

Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka

June 2014



Al Jazeera Colombo correspondent, standing in front of the damaged vehicle, explains how their media team came under attack from an unruly mob while covering the aftermaths of communal violence in Aluthgama, Sri Lanka (Photo: Al Jazeera video)

INFORM

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Issues Covered

- A. Violations of Freedom of Expression**
- B. Violations of Freedom of Assembly**
- C. Threat to take Action against those giving Evidence to UN Investigation**
- D. Death Threats to Academics, Attacks on Agitating Parents and Teachers**
- E. Repression of Students Activists**
- F. Threats and attacks on a HRD promoting Religious Freedom**
- G. Attack on an Opposition Parliamentarian helping victims of communal violence**

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

Summary:

June 2014 will be remembered in Sri Lanka for the communal violence in the towns of Aluthgama and Beruwala in Southern Sri Lanka, that resulted in 4 persons (three Muslims and one Tamil) being killed, more than 80 injured and widespread damage to property, mainly of Muslims. The widely held belief, including by the Minister of Justice and several other Government Ministers is that the Buddhist extremist group, Bodu Bala Sena (BBS – meaning Buddhist Power Force) was primarily responsible for the rioting, particularly through an inflammatory speech by its leader, Ven. Galabodaatthe Gnanasara Thero, who said *“In this country we still have a Sinhala Police; we still have a Sinhala Army. After today if a single Marakkalaya (derogatory term for Muslims) or some other paraya (alien) touches a single Sinhalese.....it will be their end.”* Police had allowed the rally in which this speech was made to go ahead, despite appeals by Muslim religious and political leaders that it may lead to violence. The BBS and some government officials have claimed that the origins of the riots was an alleged attack by Muslim youth on a Buddhist Monk few days earlier. Others have reported that the Buddhist Monk in question was not attacked, but there was an incident involving Muslim youth and a Sinhalese – Buddhist driver of a Buddhist Monk. Three Muslim youth have been arrested for this incident. However, the Police and government institutions have been accused of inaction by those affected by the riots and the violence and eyewitnesses.

An opposition Parliamentarian and several journalists who went to cover the communal violence were attacked and threatened. A leading Sri Lankan journalist and a prominent citizen journalist website were accused of being “twitter/social media murderers” by the editor of a leading state controlled newspaper. This was after they exposed facts about the communal violence, in the absence of independent coverage in mainstream newspapers. The Defence Ministry was accused by the Leader of the Opposition of attempting to censor media institutions.

A training workshop for Tamil journalists organized by a leading Sri Lankan NGO had to be cancelled for the second time due to protests by an unknown group and refusal of the Police to provide protection. Participating journalists were evacuated and housed in a leading Colombo hotel for safety, only to be driven out of the hotel rooms in the middle of the night by the hotel management following alleged threats by a “powerful” group. Media reports appeared about proposals by the Ministry of External Affairs to control events organized by NGOs, by demanding detailed information in advance and controlling visas for foreign visitors through the Ministry of Defence and other governmental authorities. The Military and Police also tried to stifle a protest by Tamil politicians and Families of Disappeared persons in the North.

Academics critical of the government received death threats. Repression of University students continued, with arrests, protests attacked and student activists being called lunatics, fools and foxes by the Minister of Higher Education in a speech publicized by mainstream TV in Sri Lanka. Even teachers and parents agitating about conditions in a school in Colombo were attacked. A

report from “Students for Human Rights” claimed that a Magistrate has recommended to break necks of student activists while another Magistrate had advised female student activists to refrain from political activism.

Police protection was suddenly withdrawn for a Buddhist Monk who had been subjected to several attacks, threats and intimidation, and he was later found on roadside with injuries. The Police later arrested the Monk and accused him of having staged the abduction and inflicted the injuries on himself.

Overall, June was another month where minorities and those critical of the government faced numerous attacks and threats with impunity.

