

Repression of Dissent

May 2022



Supporters of Sri Lanka's ruling party attack an anti-government demonstrator in Colombo [Dinuka Liyanawatte/Reuters]

INFORM

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Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka in May 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 of expression and human rights defenders. INFORM is based in Colombo Sri Lanka, and works closely with local activists, groups, and networks as well as regional (Asian) and international human rights networks.

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1. Executive Summary

Context: The Prime Minister Rajapakse was forced to resign from his position following an attack launched by pro-government supporters against the protesters in the anti-government protest site in Colombo city. Following the attack, agitated anti-government mobs attacked those who assaulted the demonstrators, a number of houses and property belonging to government Politicians were damaged and 10 individuals including a member of parliament (MP) were killed during the mob attacks. The Police arrested over 1500 individuals including several politicians for alleged involvement in the violence occurred on the day. Victims of war including those killed by the government military were remembered at the anti-government protest site. The 10 years commemoration of late Rugby Player Wasim Thajudheen was held at the Galleface protest area. He was killed in 2012, following a brutal assault due to an alleged dispute with Rajapakse family members.

Case updates: On 12th and 13th of May, the case of murdered journalist Lasantha Wickrematunge was heard at The Permanent People's Tribunal (PPT) on the Murder of Journalists in Hague. On 17th May, two Fundamental Rights petitions filed challenging former President Maithripala Sirisena's decision to grant pardon to Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero was also fixed for support by the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court (SC) has issued an interim order against the presidential pardon given to former MP and Chairperson of the housing development authority Duminda Silva in June 2021, who was convicted for murder for shooting dead a rival politician and three of his supporters in 2011. The Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) filed a fresh indictment against Former Minister Johnston Fernando on 30th May 2022 for the case of using government employees for election campaigns that he and three others were released on 28th January.

Repression of media journalists: Digital Journalist Buwanka Perera was among the group of people who were arrested during a protest held on 4th May 2022 near the Parliament premises. On 14th May 2022, the Sri lankan forces allegedly obstructed Mullaituv based journalist Shanmungam Thavaseelan while he was covering preparations of annual commemoration for remembrance of victims of war in Mullivaikkal. Three ruling party Parliamentarians have physically assaulted, verbally threatened and forcefully taken away the mobile phones of two Parliament correspondents, on 17th May 2022. The Vlogger and Youtuber Darshana Handungoda was summoned to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) on 25th May 2022 over the certain revelations he made on social media. Eastern journalist Shaheer Khan Farookh was assaulted by a group of people while he was covering a clash between police and residents in Palamunai area in the Eastern town of Akkaraipattu in Ampara district on 05th May 2022. Mohammed Bhuhari a freelance journalist was subjected to an attack while he went to record a crowd queuing outside a petrol station in the Eastern town of Muttur in Trincomalee district on 21st May 2022. Three admins of a social media group

including Wasundra Gamage a female TV presenter from state owned media channel Rupavahini Corporation was arrested by CID in relation to violence erupted following the pro-government attack on GoGotaGama anti-government demonstrators on 9th May. Pushpa Weerasekara, a well-known freelance journalist and a prominent activist associated with GotaGoGama protest site in Kurunegala and her husband were summoned to the Wariyapola Police Station on 16th May 2022 to be questioned on an “arson investigation” .

