

Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka

February 2022



Police obstructing the protest of Ceylon Worker's Red Flag Union. Photo Courtesy: Lankadeepa

INFORM

Human Rights Documentation Centre

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Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka in February 2022.

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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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1. Methodology

This report provides some general trends and details some significant incidents related to the repression of dissent in Sri Lanka from 1st February to 28th February 2022. This is mainly based on the information reported in mainstream and social media. Incidents of repression mentioned in this report include both actual threats such as arrests, investigations of Human rights defenders (HRDs) etc. and potential threats such as new repressive laws which may have a negative impact on freedoms and security of HRDs in the future.

In this report, “dissent” is broadly defined to include acts of protest, resistance, defiance, challenge against, or attempt to record rights violations, social injustice at the hands of state or non-state apparatus, including police, armed forces, religious groups, and politicians among others. “Repression” is defined as any attempt by the above state or non-state actors to suppress the above acts of dissent. Any rhetoric decrying human rights has also been considered as repression of dissent because of its potential to erode rights.

The Executive Summary describes the context of these trends and analyses the incidents and some common findings regarding state and other related parties’ conduct. INFORM maintains a running roster of incidents compiled from media reports, social media, incidents reported to INFORM, and the observations and experience of INFORM staff.

2. Executive Summary

Frequent power cuts, shortage in fuel and gas caused by Sri Lanka's economic crisis became further worse in the month of February. With high foreign debt, low foreign reserves and the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and financial mismanagement of the authorities led to Sri Lanka's financial crisis. Several high profile politicians including government Ministers were acquitted from corruption cases. The 49th UNHCR Session of the Human Rights Council began on 28th February. A report issued by the OHCHR in February expressed deep concern over a number of violations in the country. While the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) amendment was recognized as an important step, the report also pointed out that the changes are inadequate as the most problematic provisions of the Act have been left intact.

Arrested journalist Keerthi Rathnayake was released on bail. He was arrested in August 2021. Hearing of the case of a disappeared journalist in 2010 was postponed until April 2022. Human Rights lawyer Hejaaz Hisbullah was granted bail after 20 months of detention under PTA. The suspects who were handed over for attacking the JVP leader with eggs were reported to be missing in Police custody. Media rights activist and senior journalist made a complaint for the second time about the threats he has been facing, as the Police had conducted no investigation since his complaint in December 2021.

Repression of Media and Journalists: Punniyamurthi Sasikaran, a journalist based in Batticaloa was issued a court order banning him from reporting a protest on independence day that he was not even aware of. Batticaloa based journalist and media rights activist Selvakumar Nilanthan was interrogated by the CID of Sri Lanka Police. Journalist Chamuditha Samarawickrama's residence was subjected to a stone and excrement attack. Tamil journalist Lakshaman Devapatheeran working for IBC Tamil website was assaulted by political supporters led by a State Minister.

Repression of Freedom of Assembly: Minister Tissa Kuttiarachchi made a controversial statement claiming that people should assault the trade union activists. Police raided an NGO in Kilinochchi named District office Fisheries Solidarity (DIFSO), when they were planning a protest. The President declared Electricity and Health services as essential services. Declaration as essential services has been historically used as a measure to prevent and restrict trade union actions. Court issued two enjoining orders against the nursing trade union and its President just before a trade union action that they were planning. An activist TID of Sri Lanka Police to get details of the participants who attended a remembrance event held on 18th May last year. A quarry company employees organised a counter protest against a protest organized by villagers on environmental destruction caused by the granite cutting in the area. Police dispersed a protest conducted by the Ceylon Workers' Red Flag Union in Kandy.

Repression of Civil Society: Shehan Malaka Gamage activist who raised his voice for justice to Easter Sunday Bomb attack was arrested by CID of Police. The president of Right to life of Organisation (Tamil Thesiya Valvurimailayakkam) V S Sivakaran residing in Mannar, was summoned to TID head office in Colombo and interrogated for 5 hours. Activist Manorama Weearsinghe was also summoned by the CID, without mentioning why he was summoned. Unidentified persons have searched personal details of secretary of Committee to Protect Rights of Prisoners (CPRP) Sudesh Nandimal. Police offices from TID have visited several non governmental organizations and requested them to provide details of the staff and funders.

