

# Repression of Dissent In Sri Lanka

July– September 2018



*(Protesting female detainees of Welikada Prison in Colombo against lack of facilities and other concerns they had about their rights and wellbeing, Picture courtesy- Rukmal Gamage, Daily News)*

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Colombo, Sri Lanka

## Issues Covered

- A. Obstacles and threats to Tamil activists & politicians in North and East**
- B. Threats and obstructions against Journalists**
- C. Restrictions on Arts and Literature**
- D. Threats and intimidations related to campaigns on disappearances**
- E. Other forms of threats and intimidations**

*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 July to September 2018. Executive summary describes context and analyses the trends and some common findings including government and other related parties behaviour. 35 specific incidents are reported under 5 topics. Media reports, incidents reported to INFORM, observations and experience of INFORM staff have served as sources of information to the report.

## Executive Summary

INFORM's previous reports on repression of dissent from January to March and April to June this year had 22 and 18 incidents respectively, but the number had almost doubled during these three months to 35.

About half of these have been against Tamil activists in North and East. They include journalists and editors, families of disappeared and those supporting campaigns against disappearances of Tamils and Tamil politicians. The type of repression ranged from physical assaults, interrogation, summoning to police, especially to its Terrorist Investigation Division (TID). The military has also been behind some of the reprisals.

In addition to Tamil journalists and editors, other journalists and editors have also faced questioning, harassments and intimidations, including from politicians and a Trade Union leader.

There were also reports of restricting arts and literature, including books and theatre, and arrests, questioning and intimidation of artists. Many of these were based on allegations that they contain content critical or harmful to the country's majority religion, Buddhism. Politicians and Buddhist Monks appear to be behind some of these.

Amongst those who faced threats was the Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, Dr. Deepika Udagama. The Catholic Archbishop of Colombo, Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, also made public pronouncements criticizing the human rights framework. Both these drew strong condemnation from human rights activists.

Several of the victims were female activists. Amongst them were the Chair of the Human Rights Commission, the wife of disappeared person in the East, an activist supporting families of disappeared in the North, a journalist in the North and an activist who has been working with survivors of torture, in the southern part of Sri Lanka. Four of the above were physical assaults, though on one occasion, there was a narrow escape. One of the most brutal attacks on dissent was on female detainees who were protesting for their rights and basic needs.

## A. Obstacles and threats to Tamil activists & politicians in North and East

The Northern Province continues to be heavily militarized, but this year and last few years there have been protests and resistance on variety of issues, including memorials and monuments for those who had died during the war. Eastern province had also seen such activism. It is in this context that Tamil activists and politicians continued to face more obstructions, threats, intimidation and surveillance than in other parts of the country. Below are seven incidents of reprisals in the course of struggles for justice that had been reported in the media, but many of other incidents in this report under thematic areas also relate to repression of dissent in the North and East.

### 1. Fishing Activist's boat set on fire



(Image- Burnt boat - Picture courtesy- [www.tamilguardian.com](http://www.tamilguardian.com) )

A fishing boat belonging to a Tamil fisherman, Sujeepan Sebamalai who is an activist for rights of Northern fishermen, was reported to have been set on fire on 21<sup>st</sup> of July at Mulliyan in Kaddaik – Kaadu in Vadamaraadchi East of Jaffna. The incident has taken place near the Navy detachment and the loss is estimated at Rs. 400,000. Sujeepan has been leading protests against large scale sea-cucumber poaching scheme in Vadamaraadchi East, which would have negatively affected fishermen's livelihood and the fishing ecosystem<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=39137> (Last Accessed on 3<sup>rd</sup> of October)

## 2. Pradeshiya Sabha member threatened by Army intelligence

Mr S Sivaloganathan, member of the Nallur Pradeshiya Sabha (Local government Council member) had claimed that he had been threatened by Army intelligence officers through telephone due to his public interest activities, such as proposing resolutions at the Pradeshiya Sabha for releasing of land occupied by the Army for many years. He had alleged that the callers who had identified as Army intelligence officers, had asked him in a threatening tone why he was bringing resolutions against the Sri Lankan military<sup>2</sup>.

## 3. TNPF office was raided



**Tamil National People's Front**  
@TnpfOrg

**Mullaitivu: Nearly a dozen Sri Lanka Army personnel surrounded, forcibly entered and searched the Mullaitivu district office of the TNPF yesterday (17th) around 11 am. They remained there for several hours according to neighbors,**

12:50 pm · 17 Aug 18

(Image-Tweeted message by TNPF- Image courtesy-  
<https://mobile.twitter.com/TnpfOrg/status/1030353557151772673?p=v>)

Tamil National People's Front's (TNPF) Mullaitivu office has been reported to have been raided by Sri Lankan Army on 16<sup>th</sup> of August. According to party sources, a group of army soldiers had surrounded TNPF's Mullaitivu district office for hours and forcibly entered and searched the office<sup>3</sup>. Later, TNPF tweeted about the incident and blamed the police for being reluctant to receive a complaint from the District Secretary of the TNPF citing a 'lack of eyewitnesses'. The TNPF further said that they viewed the break-in by the Army as a blatant attempt to intimidate them<sup>4</sup>. TNPF had been supporting some of the protests by families of disappeared and communities whose lands have been occupied by the military in the North and East.