Repression of freedom of assembly: On the 9th May 2022, the ruling party Sri Lanka Podujana peramuna (SLPP) following a meeting to support former Prime Minister (PM) Mahinda Rajapakse at the Temple Trees, attacked the peaceful anti-government demonstrators who were near the Temple Trees and then in the Galleface. Police requested the court to issue an urgent order to remove the huts built by demonstrators claiming that they obstruct the access to the Presidential Secretariat and private companies in the area. Another protester, Susantha Rambukwella a Library Assistant of the Kanthale Mahaweli Pura Vidyalaya in the eastern province was arrested by the Kanthale police on 16th May 2022. Police arrested Prabodha Lakshan an employee working in the Lanka Naigai (pvt) Ltd in Katunayake Export Processing Zone on 13th May 2022 night for taking part in the protests. On 19th May 2022, Police fired tear gas and water to disperse the protestors at a protest organised by the Inter-University Student Federation (IUSF) . On a request made by the Fort Police. the Colombo Fort Magistrate has issued an order on a protest march by students of the Higher National Diploma (HND), banning them from entering certain roads in the Colombo Fort, state institutions or damaging property and obstructing duties of Police. Despite the court order, as the students marched in protest on 21st May, police used tear gas and water cannons. Riot Police have used tear gas and water cannons to disperse another protest organised by the Medical Faculty Student Activist Committee in Colombo on 29th May 2022. On 12th May 2022, a travel ban was issued by the Colombo Magistrate Court to seven people who were eyewitnesses including those injured during the 9th May pro-government mob attack, as per the request of the Attorney General, claiming they need to be present in Sri Lanka for further investigation. Activist and president of the Sri Lanka Information Technology Professionals Association, Indika Gamage was arrested by the Matale police on 27th May 2022 in relation to the attack on protestors on 9th May. Dewalegama Premarathana Thero was summoned to the Weeraketiya police station on the 26th May 2022. He was questioned over the destruction of the parents grave of the president Gotabaya Rajapaksha and several other incidents that occurred in the 9th May 2022. . Nuwan Neelamuni and Harshana Neelamuni environmental activists were arrested by the Ambalangoda police on 26th May 2022. They both were actively involved in the anti government protests. The Colombo Magistrate Court has issued an order to remove all the structures, vehicles and belongings to the protesters who have staged protests opposite to the Temple Trees on 4th May 2022. Saman Kumara Ranthilaka, a youth from Pannala in Kurunegala district was arrested by the Yakkala Police in Gampaha district, along with another person on 1st May 2022. These two were arrested for taking part and

speaking to the media at an anti-government protest. YouTuber Rathidu Senarathna alias “Ratta” was arrested by the Slave Island Police on 30th May. Ratta was arrested over allegations that he had violated a court order issued against a protest he took part in. A group of protesters protesting against the shortage of gas in the Dematagoda area in Colombo were assaulted by a mob led by a local politician. A person who shared the incident live on facebook was also assaulted. Amila Mendis of Wāriyapola, a youth activist who actively took part in Kurunegala GotaGoGama protest campaign was arrested and detained by the police following a complaint made by the Mayor of Kurunegala on 16th May.

Other incidents: Arumugam Balasubramaniam, a government youth service officer from Hatton in the Central Province of Sri Lanka was arrested for criticising the mob attack on Galleface demonstrators backed by the state using his facebook page. He was granted bail after being presented before the Hatton District Court.¹

¹ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1527350028112896000>

2. Context

Anti-government protests: The Prime Minister Rajapakse was forced to resign from his position following the attack on the anti-government protest in GoGotaGama.² The ongoing “Occupy Galleface/ Gotagogama” peaceful demonstrators were assaulted by pro-government mobs who were returning from a meeting with the Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse on 9th of May, on the 32nd day of the occupying protest. First Mainagogama - the occupying protest site in front of Prime Minister’s official residence Temple trees were assaulted, and tents were destroyed and some were burnt. Then the attackers who walked around one kilometre assaulted the demonstrators in GotaGoGama. Though the Police intervened later, they did not use sufficient power to prevent attackers from reaching the GoGotaGama protest site and assaulting the demonstrators. Following the attack, agitated anti-government mobs attacked those who assaulted the demonstrators, a number of houses and property belonging to government Politicians were damaged³ and 10 individuals including a member of parliament (MP) were killed during the mob attacks.⁴ The Police arrested over 1500 individuals for violence occurred on the day.⁵ Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) MPs Sanath Nishantha, Milan Jayatilake, Moratuwa mayor Saman Lal Fernando, Seethawakapura local council Chairman Jayantha Rohana and Kelaniya local council member Manjula Prasanna were also arrested for their alleged involvement in the attacks.⁶ On 10th May, the secretary of the Ministry of Defence gave an order to the Tri Forces to shoot at any person engaging in violence. This order was issued on 10th May 2022.⁷ Travel bans were issued for the Former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksha, MP Namal Rajapaksha, former Minister MP Johnston Fernando and 14 others by the Fort Magistrate’s Court.⁸