Other incidents: Military officers in civil clothes visited the residence of poet Ahnaf Jazeem who had been previously arrested under Prevention of Terrorism (PTA) and currently granted bail. Land commissioner Keerthi Gamage stated that a powerful politician in Hambantota district has been attempting to sack him from his position. The Prime Minister and ruling government ministers have discussed the importance in taking actions against company chairpersons at government owned Litro Gas company and the Public Utilities Commission of Sri Lanka (PUCSL) for criticising the government at media interviews and press briefings. Gazettes calling on the armed forces to maintain public order were reissued in February, providing the military with additional powers to intervene in civilian affairs. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) has summoned Kumara Joseph, a civilian over a facebook comment made on a facebook post by Rev. Fr. Cyrill Gamini. Despite the comment not including any hateful ideas, he was questioned over 5 hours. a group of unidentified persons who identified themselves as state intelligence had attempted to abduct Nishanthan, the Youth Wing Assistant Secretary of the political party - Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK), using a white van. Matale District MP, the Minister of Ports and Shipping Pramitha Bandara Tennakoon stated that the Trade Unions and other opposite political parties are sort of epidemic in Sri Lanka. The Minister of public Security Sarath Weerasekara's Son Sachithra Adheesha Weerasekara has posted a facebook post referring to the stone and excrement attack on the veteran journalist Chamuditha Samarawickrama's residence. Sri Lanka Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement claiming that the testimony given by the former Human Rights Commissioner and current Chairperson of the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust Ambika Satkunanathan at the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights on 27 January, 2022 was misleading one.

3. Context

Frequent power cuts, shortage in fuel and gas caused by Sri Lanka's economic crisis became further worse in the month of February. With high foreign debt, low foreign reserves and the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and financial mismanagement of the authorities led to Sri Lanka's financial crisis. At the same time, international attention on Sri Lanka's human rights situation was received as the 49th session of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) started on 28th February, though the significance was a bit diminished in the face of the Ukraine-Russian Conflict.

Acquittal from corruption cases: Colombo High Court and Kaduwela Magistrate Court ordered the President's brother and current Minister of Finance to be acquitted from the case of misappropriation of funds of the Divineguma project in 2015, after the Attorney General withdrew the charges. Minister Rajapaksa, officials Nimal Jayatilake, Amith Kitsiri and Bandula Tilakasiri had been named the respondents in the case accusing them of paying compensation and gratuity to Samurdhi recipients from the funds of the Divineguma community-based bank of the Divineguma Department where financial irregularities have allegedly occurred.^{1 2} In another case, the Colombo High court has acquitted Minister Basil Rajapaksha over the case of misappropriation of Divineguma funds for Printing Almanac. The Attorney General filed an indictment on 5th November 2021 against the Finance Minister and former Director-General of Divineguma Department Kithsiri Ranawaka for printing almanacs with the photo of the Mahinda Rajapaksha on 2015 election. The Attorney General has alleged that the Printing 5 million of almanacs including the current prime minister picture has incurred a loss Rs.29.4 million to the Divi Neguma Department. On 1st February 2022 Colombo high court judge Damith Thotawatte ordered the acquittal of the Finance minister Basil Rajapaksha and former Director general of Divi Neguma Department Kithsiri Ranawaka.³ Judge Damith Thotwatta ruled that the plaintiff had failed to prove the charges against the defendants beyond a reasonable doubt based on the evidence presented and that the defendants would be acquitted and released.⁴

Similarly in relation to another corruption case concerning current Agriculture Minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage and two others for allegedly causing a loss to the Government during Aluthgamage's tenure as a former Sports Minister, Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) informed the Court that the indictments had recently been amended by the Attorney General's (AG's) Department without the consent of the CIABOC.⁵ In another case, the minister of Health kehiiya Rambukwella, the former chairperson of the Rupavahini Corporation Wimalasena Rupasinghe and the former Director General of the Rupavahini Corporation Delwatta Liyanage Chandrapala were acquitted from

¹ <https://island.lk/basil-three-others-acquitted-in-divineguma-misappropriation-case/>

² https://www.dailymirror.lk/top_story/Basil-acquitted-released-from-almanac-case/155-230269#

³ [Basil acquitted, released from almanac case.](#)

⁴ [Basil was acquitted in 'almanac' case.](#)

⁵ <https://www.themorning.lk/can-the-ciaboc-not-take-an-independent-decision-colombo-high-court/>

the bribery case of purchasing 600 GI pipes causing 990,000 Rupees loss to the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation.^{6 7} Recently a number of corruption cases against ruling politicians were withdrawn by the AG or Commissions citing technical reasons, resulting in the acquittal of the suspects.