## 4. Chairman of Karaichchi Pradeshiya Sabha summoned to TID

The Chairman of the Karaichchi Pradeshiya Sabha (Local government Council) in the Kilinochchi district was reported to have been summoned by the TID (Terrorism Investigation Division) 29<sup>th</sup> of August but later the date was changed as 1<sup>st</sup> of September. The TID has not explained the reason for the calling. He had also been detained by the TID in 2013<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>2</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/nallur-council-member-threatened-army-intel-bringing-resolutions-against-militarisation> (Last Accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> of October)

<sup>3</sup><https://mobile.twitter.com/TnpfOrg/status/1030353557151772673?p=v> (Last Accessed on 06th of October)

<sup>4</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-army-raids-tnpf-office-mullaitivu> (Last Accessed on 06th of October)

<sup>5</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tid-summons-karaichchi-divisional-council-chairman> (Last accessed on 1st of October)

### 5. Vavuniya Citizens Committee president summoned by TID

Mr Gopalakrisnan Rajkumar the president of Vavuniya Citizens Committee, was reported to have been summoned by the TID (Terrorism Investigation Department) on 6<sup>th</sup> of September. TID had not mentioned reasons for the summons<sup>6</sup>.

### 6. Harthal organizer arrested

Kanapathipillai Mohan, activist from Batticaloa was reported to have been arrested by Eravur police for allegedly damaging public property. Under the leadership of Mohan and some other activists, there was a harthal (protest) organized against the construction of a bottle water factory near Eravur. Mohan was arrested by 11<sup>th</sup> of September and later released on bail<sup>7</sup>.

### 7. Police asked injunction against Thileepan commemoration



(Image- Thileepan commemoration- Picture courtesy- [www.tamilguardian.com](http://www.tamilguardian.com) )

There were media reports that Police on 21<sup>st</sup> of July filed an injunction to prevent an event of commemorating Thileepan's fast unto death protest against the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), 31 years ago. Thileepan was a former LTTE member. The event was planned for 26<sup>th</sup> September at Nallur in Jaffna district. Police had claimed that memorial event should be banned, and decorations on Thileepan monument should be removed on the basis that the event can intimidate Sinhala tourists visiting Jaffna and could endanger ethnic and religious reconciliation. The court had rejected issuing an injunction at a hearing on 25<sup>th</sup> September<sup>8</sup>. The following day, the event was held near the Nallur Kandaswamy Temple, Jaffna with participation of mayor of Jaffna, politicians and civilians from Kilinochchi, Mullaithivu and Jaffna<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>6</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tid-summons-vavuniya-citizens-committee-president> (Last Accessed on 1<sup>th</sup> of September)

<sup>7</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/organiser-released-bail-over-batticaloa-hartal> (Last Accessed on 1<sup>th</sup> of September)

<sup>8</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/jaffna-court-rejects-ban-thileepan-commemoration> (Last Accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> October)

<sup>9</sup><http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/Jaffna-Mayor-at-Thileepan-s-commemoration-156035.html> (Last Accessed on 16<sup>th</sup> November)

## B. Attacks, intimidations and restrictions against journalists and editors

The period saw several journalists and editors being summoned for interrogation and to take statements by the Police, and specially the TID (Terrorist Investigation Division). Except one, all were Tamil journalists from the North and East. On one occasion, Army had questioned Tamil journalists and activists about media reports related to the Army. Two Colombo based journalists were criticized for contributing towards an investigative report, while journalists also reported being restricted from reporting on issues related to mass graves and a corruption case against a well-known politician. The period also saw the Army admitting that they were holding intelligence reports about a Jaffna based Tamil journalist, a physical attack on a Jaffna based female Tamil journalist and President blaming social media for drugs, murder and rape. The President of the Government Medical Officers Association (GMOA) was also reported to have made threatening remarks against journalists.