A. Violations of Freedom of Expression

1. Government imposes unofficial censorship

Leader of the opposition, Mr. Ranil Wicramasinghe had stated that a censoring letter had been sent to every media organization following the Aluthgama and Beruwala communal violence which took place on 15 and 16th of June. The letter had allegedly instructed the media organizations to do as told or suffer the consequences such as legal action and the revoking of licenses to electronic media, Mr. Wicramasinghe stated¹.



Despite a military imposed curfew in the town of Aluthgama, crowds supporting the Bodu Bala Sena continued to line the streets accusing the armed forces of protecting Muslims (photo: Dinouk Colombage/ Al Jazeera)

2. Attempts to suppress social media

The Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL) accused the government of planning to bring in special legislation to suppress social media networks. Chairman of the Standing Committee on Rule of Law of the BASL and Convenor for Lawyers for Democracy, Lal Wijenayake, referring to the directive by Secretary of the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, to law enforcement authorities to enact the law against those allegedly attempting to incite racial and religious disharmony through verbal and written expressions, said the directive could become a thinly veiled effort to stop people from receiving information through social media. According to Mr. Wijenayaka without defining hate-speech, moves to bring anti-hate speech laws was pointless.²

¹ <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/video-govt-imposed-unofficial-censorship-to-cover-up-its-sins-ranil> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

² <http://www.ceylontoday.lk/51-67271-news-detail-laws-to-suppress-social-media-planned-basl-alleges.html> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

3. “Arrest Twitter murderers Groundviews, Colombage etc” – State media

In a series of Twitter rants, the state-owned English daily newspaper's (Daily News) editor, Mr. Rajpal Abeynayake, accused Al Jazeera's Colombo stringer, Mr. Dinouk Colombage, of inciting religious tensions by reporting on Buddhist-Muslim clashes in southwest Aluthgama in which four people died and about 80 more were injured. He accused Colombage, an experienced Sri Lankan reporter who writes a Huffington Post column, of exaggerating the toll and being a “social media murderer”. “Arrest Twitter murderers Groundviews³, Colombage etc,” Abeynayake demanded in one tweet. Several of the tweets were copied to President Mahinda Rajapakse's official twitter account and that of his son, who is also a Member of Parliament from the ruling party⁴

4. Journalist threatened while covering communal violence & driver assaulted

Journalist, Mr. Binoy Suriarachi of the Sunday Leader English weekend newspaper was threatened and his driver was assaulted by a violent mob in Aluthgama on 16th June. He had gone to Aluthgama with two other journalists to cover the communal violence that has erupted in the area on 15th June. On their way, they were surrounded by a violent mob with poles in their hands. Mr. Suriarachi was held hostage by the group for some time before his colleagues managed to negotiate his release. The driver was hospitalised⁵. One of Mr. Suriarachi's colleagues and the driver had lodged a complaint with the Cinnamon Garden Police in Colombo on the same day, but had not heard of any progress as of 11th July.

5. Journalist covering communal violence threatened with death and sustains seriously injuries in attack

“I thought I was going to die that night”, Mr. Sarath Siriwardana, a journalist attached to Sunday Times (English) / Lankadeepa (Sinhalese) newspapers said, after he had gone to cover communal violence in Aluthgama on 15th June⁶. According to him, “about hundred people, both Sinhala and Muslim, surrounded me and attacked me, they took my camera and smashed it on the floor. I took pictures of members of both communities being violent and suddenly they turned on me,” he recounted. “I suddenly felt a severe blow to my head, and a few others started hitting me from behind. I collapsed and they kept hitting me. They tore my clothes off and kept beating me from all sides. They kept saying that I should be killed.” Hearing gunshots from a distance, the mob dispersed. Siriwardana had crawled into a nearby garden, where he hid until the mobs passed, and then sought treatment in hospital.