Other acquittals of politically exposed persons: On 15th February 2022 Former Uva Province Chief Minister was acquitted from the case of forcibly kneeling down a Principal of Badulla Tamil Girls Maha Vidyalaya in January 2018.⁸ Magistrate made the order in pursuance of the settlement arrived at the Conciliation Board with the consensus of the parties to the case.⁹ Former Inspector General of Police (IGP) Pujitha Jayasundra and former defence secretary Hemasiri Fernando were acquitted from the case of alleged criminal negligence of not preventing Easter Sunday Bomb attack despite of having received the prior information.¹⁰ The verdict was delivered by a three-judge Colombo High Court Trial-at-Bar, who thoroughly advised the Attorney General for pressing criminal charges against the individuals without having proper evidence.¹¹

UNHCR session: The 49th UNHCR Session of the Human Rights Council began on 28th February.¹² A report issued by the OHCHR in February expressed deep concern over a number of violations in the country including setbacks to accountability, the pattern of surveillance and harassment by security forces of civil society organizations, human rights defenders, journalists and victims. While the PTA amendment was recognized as an important step, the report also pointed out that the changes are inadequate as the most problematic provisions of the Act have been left intact.¹³

Release of PTA Prisoners: A PTA detainee was released after 12 years of custody. Khandappu Rajasekar from jaffna was arrested under prevention of Terrorism Act on 19th October 2010. He was acquitted from all charges on 15th February 2022. He had remained in custody for over 12 years.¹⁴

⁶ [බට නඩුවෙන් කෙහෙළිය නිදහස්.](#)

⁷ [Minister Keheliya Rambukwella acquitted from GI Pipe case.](#)

⁸ [Death threats to Principal of Tamil Girls' MV, Badulla.](#)

⁹ [Former Uva Province Chief Minister acquitted.](#)

¹⁰ [AG directs acting IGP to arrest and produce Pujith and Hemasiri.](#)

¹¹ [Easter Sunday carnage case: Hemasiri, Pujith acquitted and released](#)

¹² <https://www.dailynews.lk/2022/02/28/local/273618/unhrc-sessions-begin-geneva-today>

¹³ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/02/1112782>

¹⁴ [Tamil political prisoner acquitted after 12 years of Sri Lankan detention.](#)

4. Case Updates

Arrested journalist Keerthi Rathnayake Bailed out.

On the 9th February 2022 the Lanka E news Journalist Keerthi Rathnayake was bailed out by the Fort magistrate court. He was arrested in August 2021 under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) following him providing information to the Indian High Commission about a possible terrorist attack. The Magistrate had requested for the Attorney General's observations, who said that there were no grounds to proceed with the case. Counsel for Rathnayake, attorney at law Upali Kumarapperuma argued that there was no prima facie for the case to proceed.¹⁵

Disappeared journalist Prageeth Eknaligoda: Case postponed.

On 22nd of February 2022 Colombo High Court Trial at bar fixed the further hearing of the case of missing journalist Prageeth Eknaligoda on 29th April 2022.¹⁶ The journalist Eknaligoda was abducted in January 2010. The case has been filed against the Commandant of the Giritale Army Camp, Shammi Kumararatne and eight other army intelligence officers for forced abduction and disappearance of the journalist. The case was postponed as the prosecution informed the court that they were not prepared. The nine defendants who have been currently on bail, appeared at the court.¹⁷

Human Rights Lawyer Hejazz Hisbullah: Granted bail

The court of Appeal granted bail to the Human Rights Lawyer Hejazz Hisbulla after 20 months of detention under PTA for his alleged charge of aiding a suicide bomber of Easter Sunday Bomb attack, which the authorities later withdrew. After amending the charges against him several times, he was indicted with the accusation of "causing communal disharmony."¹⁸ His bail was previously denied by the Puttalam High Court on 20th January.¹⁹

Suspects of egg attack on NPP leader were missing in police custody

On 30th January 2022 Member of Parliament Anukamara Dissanayake was subjected to an egg attack and two suspects were handed over to the Nittambuwa police station. The two suspects were reported missing after Police had admitted them to the Watupitiwala hospital for medical treatment. The police have even not recorded a statement from the suspects. The Officer in Charge (OIC) of the Nittambuwa police stated that the suspects were transferred to another hospital and still they haven't received any complaint regarding the egg attack. But the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna Aththanagalla Pradeshiya Sabha Minister Hemal Mendis has stated that a complaint was made when the incident happened.²⁰