### 8. Two journalists harassed



(Images- Joint opposition MP Kanchana Wijesekera blaming two Sri Lankan journalists while addressing a press conference (R) Dharisha Bastians (M) Athur Wamanan (R) Pictures courtesy- [www.colombotelegrap.com](http://www.colombotelegrap.com), [jdssrilanka.blogspot.com](http://jdssrilanka.blogspot.com), [www.hirunews.lk](http://www.hirunews.lk))

A group of Sri Lankan parliamentarian including Kanchana Wijesekera and Dullas Alahapperume who are associated with former president Mahinda Rajapaksha publically criticized two journalists, Dharisha Bastians and Athur Wamanan who had contributed to a New York Times investigative report on Hambanthota Port. The article written by Maria Abi Habib, South Asian correspondent of the paper was published on 25<sup>th</sup> of June<sup>10,11</sup>. Former president Mahinda Rajapaksa on 1<sup>st</sup> July issued a statement disputing the findings by New York Times report alleging, among other points, that Chinese funds had flowed into Rajapaksa's failed 2015 presidential campaign. The parliamentarians blamed and criticized the two journalists while showing Bastians's photograph at a press conference held in Colombo on 2<sup>nd</sup> of July. The incident was condemned by several international and local media organizations as a threat to media freedom<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>10</sup><https://cpj.org/2018/07/sri-lankan-politicians-try-to-intimidate-journalis.php>(Last Accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> of October)

<sup>11</sup><https://www.newsfirst.lk/2018/07/04/new-york-times-reacts-to-intimidation-by-mr-camp/>(Last Accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> of October)

<sup>12</sup><http://www.ifj.org/nc/news-single-view/backpid/1/article/sri-lankan-lawmakers-intimidating-journalists-over-nyt-article/>(Last Accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> of October)

## 9. Rivira Associate Editor summoned to TID



(Image- Thissa Ravindra Perera, Photo Courtesy- [www.dailymirror.lk](http://www.dailymirror.lk))

Associate Editor of Rivira Sunday Newspaper Tissa Ravindra Perera was reported to have been summoned to the TID (Terrorist Investigation Department) on 20<sup>th</sup> July to make a clarification on an article which was published in June on developments of LTTE activities in North and East. The article had reported recovery of claymore mines in Oddusuddan in Mullaitivu district. “We revealed this based on intelligence reports. The public should be awake if there is any sign of a LTTE resurgence. We have fulfilled our social obligation as journalists,” Thissa Ravindra Perera told reporters after his statement<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>13</sup><http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/tid-records-statement-from-rivira-associate-editor-152985.html> (Last Accessed on 5th of September)

## 10. CID questioning of Editors and Journalists of Tamil Newspapers

Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Police has questioned some editors and journalists in Jaffna about a controversial statement related to the LTTE made by former state minister Wijakala Maheswaran<sup>14</sup>.

## 11. TID takes statements from Tamil newspaper editors

TID (Terrorism Investigation Division) has recorded statements from editors of three Jaffna based Tamil newspapers on 16<sup>th</sup> of September. The statements were given by Uthayan, Valampuri and Thinakkural editors on the issue of map of Tamil homeland displayed in a temple festival of Anaikkottai<sup>15</sup>.

## 12. TID summons to Batticaloa Journalist



*(Image- Head of Batticaloa District Tamil journalist's Association and independent journalist V Krishnakumar)*

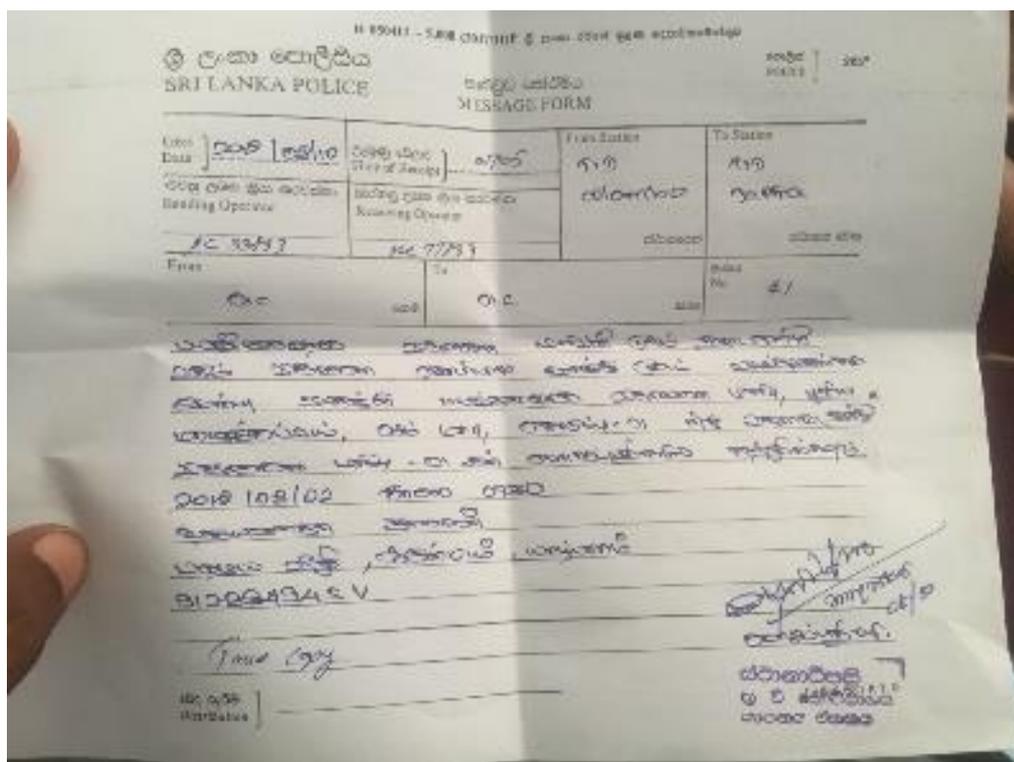
Chief of Batticaloa District Tamil journalists Association and independent journalist V Krishnakumar was reported to have been summoned to Terrorism Investigation Division on 16<sup>th</sup> of July. He has been accused by police for having links with former leaders of LTTE and some diaspora organizations. According to Krishnakumar, the nature of the link between him and former LTTE in Batticaloa has been questioned deeply. "If they are investigating me in connection to the LTTE and diaspora organizations, this is an attempt to restrict our media activities," Krishnakumar had told to the media<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>14</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankas-cid-investigates-tamil-newspapers-reported-vijayakalas-speech> (Last Accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> of October)