The Attorney General (AG) instructed the Inspector General of Police to transfer the Senior Deputy Inspector General of Police (SDIG) Deshabandu Tennakoon in order to ensure that there is no interference into the ongoing investigations. Instead he went on a personal leave for two weeks.⁹ Tennakoon, as the senior Police officer present when the attack occurred, had failed to take any proactive measures to prevent the attack.¹⁰ As reported to the Court in August, Police had failed to follow the instructions given by the AG on the matter.¹¹ On 26th May, the Police visited the protest site to record the statements from the protestors regarding the attack on 9th of May.¹² The government appointed a committee consisting of former

² <https://colombogazette.com/2022/05/10/resignation-of-mahinda-rajpaksa-as-pm-gazetted/>

³ <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/05/10/video-heres-a-list-of-slpp-politico-property-attacked-during-mondays-9-violence/>

⁴ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/9/sri-lanka-govt-supporters-attack-protesters-demolish-tents>

5 https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/sri-lankan-police-arrest-1-500-people-in-connection-with-may-9-violence-122052300372_1.html

⁶ <https://ceylontoday.lk/2022/05/18/moratuwa-mayor-saman-lal-fernando-others-arrested-over-may-9-violence/>

⁷ <https://twitter.com/sunandadesh/status/1528693888470470657>

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/sri-lanka-opposition-calls-for-mahinda-rajabapsas-arrest-for-inciting-violence/article65400764.ece>

⁸ <https://colombogazette.com/2022/05/12/travel-ban-imposed-on-mahinda-namal-and-several-others/>

⁹ <https://www.newswire.lk/2022/05/30/sdig-tennagoon-no-transfer-takes-leave-on-his-own/>

¹⁰ <https://www.dailynews.lk/2022/05/24/local/279408/aq-instructs-igpp-transfer-senior-dig-deshabandu>

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12 https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/CID-officers-visit-GotaGoGama-to-record-statements-again/108-237784

military leaders to probe into the violence.¹³ In addition, Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) stated that they have appointed a special rapporteur to investigate the case.¹⁴

Remembrance of victims of war: While the government celebrated the war victory,¹⁵ Different groups in the protest site GotaGoGama organised events to remember the victims of the war, and to pay tribute to the soldiers as a number of ex-combatants were also part of the anti-government protest. However, this was the first time since the end of war in 2009, that Tamil victims of war including those killed in the final phase of war in Mullivaikkal were remembered in a public remembrance event in Colombo. “Let us remember our Tamil brothers and sisters who died, or were forcibly disappeared on this day in Mullivaikkal,” said Fr. Jeewantha Peiris at the remembrance event at Galle Face.

Remembrance of late Rugby player: 10 years commemoration of late Rugby Player Wasim Thajudheen was held at the Galleface protest area.¹⁶ He was killed on 17th May 2012, following a brutal assault due to an alleged dispute with Rajapakse family members. While the case remains in impunity, another legal case was filed against the senior Police officer and the Judicial medical officer who have been allegedly involved in falsifying the relevant reports, including the post mortem.

The case against Ven. Gnanasara Thero on insulting holy Quran: The court case against the ultranationalist monk, the General Secretary of Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) Galagodatte Ganasara Thero regarding alleged insult on the Holy Quran was taken up on 30th May 2022 at the Colombo Magistrate Court.¹⁷ The Slave Island Police informed the court that the Attorney General has instructed them to file the charges against the suspect under section 291A of the penal code dealing with “Uttering words etc., with deliberate intent to wound religious feelings”. The case was postponed until 14th November 2022.^{18 19}

Economic crisis: Due to both the government imposed fertiliser ban and war in the Ukraine, Sri Lanka’s tea export marked the lowest in 23 years. Tea is the nation’s biggest export commodity.²⁰ In an interview with Indian news channel NDTV, IMF chairperson Kristalina Georgieva stated that IMF is ready to support Sri Lanka once they have clarity on what the programme may look like and how debt can be restructured and also stated that the economic crisis in Sri Lanka is mainly due to mismanagement.²¹