¹⁵ [Web journalist held under PTA granted bail](#)

¹⁶ [ප්‍රථික් එක්තැලිගොඩ නඩුව අප්‍රේල් 29 කැඳවීමට නියෝග.](#)

¹⁷ [Further hearing on 29 April.](#)

¹⁸ <https://imadr.org/srilanka-joint-statement-28072021/>

¹⁹ [HR lawyer Hejaaz Hizbullah granted bail after 20 months.](#)

²⁰ [පොලිස් භාරයේ සිටි අතුරුට බිත්තර ගැසූ දෙදෙනා අතුරුදන්: පොලිසියෙන් අපූරු උත්තරයක්.](#)

Death Threats to the journalist Lasantha Ruhunage. Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association (SLWJA) complains for the second time.

Committee member of SLWJA and the senior journalist of the *Anidda* newspaper Lasantha Ruhunage received constant death threats. Despite SLWJA has made a complaint on the matter to the Inspector General of the Police (IGP) on 24th December 2021, no investigation has been started, and he continues to receive death threats. Therefore they made a second complaint in February, 2022.²¹

²¹ [ජයෙෂ්ඨ මාධ්‍යවේදී ලසන්ත රුහුණගේට දිගින් දිගටම දුරකතන තර්ජන; පොලිසිය නිදි.](#)

5. Repression of Media and Journalists

Batticaloa Court bans a journalist from reporting the Independence Day protest.

Punniyamurthi Sasikaran, a journalist based in Batticaloa has been issued a restraining order by the Batticaloa Magistrate court preventing him from reporting a protest that the Police claimed to have organised against Sri Lanka's National Independence day on 4th February. Police claimed that they had received intelligence information on a 12 hour protest march being organized, however the journalists were not aware of such a protest.²² Last year Sasikaran was interrogated for allegedly involving in a protest for remembering indian fisher persons who died in the sea.



Sasikaran Independence day restraining order handed over by a Sri Lanka Police Officer. Photo Courtesy: Tamil Guardian

Batticaloa Journalist Selvakumar Nilanthan interrogated

On 9th February, Selvakumar Nilanthan, a media rights activist and a journalist based in Batticaloa was interrogated by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) attached to Eravur Police Station for two hours. Nilanthan is the Secretary of Batticaloa District Tamil journalists association and the Batticaloa press club.²³ Police Officers have visited his residence twice on 7th and 8th Feb asking him to be present at the interrogation. During the Interrogation, the officers questioned him whether he received funding from the Tamil Diaspora and whether he is a former LTTE rebel.²⁴ Previously Nilanthan was questioned for three hours and the Police have demanded his logging details for Social media accounts and bank accounts.²⁵

Journalist Chamuditha Samarawickrama's residence subjected to stone and excrement attack

Journalist Chamuditha Samarawickrama's residence was subjected to a stone attack and excrement attack around 2am in the early morning on 14th February.²⁶ The assailants had pointed a gun point to the security officer in the housing complex and launched the attack.²⁷

²² [Batticaloa police ban Tamil journalist from covering protest against Sri Lanka's Independence Day.](#)

²³ [Tweet by JDS](#)

²⁴ [Sri Lankan police harass, question journalists Selvakumar Nilanthan.](#) Published on 8 March 2022.

²⁵ [Sri Lankan anti-terror authorities interrogate journalist Selvakumar Nilanthan.](#) Published in 14 July 2021

²⁶ [White van assault on Journalist Chamuditha Samarawickrama's residence.](#)

²⁷ [House of journalist Chamuditha Samarawickrama attacked.](#)



Broken window of Veteran Journalist Chamuditha Samarawickrama's residence. Photo Courtesy: Lanka Gossip.com

IBC Tamil journalist assaulted by political supporters led by a State Minister

IBC Tamil Journalist Lakshaman Devapatheeran was subjected to a physical attack by a group of SLPP supporters led by State Minister S Viyalendiran, while Devapatheeran was covering the demolition of a bus station on 26th Feb 2022. When he was covering the incident, a group of SLPP supporters who arrived there approached him, threatened and assaulted him for attempting to video record the conversation.²⁸