³ An online citizen journalism website that regularly publishes contents critical of the present government. (<http://groundviews.org/>)

⁴ <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/sri-lanka-call-to-arrest-reporter/story-e6frg6so-1226965565934?nk=886e7a60410784c6ae132b150b70b3d8> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

⁵ <http://colombogazette.com/2014/06/16/journalist-held-hostage-and-released> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

⁶ <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/140622/news/need-for-calm-say-both-sides-104377.html> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

6. BBC Sandeshaya (Sinhalese service) reporter, Al Jazeera crew and local TV crew attacked

On 15th June, a local reporter working for the BBC Sandeshaya was pushed by a mob and threatened not to cover the communal violence. On 16th June, a crew from a local TV station was obstructed as they were travelling to the area and were almost assaulted. They escaped without injuries, but a camera was damaged.⁷ Mobs had also attacked a media team from the Al Jazeera network travelling in Mathugama and Aluthgama on 17th June, manhandling their cameramen and causing damage to their vehicle⁸.

7. Journalists training workshop cancelled



Member of the mob that invaded TISL media training in Negambo shouting at the journalists while a senior police officer stands in front to protect the mob (Photo: TISL)

A training workshop for Tamil journalists by the Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL) at the Gold Sands Hotel, Negombo (Western Province) was disrupted by an organized group of protesters who had arrived outside the premise on 7th June. The protesters had accused the TISL of supporting terrorists and claimed that the workshop was to train people to give evidence against Sri Lanka in an international investigation. Despite the emphasis by TISL representatives that this workshop is legal and not something against the country, the police had not taken any action to disperse the protestors and instead ordered to stop the workshop.

⁷ <http://www.ft.lk/2014/06/18/death-toll-rises-to-4-from-aluthgama-riots/> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

⁸ Watch video from 0.58 – 1.20 mins <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2014/06/sri-lanka-riots-prompt-international-concern-201461752248175495.html> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

Superintendent of Police J.K.H. Liyanage who had arrived at place had told TISL that police protection could be provided only if the workshop was stopped & participants left Negombo. TISL had noted that the journalists who took part in the workshop were registered with and accredited by the Ministry of Mass Media and Information and if the journalists were Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) agents as claimed by protesters, the Ministry of Mass Media and Information should then take responsibility for it. TISL stressed that these journalists were labelled as LTTE agents because they are Tamils and they work in the Tamil language. Earlier when TISL organised the same workshop in Polonnaruwa (North Western Province) in May, it had to be abandoned due to military intimidation. However, similar workshops organized for Sinhalese journalists were allowed to proceed. TISL vehemently condemned the disruption of the workshop for the second time and urged the government to take stern action against those who were responsible⁹.

8. Holcim bans journalists from its press conference

A Press Conference convened by Holcim Lanka last week, where Holcim's Group Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Bernard Fontana addressed journalists in Colombo was barred to journalists from Sunday Leader (English weekend paper) and its sister Sinhala language weekend paper Irudina. The Sunday Leader had carried a few articles in the recent past that were critical of the management of Holcim Lanka, a subsidiary of Swiss-based cement giant Holcim. According to the Sunday Leader, Holcim had decided not to invite journalists who would ask 'difficult questions' from its Group CEO Bernard Fontana. The Communications Manager of Holcim Lanka had admitted that the press conference was only open to 'selected members' of media¹⁰.

9. Tamil Journalists forced out of Colombo hotel in the middle of the night

Due to the disruption of the TISL workshop in Negombo on 7th June (see above), the TISL had taken the participating journalists to the Galadari Hotel, which they considered to be located in a highly secured area in Colombo. But about an hour after they had checked in to their rooms, the hotel management had asked the participants to leave the hotel immediately. When TISL had inquired from the hotel management, they had been told that a powerful organization had forced them to remove the journalists from the hotel, threatening that if they didn't comply, "they" would personally come and remove the journalists from the premises¹¹.