<sup>15</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tid-interviews-jaffna-editors-over-tamil-homeland-display> (Last Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> of October)

<sup>16</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tid-interrogates-batticaloa-journalist> (Last Accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> of September)

### 13. TID summons to Jaffna Journalist



(Image- The noticed which had been received to Mr Shalin by Police- Picture Courtesy Tamil Guardian)

Uthayarasa Shalin, Jaffna based Tamil journalist has said he was summoned to Colombo by the TID (Terrorism Investigation Division) to question him about displaying an Eelam map during the Hindu Temple festival in his home village, Anaikkottai, in the Jaffna district. The summons had been issued weeks after investigation by the TID and some other police stations in to the same incident. Mr Shalin is not a member of the temple’s any administration committees. Apart from Mr Shalin, 5 other people including priest of the temple and members of the youth forum of temple have been summoned to Colombo by the TID for questioning about the incident<sup>17</sup>.

### 14. CID summons to Jaffna Journalist

Nadarajah Kuharajah a Tamil journalist who was working at a Jaffna based private television station was reported to have been summoned to Sri Lanka Criminal Investigation Division (CID) on 24<sup>th</sup> August. The summons is a part of investigation on arrest and bail of “Swiss Kumar”, who was later convicted for murder and gang rape of 18 years school girl Sivaloganatan Vithiya in May 2015. The journalists covered the stories related to the incident<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>17</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tid-summons-jaffna-journalist-along-5-others>(Last Accessed on 5th of October)

<sup>18</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-journalist-summoned-cid> (Last Accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> of October)

### 15. Army questions Journalists in Mullaitivu

Journalists and civil society activists from Mullaitivu were reported to have been questioned by army officers on 29<sup>th</sup> of July following news reports published on Saturday about collecting information from households and businesses in Mullaitivu district by Army. According to journalists and activists, army officers had demanded how news of their activities had reached the press<sup>19,20</sup>.

### 16. Army admits holding reports on Tamil Journalists

Sri Lanka Army has admitted that they have been holding intelligence reports on Tamil journalists. The information came out during an appeal process at the Right to Information (RTI) Commission, after the Army had rejected a Right to Information request by a Jaffna based Tamil journalist. The Army had informed to RTI Commission that they had rejected the RTI application of the journalist because of military intelligence reports held about him<sup>21</sup>.

### 17. Female Jaffna journalist attacked

Jaffna based freelance female Tamil journalist Sumathi Thangaraja was reported to have been attacked in Jaffna on 28<sup>th</sup> of September while she was riding her motorcycle. According to her, she had noticed an unknown person following her by another motorbike while she was on her way home from a temple. The unknown male rider had crashed his bike with her bike and threatened her. She had lodged a complaint to Jaffna police and said she was shocked and her bike was damaged<sup>22</sup>.

### 18. President of Government Medical Officers Association threatens journalists



(Image- Dr Anurudha Padeniya- Photo Courtesy- Sunday observer)

Dr Anurudha Padeniya, president of Government Medical Officers Association was reported to have said that they are going to publish a traitors list of journalists who are working against the interest of motherland. “We have created a point scheme. In Psychiatry, there is a method to identify people who betray the country. We are going to keep the list online with the materials they publish. We can display you are doing a contract against the country’ Dr. Padeniya was reported to have said in Colombo 4<sup>th</sup> of July. He had also threatened

<sup>19</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/journalists-questioned-over-coverage-army-collecting-information-mullaitivu>(Last Accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> of October)

<sup>20</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/residents-fear-sl-army-collects-information-mullaitivu>(Last Accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> of October)

<sup>21</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-army-admits-holding-military-intelligence-report-tamil-journalist> (Last Accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> of October)

<sup>22</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-journalist-attacked-jaffna-0> (Last Accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> of October)

a journalist of the English newspaper “Sunday Observer” by phone on 3<sup>rd</sup> of July and said that the journalists of Sunday Observer are selling the country<sup>23</sup>.