Hospitalised Journalist Devapratheepan. Photo Courtesy: Tamil Guardian

²⁸ [Tamil journalist attacked by SLPP supporters in Batticaloa.](#)

6. Repression of Freedom of Assembly

Controversial statement on protestors made by a Minister:

Addressing a press conference, Minister Tissa Kuttirachchi stated that people should gather against trade unions and assault them with sticks. The press conference had been held at the ruling party SLPP office.²⁹

Police raids the office of an NGO in Kilinochchi:

Police have raided the office District Fisheries Solidarity Youth located in Kilinochchi. DIFSO has planned to organise a protest against the killings of two fishermen in Vadamarachchi, Jaffna.³⁰

President declares Electricity and Health services as essential services

Issuing a gazette notification on 11th of February, the President declared Electricity and health services as essential services. Declaration as essential services has been historically used as a measure to prevent and restrict trade union actions.³¹

Court issued two enjoining orders against GNOA and its President until 24th February

Based on a complaint made by the Attorney General on 11th February, Colombo District court has issued two enjoining orders against Government Nursing Officers Association (GNOA) and its president Saman Ratnapriya who organised a protest by health service employees.³² The Health Service employees of several trade unions including GNOA carried out the trade union action demanding to settle salary anomalies despite the court order that was issued.³³



Protest of the Health Service. Photo Courtesy: Sri Lanka Brief

²⁹ වැඩ වර්ජකයින්ට විරුද්ධව පොලීසි අත්වැරීම! – නිසිස කවිවිචාරවිචි.

³⁰ Sri Lanka: Police raids DIFSO Kilinochchi office while staff getting ready for a protest.

³¹ http://www.documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2022/2/2266-55_E.pdf

³² සෞඛ්‍ය සේවාවේ බියකරු මහජන ආරක්ෂා පනත යටතේ අත්‍යවශ්‍ය සේවාවක් කරයි; වර්ජනයට තහනම් නියෝගයක්.

³³ Sri Lankan health workers launch strike over pay disparities.

Activist summoned to the TID of Sri Lanka Police to get details of the participants who attended a remembrance event

On 18th February 2022, Counter Terrorism Division (TID) of Sri Lanka Police has sent an order to the former political prisoner Selvanayagam Aravindhan to provide details of the all the participants who have attended a commemoration held on 18th May to remember the Tamils lost during the last phase of war. The order had asked him to provide details to the TID office in Vavuniya before 22nd February 2022.³⁴

[illegible]

CTID letter to Selvanayagam Aravindh to appear in the Police. Photo Courtesy: Tamil Guardian.

³⁴ [Sri Lanka's counter-terrorism department orders Tamil man to provide details of May 18 commemoration.](#)

Quarry company employees protest against the villagers protest

Anamaduwa, Rabawawa villagers in Puttalam district protested against the environmental destruction caused by granite cutting, while employees of the granite company also launched a counter protest. The protest was held at Rambawava junction in Anamaduwa Chillaw main road. As the counter protest led to a heated situation, Anamaduwa police intervened to control the situation.³⁵

Police dispersed the Ceylon workers Red Flag Union protest in Kandy

Police dispersed the protest conducted by the Ceylon Workers' Red Flag Union in front of the labour department kandy. The Police claimed that the protest allegedly disturbed the Advanced level students examination. The protestors demanded a 1000 Rupees salary increment for the plantation workers that the plantation owners had promised at the wages board and signed a collective agreement with trade unions which they had withdrawn unilaterally.³⁶



Police obstructing the protest of Ceylon Worker's Red Flag Union. Photo Courtesy: Lankadeepa

³⁵ [කළුගල්වෙලේ විරෝධයෙන් ආණ්ඩුව රන් වෙයි.](#)

³⁶ [විභාග මධ්‍යස්ථානය ඉදිරිපිට විරෝධතාවට පොලිසියෙන් පොල්ලක්](#)

7. Repression of Civil Society

Activist Shehan Malaka Gamage Arrested

Shehan Malaka Gamage activist who raised his voice for justice to Easter Sunday Bomb attack was arrested by Criminal Investigation Department. Gamage was arrested at a street when he went to meet his fiancée in Panadura.³⁷ The police seized his mobile phone while he was on facebook live.³⁸ The Criminal Investigation Department said that Shehan was arrested on the advice of the Attorney General for his controversial statements about the Easter Sunday Attack. He was granted bail on 15th February.³⁹

The President of Right to Life Organization in Mannar summoned to Counter Terrorism Investigation Department of Police