10. State media censors article on political undercurrents of Bertolt Brecht's stage plays

The state run Sinhalese weekend newspaper, 'Silumina' was reported to have withheld its 'Shasthreeya Athirekeya' (Literary supplement) of 15th June, over an article on strong political

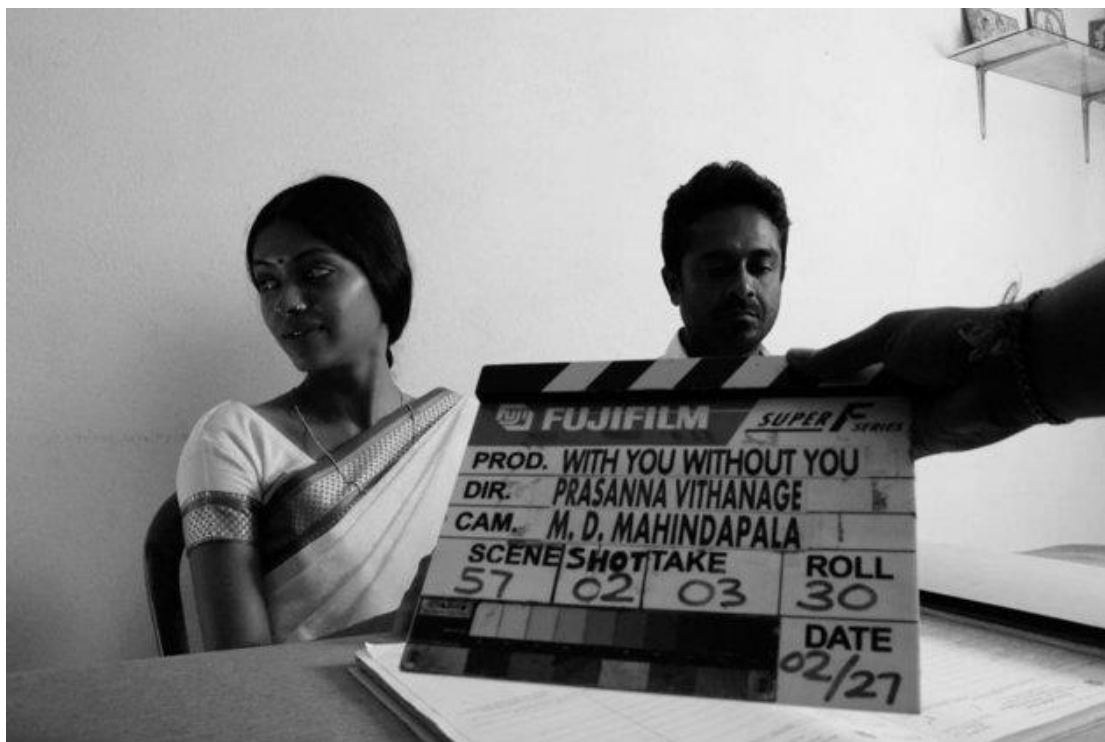
⁹ <http://www.tisrilanka.org/?p=11979> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

¹⁰ <http://www.asianmirror.lk/news/item/1563-holcim-bars-sunday-leader-swiss-giant-blatantly-violates-media-freedom> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

¹¹ <http://www.tisrilanka.org/?p=11979> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

undercurrents of Bertolt Brecht's stage plays. The article, which was to have been published as the cover story of the 'Shaasthriya Athirekaya', discusses as to how Bertolt Brecht's plays are of relevance to societies whose political bodies are characterized with hypocrisy, suppression and corruption. However, the article has not made any direct reference to the government of Sri Lanka. Instead, it had analysed the political realities of Sri Lanka in a much larger context, portraying it as a systematic breakdown of the entire 'system'¹².

