Uwa Chief Minister Chamara Dassanayake", the two journalists complained to Baddulla Police Station. Liyanage denies the allegations. The complaint has been recorded as CIB 3 319/285 by the Badulla police¹⁴.

¹⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/sinhala/sri-lanka-42851553> (Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

14. Al Jazeera crew obstructed by Armed Forces



(Image- Tweet by Ruki Fernando)

The Crew of Al Jazeera TV has been obstructed by the Sri Lankan Navy and Army in Kandy on the 12th of March 2018 around 12 noon. The crew had been surrounded and obstructed by the Sri Lankan Army and Navy at Buwelikada Junction. The members of the forces said that there was no need to report such incidents to the outside world and that they have been ordered by high level authorities to prevent such reporting. The Director General of Government Media was informed of the incident by INFORM staff, and he had confirmed that there are no such restrictions in place and that the crew was free to continue filming.

15. Tamil journalist harassed by Army officers



(Image- Demolished graveyard (L) and Shanmugam Thavaseelan (R) –Photo- tamilguardian.com / JDS)

Tamil journalist Shanmugam Thavaseelan has reportedly been harassed by Army officers on the 19th of March at Alampil, Mulaitheevu district. The journalist was working for Colombo based Asia Broadcasting Corporation.

The journalist had been returning after meeting some of the Alampil residents who were angered due to the decision of government officials to permanently acquire a graveyard which had been under the military since 2009. Hundreds of fallen Tamil Tiger fighters had been laid to rest in the graveyard but the military had demolished tombstones and denied entry to relatives. Moreover, the burial grounds are used by the military for agri-business and several other businesses, including running a cafe. The journalist, whilst reporting on the issue, filmed the area but Army officers blocked and harassed him. They brought him to senior Army officials and demanded to see the footage. However, the journalist had refused, defending his right to report on the issue.

The incident was brought to the attention of an Army spokesperson. Subsequently, it was inquired into by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka and the army is reported to have apologized to the journalist later¹⁵.

¹⁵ <http://www.jdslanka.org/index.php/news-features/media/766-sri-lanka-military-harass-tamil-journalist-for-filming-in-occupied-cemetery> (Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

E. Repression of Protests

Protests on a variety of grievances continued throughout the year. In two such protests, angry protesters have been reported to have thrown stones. In both cases, protesters had been arrested by the Police and in one case, some protesters had complained of being beaten up in Police custody.

16. Protesters attacked in police custody



(Image- Police investigation at the site of the shooting, Photo – www.adaderana.lk)

58 protesters including 13 women were arrested by the police on 21st of January at Kataragama in southern Sri Lanka for attacking the police, disturbing public peace, blocking the main access road and causing property damage. The reason behind the protest was that a person who was a worker of Kataragama Paradeshiya Sabha was killed by the police. The police claim that the victim was traveling with a friend on a motor cycle and police persons engaged in patrol duties ordered them to stop but they had not stopped, and as a result the police opened fire. However, the rider of the motor cycle said that they stopped the bike and got down from it, but despite this, the police had shot the victim.

Angry protesters had attacked the Police using stones. The chaotic situation culminated in the Police using tear gas, batten charges and rubber bullets against the protesters and finally some of the protesters were arrested by the police. Some of the arrested protesters claimed that they were physically attacked in police custody and 7 of the arrested protesters were hospitalized later^{16 17 18}.

¹⁶ <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/45540/kataragama-shooting-incident-58-protesters-arrested>(Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

¹⁷ <http://www.ft.lk/news/Chaos-in-Kataragama-after-fatal-Police-shooting/56-647764> (Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLKGD0ztAX0>(Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

17. Protesting Farmers Arrested



(Image- Protesters attacked by the Police, full video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDqrULUGeb8>)

Farmers protesting at Thabuththegama, Anuradhapura were dispersed and 59 of them were arrested by the police on the 28th of February. According to the protesters, for many years they have been using the Rajanganaya reservoir for paddy cultivation but there is a plan to establish a new clean drinking water project using the same reservoir and this would adversely affect their lives. Accordingly, thousands of farmers had gathered at Thabuththegama city and started to protest. When Police had tried to disperse them, the farmers blocked roads and threw stones at the police. The police had reacted by using teargas and water cannons. Finally, the protest was dispersed but 59 farmers were arrested by the police. Some were released on bail. According to the Police, seven policemen were injured.

All Ceylon Farmers Association President Namal Karunaratne says, “We are not against the clean drinking water project. We fully support it, but we are protesting this issue because the Rajanganaya reservoir provides water for 35,000 farming families in the locality and when the Government uses such an excessive amount for its project, the farmers cannot do their farming. Paddy cultivation is the main livelihood of these families“. Karunaratne noted that the main problem stemmed from the government’s flawed water policy and prioritization of water. The project has been temporarily suspended^{19 20}..

¹⁹ <http://www.ft.lk/news/59-arrests-following-Thambuththegama-riots/56-650395> (Accessed on 23rd of July 2018)

²⁰ <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2018/02/tension-thambuttegama-protesting-farmers-dispersed-police/> (Accessed on 23rd of July 2018)

F. Other forms of threats and intimidations

A report of a female lawyer being assaulted when she arrived in courts to give evidence is highlighted in this section, along with a report of a staff member (a retired Army officer) of the Sri Lankan High Commission in London, making threatening throat-slitting gestures to a group of Tamil protesters who had gathered outside the High Commission for a protest. The section also includes reports of reprisals faced by an NGO working on HIV / AIDS prevention program. Finally an incident of a school principal who complained and exposed the degrading treatment she had been subjected to at the hands of a politician receiving death threats is also covered in this section.