The president of Right to life of Organisation (Tamil Thesiya Valvurimailakkam) V S Sivakaran residing in Mannar, was summoned to Terrorism Investigation Division's Head office in Colombo.⁴⁰ Terrorism Investigation Department has informed him to appear on 18th february 2022 at 9.00am Colombo Office. V S Sivakaran was the former head of Illankai Tamil Arasukachchi youth wing and he is a well known political activist in Mannar district. ⁴¹ On 18th February, he was interrogated for around 5 hours, and "they had files on me compiled by CID, army, navy & air force intelligence" he has stated.⁴²



VS Sivakaran at a press conference. Photo Courtesy: Tamil Guardian

³⁷ [Activist Shehan Malaka arrested in the street by CID](#)

³⁸ [Live ගිණේ නැත්නම් ඡේෂෙන් මාරක කොහෙද කියලා අද වෙනතුරුත් දන්නෙ නෑ" - කාදිනල් හිමිපාණන්.](#)

³⁹ [Activist Shehan Malaka arrested in the street by CID.](#)

⁴⁰ [Tweet](#)

⁴¹ [Sri Lanka's Terrorism Investigation Division summon Tamil activist again.](#)

⁴² <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1494665585925529600>

Criminal Investigation Department summoned the activist Manorama Weearsinghe

Social Activist Manorama Weearsinghe was summoned to appear at the Criminal Investigation Department on 17th February. The summoning letter vaguely stated that he had been summoned in relation to a statement he had made, but did not mention what was the statement and when it had been made.⁴³ On 17th of February, Weearsinghe sent a letter in response through his lawyers asking to inform why he had been summoned.⁴⁴

Unidentified persons have searched personal details of the Secretary of the CCRP

Unidentified persons have searched personal details of secretary of Committee to Protect Rights of Prisoners (CPRP) Sudesh Nandimal. These unidentified persons who claimed to be from security forces questioned people in his area asking Nandimal's personal details, and places he was visiting. However, nobody has visited to meet him directly. On 17th February, Nandimal complained to Tissamaharama Police Station against this surveillance, indicating it as a threat to his life.⁴⁵

TID of Police visited several NGOs to collect administration details.

Officials from Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) of Sri Lanka Police have visited several non governmental organizations and requested them to provide details of the staff and funders.⁴⁶

⁴³ [Another social activist receives CID summons](#)

⁴⁴ <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/02/17/cid-summons-another-social-media-activist/>

⁴⁵ [සිරකර ඇසිතින් සුරැකීමේ කමිටුවේ ලේකම් නන්දිමාලාට තර්ජන](#)

⁴⁶ [tweet](#)

8. Other incidents

Military Officers in Plainclothes visited Poet Ahnaf Jazeem's residence

On 12th February morning, officers in civil clothes claiming to be from the military visited the residence of poet Ahnaf Jazeem who had been previously arrested under Prevention of Terrorism (PTA) and currently granted bail. The officers have told Ahnaf that they have been monitoring him as they do with the other PTA suspects. Ahnaf's lawyer Jayasekera tweeted "this is a violation of Ahnaf's personal liberty and individual freedom and this is also contempt of court."⁴⁷



Poet Ahnaf Jazeem. Photo Courtesy: Tamil Guardian

The Land Commissioner received political pressure to be sacked.

Land commissioner Keerthi Gamage stated that a powerful politician in Hambantota district has been attempting to sack him from his position, for settling a land dispute in a fair manner against the wishes of the politician. He further said that the said politician had attempted to remove him from his position since 8th February 2022.⁴⁸

Prime Minister and Ruling government ministers had discussed taking actions against the companies and corporations criticising the government

The Prime Minister and ruling government ministers have discussed the importance in taking actions against company chairpersons at government owned Litro Gas company and the Public Utilities Commission of Sri Lanka (PUCSL) for criticising the government at media interviews

⁴⁷ <https://twitter.com/sanjayawilson/status/1492512215584632836>

⁴⁸ [Will not succumb to political pressure – Land Commissioner opts to resign.](#)

and press briefings. It was reported that some ministers requested the prime minister to stop the media interviews and press briefings conducted by relevant companies and commissions. In response, PM has stated that he would pay his attention to the matter.⁴⁹

Calling out armed forces

Gazettes calling on the armed forces to maintain public order were reissued in February, providing the military with additional powers to intervene in civilian affairs. Human rights defenders, families of victims, and survivors of violations fear that this may lead to more intimidation and surveillance of them, and restrictions on activities that may be perceived as dissent.