11. Film on Post-War Sri Lanka threatened by Tamil nationalists in India



Banned in Tamil Nadu: With You, Without You (Photo credit Prasanna Vithanage)

A Sri Lankan movie about the post-war situation was taken off screens in Tamil Nadu, India, after cinemas running the film allegedly received threatening calls from pro-Tamil nationalist groups¹³. The producers of the movie, 'With You, Without You', an Indo-Sri Lankan collaboration directed by noted Sri Lankan filmmaker Prasanna Vithanage, had written to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister seeking her intervention to put the movie back on the screens. "The film is a sensitive portrayal of post-war Sri Lanka and the consequences of denial of justice to the Tamil population. Instead of supporting the widest possible exhibition of this film in India, we are today witnessing the opposite and all because some stray people have decided without seeing the film that it is inimical to Tamil interest," the letter is reported to have read, seeking police protection for the film's screening. Mr. Rahul Roy, one of the producers, is reported to have told that the film was released in two cinemas in Chennai on June 20 and on the next day,

¹² <http://www.asianmirror.lk/news/item/1550-silumina-bans-bertolt-brecht-for-damaging-government-propaganda> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

¹³ <http://dbsieyraj.com/dbsj/archives/31048> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

the exhibitors received threatening calls from groups, and that the matter was taken to the local police but there was no support. Shiladitya Bhora of PVR Cinemas was reported to have tweeted that the shows were being discontinued due to threats from local Tamil associations, but sources close to the other movie hall was reported to have said shows were cancelled “voluntarily” due to lack of patronage. Police reported that they had not received any formal complaint.

B. Violations of Freedom of Assembly

12. New visa regulations for foreign invitees for NGO events

A memorandum was reported to have been presented to the Cabinet of Ministers by the Ministry of External Affairs, which includes proposals for new regulations with regards to providing visa for foreign invitees of events organized by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). According to the memorandum, the NGO Secretariat of the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development and the Registrar of Companies will be tasked “with clearing NGO requests on hosting events and arranging necessary visas for the participants.” Further, the NGOs will have to provide the certificate of registration and details of funding sources as well as an outline of the subjects to be discussed, objectives and list of participants to support the visa applications of foreign invitees¹⁴.

13. Military tries to Prevent Families of Disappeared Tamils from attending a protest & Arrests a Tamil Provincial Councillor

Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and Tamil National People’s Front (TNPf) politicians had held a joint protest in front of the Mullaitheevu District Secretariat in the Northern Province, on 5th June, demanding legal hearings into habeas corpus petitions from the families and relatives of persons, who are reported as missing after the families had handed them over to the Sri Lankan military during the final days of the last phase of the war. The Sri Lankan military in Mullaitheevu is reported to have tried to prevent the family members of the missing persons from attending the protest¹⁵. Media had also reported that a member of the Northern Provincial Council from the TNA was arrested on Contempt of Court charges, although he was subsequently released after the venue of the protest was shifted.

¹⁴ <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/140629/columns/five-star-wonder-of-asia-dream-or-nightmare-105246.html> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

¹⁵ <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37247> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

C. Threats to take action against those giving Evidence to UN Investigation

14. Threats to take Action against those giving Evidence to UN Investigation

Media reported that the government has threatened to take “appropriate action against those who give evidence against it at a future war crimes probe, based on the evidence the adversaries give”¹⁶. The daily English newspaper, “Ceylon Today” reported the Government Spokesman and Media Minister Keheliya Rambukwella as saying “This is a serious situation and we are watching it closely. We shall take appropriate action based on the evidence the detractors give”. The Minister was also reported to have told that the government was aware of the Tamil Diaspora and others, both overseas and in Sri Lanka, including the main Tamil party, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), going all out to discredit the government.

D. Death Threats to Academics, Attacks on Agitating Teachers & Parents

15. Death threats to Dr. Nirmal Ranjith Devasiri

Former President of Federation of University Teachers’ Associations (FUTA) Dr. Nirmal Ranjith Devasiri was reported to have logged a complaint to Maharagama Police (in the Western Province) regarding death threats he has received since the 16th June. Dr. Devasiri’s wife too has been threatened and a telephone call received on 17th June morning has threatened that his daughter would be subjected to an acid attack¹⁷. Dr. Dewasiri has been a consistent public critique of the government for several years.