### 19. President blames Social Media for increase in rape, murder and drugs



(President Maithreepala Sirisena Picture Courtesy-, [vaguthu.mv](http://vaguthu.mv))

President Maithreepala Sirisena was reported to have blamed social media for increasing murder, rape and drugs. “Some social websites and use of illegal drugs have caused an increase in murders and rapes, there is the responsibility of the government as well as the parents to give priority to save children from these evils” President Sirisena was reported to have said at a public event in Kandy on 11<sup>th</sup> July<sup>24</sup>.

### 20. Journalists barred from photographing mass grave site

Mannar Magistrate Court was reported to have imposed a ban on all journalists from taking photographs at the mass grave site in Mannar. The site is currently being excavated and more than 235 bodies having been reported to have been found, including 18 young children<sup>25</sup>. Some of the skeletons had been found with “deep and unusual” lacerations on their bones. The court said that the ban on journalists is to prevent disruption of the excavation work<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>23</sup><http://srilankabrief.org/2018/08/sri-lanka-doctors-association-gmoa-head-threatens-journalists-with-traitors-list/> (Last Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> of October)

<sup>24</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-president-blames-social-media-%E2%80%99increase-murders-and-rapes%E2%80%99> (Last Accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> of October)

<sup>25</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/mannar-mass-grave-excavation-temporarily-suspended> (Last Accessed on 16<sup>th</sup> of November)

<sup>26</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-court-bans-journalists-photographing-mannar-mass-grave> (Last Accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> of October)



*(Mannar mass grave. Image courtesy – Sri Lankan Mirror)*

## 21. Journalists barred from covering case

Journalists were reported to have been barred from reporting on a court case against former minister and Kurunegala District MP Johnston Fernando. He and two other suspects have been charged with misappropriating around Rs. 5.2 million from the state retail outlet Sathosa. The suspects had been remanded until the conclusion of the case. Journalists had claimed that they were informed of the ban by a policeman on 12<sup>th</sup> of September, but that others identified as Very Important Persons (VIPs) were allowed to enter to the court premises<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup><http://srilankabrief.org/2018/09/sri-lanka-journalists-barrred-from-covering-case-of-misappropriating-state-funds-by-a-minister/> (Last Accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> of October)

## C. Restrictions on arts and literature

The three months saw threats to freedom of expression through arrests of an author and publisher of a book, a stage drama being censored, a radio drama being banned and Minister blaming Tamil cinema for drugs, murder and rape. Three of the four incidents were based on premise of them being harmful to Buddhism, the majority religion in Sri Lanka. Ministers and Buddhist Monks were behind these restrictions.

### 22. Law and Order Minister blames Tamil Cinema for promoting violence



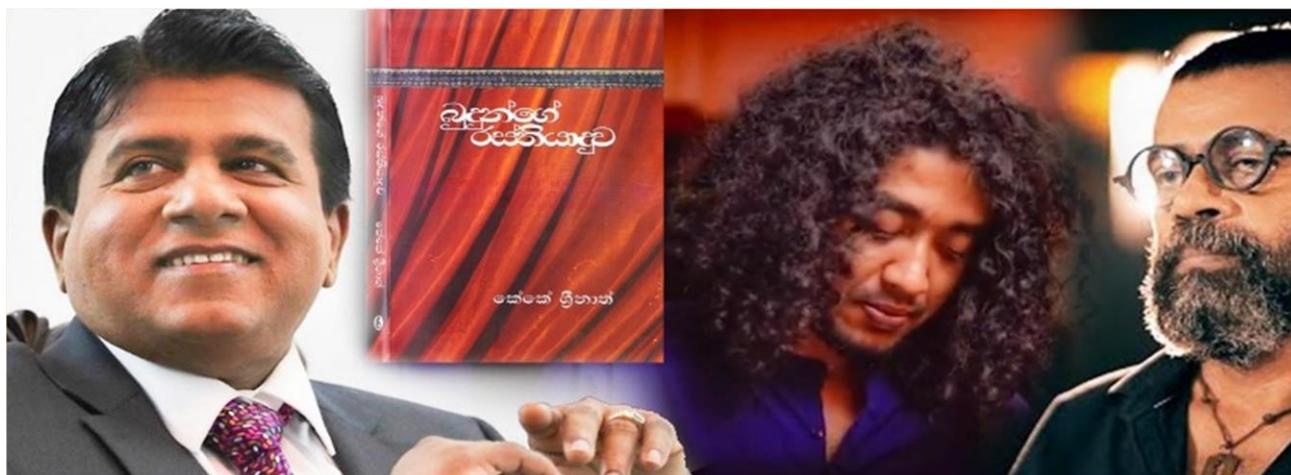
(Image- Minister Ranjith Madduma Bandara, Picture Courtesy- [www.dailymirror.lk](http://www.dailymirror.lk))