18. Threatening gesture by Sri Lankan High Commission staff in London



(Image- Brigadier Priyanka Fernando in action, Photo- www.dailymirror.lk)

Brigadier Priyanka Fernando, who was the Defense Attaché to the Sri Lankan High Commission in London, United Kingdom, had been accused of threatening Tamil protesters who were holding a peaceful protest in front of the High Commission office on the 4th of February. As shown by the photographs and videos, the Brigadier has used a throat –cutting gesture against the protesters. The Brigadier was reported to have been suspended from his duties by the foreign ministry, but later reinstated on a Presidential Directive.

Meanwhile, UK Parliamentarian Joan Ryan says that she is outraged that the Sri Lankan Government has lifted the suspension on Brigadier Fernando. “I’ve already spoken with Minister of State for Asia and the Pacific, Mark Field about this important matter,” Joan Ryan said in a twitter message.

Later, he was recalled to Sri Lanka but there is no information available about any inquiries into the matter^{21 22}.

19. Female Lawyer attacked inside Court Premises



(Image- Colombo Magistrate Courts, Photo - www.newsfirst.lk)

A female lawyer was assaulted inside the Colombo Fort Magistrate's Court Complex as she arrived to give evidence in a criminal case. The victim, Attorney-at-Law Hafsa Alif, was seen being physically assaulted by her ex-husband, Dr. Shazli Mawjooth, after he allegedly threatened to assault her if she proceeded to try and give evidence in court. The victim made a detailed complaint to a police post at the Magistrates Court complex and she was examined by the Judicial Medical Officer who recorded the injuries from her attack. However, police did not arrest the attacker but the Court decided to consider the matter after ten days. Assault or intimidation of a victim of crime or a witness in connection with their involvement in a judicial matter is a cognizable offence, punishable by up to seven years imprisonment, legal sources say. The inaction of the authorities has caused indignation and alarm among civil and legal society²³.

²¹ <http://www.dailymirror.lk/146306/Brigadier-Priyankara-Fernando-arrives>-(Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

²² <http://www.lankabusinessonline.com/tamil-group-urges-action-on-sri-lankan-brigadier-priyanka-fernando/> (Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

²³ <http://www.dailynews.lk/2018/02/13/local/142676/man-attacks-female-lawyer-inside-court-complex>(Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

20. Death threats against female Principal for exposing abuse by a Chief Minister



(Image- Principal who faced the incident, Photo- www.adaderna.lk)

The Principal of Tamil girls School of Baddulla, R. Bawani, was allegedly made to kneel down by Uva Province Chief Minister Chamara Sampath Dassanayake over the non-admission of a student recommended by him. Later, she disclosed about death threats in a press conference which was held on the 18th of March in Colombo. It is believed that the threats are due to her exposing the incident and seeking redress for being forced to kneel down. Police and the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka launched investigations, separately, into the incident. In the meantime, chief minister Dassanayake stated that he will step down as the provincial education Minister of Uva until the investigation against him is completed. However, the Principal and several teachers unions said that they are not satisfied with the ongoing investigations due to political influence^{24 25}.

21. Attack on NGO workers engaged in HIV / Aids Prevention Project

The office premises belonging to an NGO working on HIV/AIDS prevention had been forcefully opened and entered by villagers in the presence of police and media on the 18th of March in Galle. As it was a weekend, the staff of the NGO were absent at the time of incident. Some villagers claimed that the NGO has been running a secret project for sterilizing the youth in the area. After noticing the crowd around the office premises, two persons in the network of the NGO have come and asked what was happening. Then they have been attacked by the villagers in front of the police and media. The Police had not taken any action to protect the victims. This NGO works under the GFATM (The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria) for prevention of HIV among MSM population in Sri Lanka²⁶.

²⁴ <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/46468/life-threats-to-principal-of-tamil-girls-mv-badulla>-(Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

²⁵ <http://www.hirunews.lk/181499/badulla-female-principal-reveals-her-ordeal>(Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

²⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPgX1ZWQ3LO>(Accessed on 22nd of July 2018)

G. Freedom of Association

22. Attempts to restrict Freedom of Association through an amendment to existing law

On February 20, 2018, the Cabinet approved a repressive Draft Act to Amend the Voluntary Social Service Organizations (Registration and Supervision) Act no. 31 of 1980 (LDO 32/2011) and present it to Parliament for approval. The drafting has been done in secret with no consultations. The draft violates the right to freedom of association, blurs the line between government and non-governmental entities and has provisions that provide broad powers to the government to monitor, regulate and interfere in civic movements and groups, and including powers that are usually reserved for the Police and Judiciary. The amendment drew widespread criticism and from activists. In the face of mounting pressure, the Minister who tabled it agreed to withdraw it during a meeting between the Prime Minister, government officials and concerned activists from around the country. The Prime Minister and the Minister requested a committee comprising a group of activists to work with Ministry officials to address concerns through a new law^{27 28 29}.

²⁷ <http://www.cpalanka.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CPA-Note-on-VSSO-Amendment-2018-FINAL-2-1.pdf> (Last accessed 19th July 2018)

²⁸ <https://groundviews.org/2018/03/22/crippling-civic-organising-mobilising-and-resistance-through-draft-ngo-act-amendment/> (Last accessed 19th July 2018)

²⁹ <https://twitter.com/ManoGanesan/status/978617985156788224> & <https://twitter.com/ManoGanesan/status/978618562850910208> (Last accessed 19th July 2018)