16. Death threats to academics of University of Ruhuna

President of the Federation of University Teachers’ Associations (FUTA) at a media briefing in Colombo on 6th June 2014 charged the government was behind death threats received by lecturers of the University of Ruhuna, situated in the Southern Province¹⁸. They were allegedly threatened after their condemnation of an attack on students of the university. Lecturer Dr. Upul Abeyratne, who too had been threatened, told the media that the Police gave cover for the thugs who had carried out the attack on students¹⁹.

¹⁶ <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/30626> (Last accessed on 15th July 2014)

¹⁷ http://www.lankatruth.com/home/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7119:death-threats-to-dr-nirmal-ranjith-devasiri-&catid=42:smartphones&Itemid=74 (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

¹⁸ <https://www.srilankamirror.com/news/15324-death-threats-to-ruhuna-university-lecturers> and <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/140608/news/ruhuna-uni-undergrads-to-continue-agitating-for-reopening-of-their-campus-102887.html> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

¹⁹ <https://www.srilankamirror.com/news/15324-death-threats-to-ruhuna-university-lecturers> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)



Mobs supported by the ruling party politicians gathered at the gates of University of Ruhuna threatening students and lectures (Photo: BBC Sandeshaya)

17. Agitating Teachers & Parents Attacked

The parents and teachers, who were agitating against the political interference in Ashoka College, Colombo were reported to have been attacked by an unknown group of thugs on 5th June. A mother was admitted to Colombo General Hospital as result of the attack. Teachers and students were accusing the principal of destroying the school and its education. Commenting on the attack, Mr. Joseph Stalin, the General Secretary of the Ceylon Teacher's Union stated that the government gives more priority to their henchmen rather the future of the students. The Chief Minister of the Western Province had been accused of orchestrating the attack²⁰.

E. Repression of Student Activists

18. Rajarata University Student's 'Sathyagraha' attacked

The 'Sathyagraha' (protest) campaign carried out by students of University of Rajarata situated in the North Western Province, demanding authorities to remove the unjustifiable suspension of 27 students, were attacked by an unknown group of thugs on 18th June²¹ and again on 29th June²². The attackers set fire to the temporary hut students were using for the 'Sathyagraha' in

²⁰ http://www.lankaviews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11677:minister-prasanna-attacks-parents&catid=35:local&Itemid=48 (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

²¹ http://www.lankatruth.com/home/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7125:thugs-attack-students-sathyagraha-&catid=42:smartphones&Itemid=74 (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

²² http://www.lankaviews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11694:sathyagraha-of-rajarata-students-attacked-by-%20thugs&catid=35:local&Itemid=48 (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

the early hours of the morning. One student was injured in the incident. According to “Students for Human Rights”, no action has been taken by the police despite complaints being made.



The burned hut of student activists (Photo: Lanka Truth)

19. Student Leaders Arrested

Former Convener of the Inter University Students Federation (IUSF), Mr. Sanjeewa Bandara and three other student activists were arrested by the Kandy Police on 23rd June according to the present Convener of the IUSF²³. They were produced before the Kandy Magistrate and while Mr. Bandara was remanded till 23rd July, others were released on bail. A student activist told INFORM that the student leaders were arrested after the University security personnel had made a false complaint against them. Mr. Bandara had later been charged for breaking a previous bail condition of entering University premises. Mr. Bandara is a strong advocate of free education rights in Sri Lanka and has faced threats and been arrested several times in the past.

20. Attack on Students of Ruhuna University for Protesting against Government Exhibition

The Standing Committee of the Bar Association of Sri Lanka has condemned the attack on the students by a mob led by Deputy Minister Sanath Jayasuriya, while Police watched by²⁴. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP, a political party) had also condemned the attack, producing photographs of Mr. Jayasuriya and government politicians involved in the attack²⁵. This attack on 2nd June was allegedly due to the students protesting against “Deyata Kirula”, an annual

²³ Based on information provided by Student Activists provided to INFORM. See also <http://www.dailymirror.lk/news/48838-bandaras-arrest-part-of-witch-hunt-iusf.html> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

²⁴ <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/bar-association-condemns-police-inaction-during-ruhuna-university-attack/> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

²⁵ <http://www.srilankanews.lk/index.php/news/general-news/3538-master-blaster-blasts-students-jvp> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

exhibition organized by the government being held in the Ruhuna University compound²⁶. The Deputy Minister has rejected the allegations of attacking students, but had admitted to being part of a group of residents who had protested against the students²⁷.