Law and Order Minister Ranjith Maddumaandara is reported to have blamed to Tamil Cinema for promoting violence in North especially among the youth groups. He described in Colombo on 13<sup>th</sup> of July that a 'fact finding mission' in Jaffna, found that Tamil films was fuelling the gang violence in Jaffna. Tamil youths were emulating the violent scenes to instill fear before carrying out their criminal activities such as robberies."<sup>28,29</sup>

<sup>28</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankas-law-and-order-minister-blames-tamil-cinema-gang-violence> (Last Accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> of October)

<sup>29</sup><http://www.dailymirror.lk/152689/-Ava-gangsters-influenced-by-violence-in-Tamil-films-Minister> (Last Accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> of October)

### 23. Author and Publisher Arrested



(Image- From left, Minister Wijayadasa Rajapaksha, cover of the book, Shreenath Chathuranga, Upul Sannasgala- Picture courtesy- [www.gossiplanka.com](http://www.gossiplanka.com))

Popular author and publisher Upul Shantha Sannasgala and author Srinath Chathuranga were reported to have been arrested by police over the publishing a book named “Budunge Rasthiyaduwa”. The book is written by Srinath Chathuranga and it was printed and distributed by Upul Sannasgala. Both were arrested by Mirihana police with hundreds of books, just before the distribution, based on a complaint made by a group who identified themselves as Buddhist Information Center. Both were released without being charged, but the book, author and printer were verbally abused and attacked through media by monks, politicians, and several such parties. The minister of Higher Education and Cultural Affairs Wijayadasa Rajapaksha had sent an official letter to the Inspector General of Police (IGP) to initiate legal actions against the book, author and printer<sup>30, 31</sup>.

### 24. Banning of Radio drama

A radio drama series which was to be broadcasted on the state owned and managed Independent Television Network (ITN) with the sponsorship of Office of National Unity and Reconciliation functioning under the Ministry of National integration and Reconciliation was reported to have been banned due to the intervention of several ministers including Wijayadasa Rajapaksha and Gamini Jayawickrama Perera. The drama series is directed by veteran drama director Malaka Devapriya, and several reputed artists had contributed to the drama series. However, some Buddhists monks had criticized the drama series and had demanded to ban as the drama series is ‘disrespectful’ to Buddhism.

<sup>30</sup><http://www.hirunews.lk/198018/legal-action-to-be-taken-against-book-titled-budunge-rasthiyaduwa> (Last Accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> of October)

<sup>31</sup><http://www.asianmirror.lk/news/item/28054-cultural-minister-requests-police-chief-to-take-action-against-author-publisher-and-distributors-of-budunge-rasthiyaduwa>(Last Accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> of October)

Gamini Jayawickrama Perera, the Minister of Buddhist and Religious Affairs had instructed his officials to initiate an investigation<sup>32</sup>.

## 25. Ban on stage drama “Mama Kelin Minihek”



*(Asanka Sayakkara speaking at a press briefing collectively organized by a group of artists and activists to condemn ongoing censorship against artists and writers on 23<sup>rd</sup> August, in Colombo)*

“Mama Kelin Minihek” (I’m a straight man), a stage drama by Asanka Sayakkara, was reported to have been banned by Public Censor Board on the basis that it defames Buddhism. The drama had been categorized as an “adults only” and it had been staged many times. Suddenly, the Censor Board had recalled the stage certificate of the drama on the basis that some scenes defames Buddhism, which was denied by the director, Sayakkara. Later, the ban was removed with the condition of removing some scenes<sup>33 34</sup>.

<sup>32</sup><http://srilankabrief.org/2018/08/kanata-paharak-radio-drama-banned-as-ordered-by-buddha-sasana-and-religious-affairs-minister/>  
Last accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> of October)

<sup>33</sup><http://www.rivira.lk/online/2018/08/25/158168> (Last accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> of October)

<sup>34</sup><https://srilankamirror.com/entertainment-mirror/10081-mang-kelin-minihek-to-be-banned> (Last accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> of October)

## D. Assaults and threats against anti-disappearances campaigners

Protests across the North and East started by Tamil families of disappeared in early 2017 has been continuing till 2018, going beyond 600 days. Other families of disappeared had published books, filed new court cases and attended sessions of the UN Human Rights Council. This increased activism had also resulted in increased threats, intimidation and even assaults on families of disappeared and those supporting them. Two witnesses from the Navy had also complained of reprisals, after cooperating with investigators in a case where the Navy is implicated in disappearance of 11 youth. Below are several such examples reported in the three month period covered in this report.