A civilian was summoned to the CID due to a facebook comment

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) has summoned Kumara Joseph, a civilian over a facebook comment made on a facebook post by Rev. Fr. Cyrill Gamini. Despite the comment not including any hateful ideas, he was questioned over 5 hours. He had been asked questions about his association with his Eminence Malcom Cardinal Ranjith, Fr. Rohan Silva, Fr. Julian Friedrich and Fr. Cyril Gamini the religious leaders advocating for justice for victims of the Easter Sunday attack.⁵⁰

Unidentified persons attempted to abduct ITAK youth wing assistant Nithanshan

On 18th February 2022, a group of unidentified persons who identified themselves as state intelligence had attempted to abduct Nishanthan, the Youth Wing Assistant Secretary of the political party - Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK), using a white van.⁵¹ Nishanthan said that since a white van had followed him in a suspicious manner, he had gone to the nearest checkpoint and logged a complaint. This incident has been reported by the ITAK Member of Parliament (MP) Shanakiyan Rasamanickam from his twitter account.⁵² Shanakiyan Rasamanickam stated he has informed this incident to the Public Security Minister Sarath Weerasekera.⁵³

“Trade Unions in Sri Lanka are another pandemic to the country” says a minister

Matale District MP, the Minister of Ports and Shipping Pramitha Bandara Tennakoon stated that the Trade Unions and other opposite political parties are sort of epidemic in Sri Lanka. He made these comments at the SLPP women balamandala meeting held at Dambulla electoral seat on 17th February 2022. He further accused the opposition political parties Samgi Jana Balawegaya and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna for agitating the people to protest against the government.

⁴⁹ රජයට දෙන කපන සංස්ථා හා ආයතන සහායවරුන් ගැන අගමැති කඳිත්.

⁵⁰ [Facebook comment leads to CID investigation.](#)

⁵¹ [ITAK complains of an attempt to kidnap youth wing member.](#)

⁵² [Tweet](#)

⁵³ [ITAK youth wing assistant escapes white van abduction: Shanakiyan.](#)

The Minister of public Security Sarath Weerasekar's son publishes a mocking facebook post about the attack on Journalist Chamuditha Samarawickrama's residence:

The Minister of public Security Sarath Weerasekara's Son Sachithra Adheesha Weerasekara has posted a facebook post referring to the stone and excrement attack on the veteran journalist Chamuditha Samarawickrama's residence on 15th of February 2022. In his post he has stated that condemned those who insulted the stone and excitement. Sachithra Adheesha Weerasekara also an officer in the Sri Lanka police. Later he changed the privacy of his facebook profile.⁵⁴



Image: The Minister of public Security Sarath Weerasekara's son mocking facebook post over the Residence attack to the Journalist Chamuditha Samarawickrama. The post published soon after the attack on Samarawickrama's residence says "Let's condemn those who insulted stones and faeces"

Sri Lanka Foreign Ministry issues a statement denouncing a testimony given by former Human Rights Commissioner at the European Parliament

On 4th February, Sri Lanka Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement claiming that the testimony given by the former Human Rights Commissioner and current Chairperson of the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust Ambika Satkunanathan at the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights on 27 January, 2022 as a misleading one.⁵⁵ Number of local and international organisations and civil society activists condemned the statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, seeing it as "a form of intimidation aimed at stifling dissent and freedom of

⁵⁴ [Facebook post](#) Liyanage Amarakeerthi

⁵⁵ <https://mfa.gov.lk/fm-refutes-claims-ambika/>

expression.”⁵⁶ Further Eight leading international NGOs working on human rights issued a joint statement expressing their deep concern about the statement issued by the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry on February 4, 2022. The statement said this “exemplifies threats faced by human rights defenders, particularly when they engage with foreign and international forums, and it further shows the government’s refusal to address the ongoing serious human rights violations taking place in the country.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ (1) [Civil society slam Foreign Ministry over statement against Ambika](#), Daily Mirror.; (2) [SAHR expresses concern over the statement issued by the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry to the statement by a prominent human rights lawyer Ambika Satkunanathan to the European Union](#)

⁵⁷ [Joint NGO Statement: In solidarity with Sri Lankan Human Rights Defender Ambika Satkunanathan](#).