21. Disciplinary Inquiry against Student Activist and Ban on Entering University

On 26th June, Ms. Shayamali Liyanaarachchi, a leading female student activist was called for a disciplinary inquiry and banned from entering university premises till the inquiry proceedings were finished²⁸. She was accused of instigating unrest amongst female students, after a successful all female student action in the University of Kelaniya managed to win a new hostel building for the female students who were previously compelled to live in very bad conditions, sometimes more than 25 students in one room. Ms. Shayamali and two other female students had been arrested for taking part in a student demonstration violating a court order banning it²⁹. During the proceedings in courts, Ms. Shayamali had been warned by the Mahara Magistrate against taking part in political activities in the future, considering the fact that she is a girl. She was also falsely accused of carrying a pole around the hostels in order to intimidate the female students.

22. Magistrate recommends to Break Necks of Student Activists

On the 16th of June, Fort (Colombo) Magistrate Thilina Gamage had stated in the court that two students who appeared in courts after being charged for obstructing the Police should have had their necks broken³⁰. The two students had appeared in courts in relation to a case where student activists had been arrested and beaten by the Police, with one student suffering serious eye injury.

23. Suspension of a Student Activist

Mr. C.M. Amararathne a final year student of the Faculty of Applied Science at the University of Rajarata (in North Central Province) was suspended on 5th June for allegedly disrupting the duty of Security Officers³¹. According to the suspended student, he had asked Security Officers why they were not able to provide security when a group of students had requested for protection after being assaulted by a group of villagers. He claims the letter informing him about

²⁶ <http://www.srilankanews.lk/index.php/news/general-news/3538-master-blaster-blasts-students-jvp> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

²⁷ <http://www.samachar.com/Jayasuriya-accused-of-attacking-students-ogfmMTagfcd.html> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

²⁸ "Monthly update on repression of students in Sri Lanka" – June edition, by "Students for Human Rights"

²⁹ "Monthly update on repression of students in Sri Lanka" – June edition, by "Students for Human Rights"

³⁰ "Monthly update on repression of students in Sri Lanka" – June edition, by "Students for Human Rights"

³¹ "Monthly update on repression of students in Sri Lanka" – June edition, by "Students for Human Rights"

the disciplinary inquiry came to him 4 months after the incident, and that the letter did not have specific charges against him. It was only during the inquiry that he was informed that the inquiry is for an incident that happened 4 months earlier. Although he explained his story, the student was suspended from taking lectures and exams for six months, in the last semester of his academic career. "Students for Human Rights" claims that the suspension procedure has not even followed the proper procedure with regards to holding a disciplinary action against a university student.

24. Discrediting Student Activists

The Minister for Higher Education had called student activists as fools, lunatics and foxes³² and that he will not discuss and respond to anything raised by them, and that he will only respond to students, not foxes. President of the Federation of University Teachers Associations (FUTA), Dr. Chandragupta Thenuwara told media that they strongly protest this speech by the Minister for Higher Education³³.