### 26. Attempted assault and interrogation of a family of disappeared

A female Tamil disappearances activist was attacked on 10<sup>th</sup> of July near her house in the Eastern province while she was on a bicycle with her son. According to her, two men had thrown an iron rod towards her. Her husband had disappeared and she had been fighting on his behalf along with other families of disappeared. This incident happened few days after she had returned from attending sessions of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. She had also been subjected to interrogation by some CID officers who visited her home on 6<sup>th</sup> of July on why she went to Geneva, what she had spoken there. She had also said that her luggage had been unusually delayed at Colombo airport while on landing from Geneva, and that she has been taken to a separate room and questioned at the airport about where she was coming from and the contents of her suitcase and laptop<sup>35</sup>.

### 27. Assault on female activist assisting in a disappearance case against the Army

An activist who was assisting families of disappeared and their lawyers in several Habeas Corpus cases against the Army was brutally attacked with an iron rod in Vaddukoddai in the Jaffna district on 14<sup>th</sup> of July. She had been riding her bicycle with her young son when she was hit with an iron rod by an unidentified man. The incident had happened near a Police station. She was hospitalized with injuries on her face and head. The Habeas Corpus cases, are being heard in Jaffna courts in relation to the disappearance of over two dozen Tamil youths in 1996, after having been detained by the Sri Lankan army<sup>36</sup>.

### 28. Activist works against disappearances arrested

Yasith Chandima, activist of Sama Aithiya (Equal Rights) Movement was reported to have been arrested by the police in Horana in the Kaluthara district on 27<sup>th</sup> August around midnight while he was pasting posters about International Day of Disappeared on 30<sup>th</sup> August. The poster campaign was one of the activities to commemorate this day and slogans on the posters included slogans on political prisoners and disappeared people<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>35</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-disappearances-activist-attacked-days-after-cid-harassment> (Last Accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> of September)

<sup>36</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/lawyers-assistant-brutally-attacked-jaffna> (Last Accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> of September)

<sup>37</sup><https://www.lankaviews.com/mer-activist-arrested/> (Last Accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> of September)

## 29. Reprisals against key witness in disappearances case against Navy



*(Lt. Commander Krishan Welegedara, photo courtesy Sunday Observer)*

Lt. Commander Krishan Welegedara, who is a key state witness of 11 youth who had disappeared at the hands of the Navy, in a letter to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, is reported to have said that he is being subjected to reprisals such as denial of promotions, by his employer, the Sri Lanka Navy. This case is being investigated by Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and had received widespread media coverage, and several Navy personnel had been arrested as suspects. During the investigation, Lt. Com Welegedara had claimed that he had seen the disappeared youths when they were in Navy custody and they had been beaten and they begged him to rescue them<sup>38</sup>.

## 30. Death threats against witness implicating Chief of Defense Staff in disappearances

The Special Investigation Unit of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) on 26<sup>th</sup> of September was reported to have informed to Fort Magistrate Court in Colombo district that Sri Lanka Navy officer Lt. Commander Galagamage Laksiri, had received death threats from higher officials. He is the witness who had provided information about Chief of Defense Staff Admiral Ravi Wijegunaratne's involvement in assisting a suspect from the Navy evade arrest, after being implicated in the disappearance of 11 youth<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>38</sup><http://srilankabrief.org/2018/09/key-witness-in-students-abduction-case-petitions-hrcsl-claims-navy-is-victimising-him/> (Last Accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> of October)

<sup>39</sup><http://www.ft.lk/news/Key-witness-giving-evidence-of-CDS--involvement-in-youth-abduction-case-receives-death-threats/56-663546>(Last accessed on t of October)

## E. Other forms of threats and intimidations

Threats and intimidations against human rights, human rights defenders in different manner continued during the period, with Religious leaders and Military officials making controversial statements against human rights and rights defenders. Below are some reported incidents.

### 31. Attack on female human rights activist



*(Image- Amitha Priyanthi, Photo courtesy- Sunday observer)*

Amitha Priyanthi, a female human rights activist attached to the group Janasansadaya, based in Panadura in the Colombo district, was assaulted by two motorcyclists dressed in Black with full face helmets in Moragawala, Aluthgama on 6<sup>th</sup> July while she was walking towards her home,. The attackers had taken her bag which had some sensitive documents related to human rights cases and her mobile phone. A complaint was lodged with the police and the number plate of the attackers' motorbike had been identified. Janasansadaya is a well-known human rights organization, especially for its work to assist survivors of torture<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup><http://www.ahrchk.org/ruleoflawasia.net/news.php?id=AHRC-STM-039-2018> (Last Accessed on 7<sup>th</sup> of October)

### 32. Attack on protesting female detainees



*(Protesting female detainees of Welikada Prison in Colombo against lack of facilities and other concerns they had about their rights and wellbeing, Picture courtesy- Rukmal Gamage, Daily News)*

Group of female detainees of Welikada Prison in Colombo were reported to have been brutally attacked by some officers inside the Prison premises and inside a bus while they were taking from Welikada to another prison. The group of female detainees had been protesting for more than two weeks against lack of facilities and other concerns they had about their rights and wellbeing. The protest was dispersed by prison authorities and protesters were reported to have been brutally attacked. After the dispersal, 52 female detainees were transferred to some other prisons from Welikada on 20<sup>th</sup> of August, and they had been attacked inside the bus by male prison officers. Mali, a 35 years old female inmate of Welikada Prison, was reported to have died 24<sup>th</sup> of August, due to the assault<sup>4142</sup>.

<sup>41</sup><https://srilankamirror.com/news/10230-assaulted-welikada-inmate-died-without-treatment> (Last accessed on 8th October)

<sup>42</sup><https://srilankamirror.com/news/10230-assaulted-welikada-inmate-died-without-treatment> (Last accessed on 8th October)

### 33. Army Commander threatens critiques of it's reconciliation work



*(Image- Army Commander Lieutenant General Mahesh Senanayake, Picture courtesy- [www.asiantribune.com](http://www.asiantribune.com))*

Army commander Mahesh Senanayake was reported to have issued directives to all units of Sri Lankan Army to not allow any individual, including retired officers and civil activists, to obstruct ongoing reconciliation process. "It has been observed that at times, opportunistic politicians, and some retired military officers as well as civil activists, while criticizing the reconciliation process carried out by the Government and the Army and appreciating the terrorists' activities, conduct lectures and meetings to damage the trust peace loving people in the North and East have placed in the government and the military and to poison their minds with hatred," the Army Commander is reported to have said. This is seen as indirect threat to those who are critical about the government's reconciliation process, and the role of the Army, such as their continued occupation of private and public lands, involvement in farms, pre-schools, surveillance etc<sup>43 44 45</sup>.

<sup>43</sup>[http://www.colombopage.com/archive\\_18B/Jul09\\_1531105657CH.php](http://www.colombopage.com/archive_18B/Jul09_1531105657CH.php) (Last accessed 5<sup>th</sup> October)

<sup>44</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/army-commander-orders-troops-condemn-acts-obstructing-reconciliation> (Last accessed 5<sup>th</sup> October)

<sup>45</sup><http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/59924#more-59924> (Last accessed 5<sup>th</sup> October)

### 34. Threats to the Chair of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka



*(Dr Deepika Udagama, Chairperson of Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission speaking at a press briefing held in Colombo, photo courtesy -Asia News)*

Dr. Deepika Udagama, Chairperson of Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission received threats, allegedly due to the Human Rights Commission's role in vetting process undertaken at the request of the Government of Sri Lanka and with the agreement of Sri Lanka Army. The threats against Dr. Udagama were made by Rear Admiral (Rtd) Sarath Weerasekera former Director General of the Civil Defense Force<sup>46</sup>. Dr. Udagama, was also accused of working with NGOs to treacherously further the interests of the Tigers and Rear Admiral Weerasekera called for the death penalty for all traitors under the rule of a patriotic government<sup>47</sup>. Later the Prime Minister issued a press statement condemning this malicious attack, and also stated that threats of this nature, and publishing such irresponsible statements in print media is a serious concern. He also ordered Inspector General of Police to conduct an investigation into the matter, and to ensure the safety of the staff of Human Rights commission<sup>48</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.dailynews.lk/2018/07/24/features/157726/traitors-and-patriots> (Last accessed 4th December)

<sup>47</sup> <http://srilankabrief.org/2018/07/civil-society-calls-on-pm-president-to-publicly-express-their-confidence-in-the-chairperson-and-hrcsl/> (Last accessed 5<sup>th</sup> October)

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.dailynews.lk/2018/07/20/local/157473/pm-wants-igp-probe-threat-against-deepika> (Last accessed 5<sup>th</sup> November)

The threats were condemned by several local and international groups, including 37 civil society organizations and 170 individuals from Sri Lanka and the International Truth and Justice Project (ITJP)<sup>49</sup>.

### 35. Catholic Cardinal criticizes human rights



(Image- Cardinal Malcom Ranjith- Video – Ada Derana <https://youtu.be/qTVqGUUOWNY>)

Catholic Archbishop of Colombo, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith has said that human rights had come recently, that it is a new western religion, meant for those without a religion, a myth to be careful about and that those who believe in religion do not need to talk about human rights<sup>50</sup>. A group of Catholics had publicly challenged his position, highlighting Catholic teachings related to human rights and statements by present and past Popes supporting the human rights framework<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>49</sup><https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/threats-against-sri-lanka%E2%80%99s-human-rights-commission-are-%E2%80%98absolutely-outrageous%E2%80%99-says-itjp> (Last accessed 5<sup>th</sup> of October)

<sup>50</sup><http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/Human-rights-is-the-latest-religion-among-Western-nations-Archbishop--155899.html> (Last accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> of October)

<sup>51</sup> We are shocked at some of your recent comments, group of Catholics tell Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith. <http://srilankabrief.org/2018/10/we-are-shocked-at-some-of-your-recent-comments-group-of-catholics-tell-malcolm-cardinal-ranjith/> (Last accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> of November)