F. Threats and Attacks on a HRD promoting Religious Freedom

25. Withdrawal of Police protection and alleged attack on Ven. Watarekke Vijitha Thero

Ven. Vijitha Thero has been actively promoting religious freedom, especially of minority religious groups in Sri Lanka, and since 2013, has been critical of the views and activities of the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS – Buddhist Power Force). He has been attacked and injured, received death threats, been discredited, obstructed from attending meetings and a press conference he organised was disrupted and had to be cancelled in front of Police offices. Evidence has pointed towards the BBS for all these³⁴. After repeated complaints and appeals to the political leaders including the President and the Police, including the Inspector General of Police, he had been provided Police protection. But Police protection was withdrawn without notice and explanation on 7th June. On 9th June, when the case related to the disruption of the press conference was taken up at Fort (Colombo) Magistrate's courts, the BBS leader Ven. Gnasara Thero had said "where's this dog? I could have killed him and gone inside (prison) on that day". He (BBS leader) had also called the lawyer appearing for Vijitha Thero a dog³⁵. On

³² Original speech in Sinhalese is available at <http://www.col4neg.net/newspage/sirasa-news-1st/sirasa-news-1st-7pm-05-06-2014.html> (minutes 17.56 to 18.13 of the news broadcast) while the English translation (text and video) which is slight edited, is at <http://newsfirst.lk/english/2014/06/allied-health-science-students-issue-will-provide-answers-foxes-s-b-dissanayake/38708> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

³³ <https://www.srilankamirror.com/news/15324-death-threats-to-ruhuna-university-lecturers> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

³⁴ See <http://groundviews.org/2014/06/20/did-the-bbs-attack-vijitha-thero-again/> and <http://groundviews.org/2013/10/09/buddhist-monk-attacked-by-bodu-bala-sena-and-police-inaction/> (Last accessed on 13th July 2014)

³⁵ <http://www.dailymirror.lk/news/48186-counsel-says-vengnanasara-thera-insulted-him.html> and <http://www.srilankanews.lk/index.php/news/general-news/3585-bbs-insulted-me-lawyer-complaints-> (Last accessed on 12th July 2014)

the morning of 19th June, Vijitha Thero was found on the roadside, stripped naked, hands and feet tied with his own robes, with serious injuries. After he was hospitalized, he was not allowed to meet friends and even lawyers freely, with Police officers being present at his bedside and monitoring all visitors and conversations. Police later claimed that Vijitha Thero had admitted to having made a false complaint about the latest incident, and that the injuries were self-inflicted³⁶. Police also claimed that they had other evidence and testimonies to this effect and arrested Vijitha Thero as soon as he was released from hospital. The Panadura Magistrate twice refused bail for him, even though the alleged offence was an offense that provided for bail. He was finally released on bail on 10th July. Vijitha Thero had since then spoke to the media indicating that he was actually abducted and beaten³⁷.



Vijitha Thero: abducted and assaulted? (Photo: Neth FM)

³⁶ <http://newsfirst.lk/english/2014/06/venerable-watareka-vijitha-thero-abducted-police-media-spokesperson/41185> (Last accessed on 13th July 2014)

³⁷ <http://groundviews.org/2014/06/26/ven-wataraka-theros-last-statement-before-his-arrest-with-english-subtitles/> (Last accessed on 13th July 2014)

G. Attack on an Opposition Parliamentarian helping victims of communal violence

26. Opposition Parliamentarian Mr. Palitha Thewarapperuma injured and vehicle destroyed

Mr. Palitha Thewarapperuma, an Opposition (United National Party – UNP) Member of Parliament has complained that he was assaulted by a mob on 16th June in Dharga town (near Aluthgama)³⁸. The MP had reported that this was during the curfew and that his vehicle has been destroyed, while the Police and the Special Task Force (STF – an elite Commando unit of the Police) was watching. The MP had told media he was visiting Dharga Town to check on the helpless people in the area when he saw a group in possession of swords and batons attempting to kill a group of women and small children. In order to save them he has got down from the vehicle and got them inside it, after which he himself was assaulted. He had suffered injuries and his vehicle was destroyed.

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<http://www.lankasrinews.com/view.php?22qKH303dOK4e2HqGcb2a1Jdd3175bc3qD8e43Vf20235Co3>,
<http://www.dailymirror.lk/opinion/172-opinion/49654-unfortunate-riots-were-not-by-chance.html> and
<http://lankaenews.com/English/news.php?id=14285> (Last accessed on 15th July 2014)