¹³ <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/05/26/former-military-chiefs-to-probe-recent-violence/>

¹⁴ <https://srilankabrief.org/sri-lanka-hrc-has-appointed-a-special-rapporteur-to-report-on-violations-of-the-rule-of-law-on-9th-and-10th-may-2022/>

¹⁵ http://www.colombopage.com/archive_22A/May19_1652984064CH.php

¹⁶ <https://colombogazette.com/2022/05/17/wasims-death-anniversary-commemorated-at-gotagogama/>

¹⁷ <https://twitter.com/sunandadesh/status/1531197002452803584/photo/1>

¹⁸ <https://lankanetnews.com/?p=11312>

¹⁹ <https://mawbima.lk/2022/05/31/colombo-crime-prevention-division-informed-about-gnanasara-thera-to-the-court/>

²⁰ <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220504-sri-lanka-tea-exports-lowest-in-23-years>

²¹ https://www.dailymirror.lk/latest_news/Sri-Lankas-crisis-is-a-result-of-mismanagement-IMF-Chief/342-237804

3. Case Updates

Lasantha Wickrematunge Case hearing at People's Tribunal:

On 12th and 13th of May, the case of murdered journalist Lasantha Wickrematunge was heard at The Permanent People's Tribunal (PPT) on the Murder of Journalists in Hague, while Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) was officially notified about the indictment. Lasantha Wickrematunge was assassinated on 8th January 2009.²² The testimony given by former detective of Sri Lanka Police Nishantha de Silva currently in exile stated the complicity of Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapakse in the murder of journalist Wickrematunge.²³ Wickrematunge was murdered while he was waiting to give testimony before the court regarding a defamation case filed against him by then Defense Secretary Gotabaya Rajapakse (GR) after Wickrematunge exposed an alleged corruption case involving GR. Sandhya Ekeneligoda, the wife of the Disappeared Journalist Pargeeth Ekeneligoda also provided a testimony before the court and highlighted reprisals faced by witnesses and victims, lack of accountability of government and overall impunity regarding the crimes committed against the journalists.²⁴

Problematic Presidential pardons:

Gnanasara Thero: On 17th May, two Fundamental Rights petitions filed challenging former President Maithripala Sirisena's decision to grant pardon to Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero was also fixed for support by the Supreme Court. The petitions were filed by Centre for Policy Alternative (CPA) and Sandhya Ekeneligoda, the wife of missing journalist Prageeth Ekeneligoda. The Supreme Court granted permission to the petitioners to file amended captions in respect of the petitions.²⁵

Duminda Silva: The Supreme Court (SC) has issued an interim order against the presidential pardon given to former MP and Chairperson of the housing development authority Duminda Silva, who was convicted for murder for shooting dead a rival politician and three of his supporters in 2011. Duminda Silva was granted a presidential pardon on 24th June 2021.²⁶ On 31st May 2022, SC issued an interim order suspending his presidential pardon. The interim order was made by the SC in response to a three fundamental rights applications filed by family members of late Bharatha Lakshman Premachandra who was shot dead by Duminda

²² <https://www.themorning.lk/witness-testimony-in-lasanthas-murder-to-be-heard/>

²³ <https://cpj.org/2022/06/new-details-raise-questions-about-whether-sri-lankan-president-was-complicit-in-the-killing-of-journalist-lasantha-wickrematunge/>

²⁴ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1525030814949556226>;
<https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1525023239092817921>;
<https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1525020508424749056>

²⁵ https://www.dailymirror.lk/latest_news/FR-petitions-challenging-decision-to-pardon-Gnanasara-thera-fixed-for-support/342-237242

²⁶ <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/05/31/sri-lankan-court-suspends-presidential-pardon-given-to-duminda-silva/>
<https://economynext.com/former-sri-lanka-mp-and-murder-convict-duminda-silva-out-on-presidential-pardon-83320/>

Silva²⁷ and former Human Rights Commissioner Ghazali Hussian. Subsequently Duminda Silva was soon arrested.^{28 29}

Bribery Commission has filed a fresh indictment against MP Johnston Fernando:

The Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) filed a fresh indictment against Former Minister Johnston Fernando on 30th May 2022 for the case that he and three others were released on 28th January.^{30 31} He was accused of unlawfully employing Sathosa employees for election campaigns during 2010- 2014 period, causing loss of Rs.8.4 million to the government while he was serving as the Minister of Cooperative and Trade.³² Mp Johnston Fernando, Former Cooperative Wholesale Establishment (CWE (Lak Sathosa)) Chairperson Eraj Fernando and former Minister's Private Secretary Raj Mohideen Mohammad Sakeer were released due to a technical issue, as the Bribery Commission had failed to obtain the sanctions of three Commissioners when filing the case.^{33 34}

²⁷ Daughter and wife of late Bharatha Lakshman Premachandra: MP Hirunika Premachandra, and her mother Sumana Premachandara

²⁸ <https://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/70830>

²⁹ <http://www.adaderana.lk/news.php?nid=82811>

³⁰ <https://www.newswire.lk/2021/01/15/court-discontinues-case-agast-jognston-fernando/>

³¹ <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/bribery-commission-files-case-against-johnny/>

³² <https://mawbima.lk/2022/05/30/the-bribery-commission-is-re-filing-a-case-against-jonston-which-was-withdrawn-during-the-previous-government/>

³³ <https://www.newswire.lk/2021/01/15/court-discontinues-case-agast-jognston-fernando/>

³⁴ https://www.dailymirror.lk/latest_news/Bribery-Commission-files-fresh-indictment-against-Johnston-Fernando/342-238009

4. Repression of Media and Journalists

4.1. The journalist was arrested when he was reporting the protest near parliament:

Digital Journalist Buwanka Perera was among the group of people who were arrested during a protest held on 4th May 2022 near the Parliament premises.³⁵ Police claimed that the protesters arrested were violating the parliamentary privileges of the MPs. They were granted bail on the same day by the Kaduwela Magistrate court.³⁶

4.2. Police harassed and threatened the Journalist Shanmugam Thavaseelan:



Journalist Shanmugam Thavaseelan. Photo Courtesy: Tamil Guardian

On 14th May 2022, the Sri Lankan forces allegedly obstructed the Mullaitivu based journalist and the President of the Mullaitivu Press Club Shanmugam Thavaseelan while he was covering preparations of annual commemoration for remembrance of victims of war in Mullivaikkal, where last phase of Sri Lankan civil war happened. On 18th of May, while the government celebrates the victory of the war, Tamils remember their loved ones lost during the war. Shanmugam was stopped by a group of Army and police officials personnel at the newly established army post near the Mullivaikkal Memorial. Journalist Shanmugam stated that police officers who arrived at the scene had checked his driving licence in addition to his media accreditation card. They have also questioned him if he had videotaped the place.³⁷

³⁵ <https://twitter.com/easwaranrutnam/status/1521759508095291392>

³⁶ <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/05/04/youth-protestors-who-were-arrested-near-the-parliament-released-on-bail/>

³⁷ <https://english.theleader.lk/news/2109-army-harass-tamil-journalist-at-mullivaikkal-memorial-site>

4.3. MPs threaten and snatch mobile phones of two parliamentary correspondents:



Sri Lankan Parliament. Photo Courtesy: Daily News

Three Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna Parliamentarians have physically assaulted, verbally threatened and forcefully taken away the mobile phones of Parliament correspondents Swarnawahini Journalist Prageeth Perera and Sirasa TV Journalist Kasun Samaraweera, on 17th May 2022. This incident occurred while the journalists were recording the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna Parliamentary group meeting held inside the Parliament premises, using their mobile phones. When MPs were leaving the room following the end of the meeting, MPs Indika Anuruddha and D. Weerasinghe have allegedly manhandled Prageeth Perera pushing towards the nearby wall, and demanded why the journalists have recorded them during the meeting, and snatched the mobile phones of two journalists,³⁸ while MP Prof. Channa Jayasumana has also threatened them not to fight back as MPs have parliamentary privileges. After the journalists have informed the Speaker of the Parliament, he has responded saying that MPs have behaved in such a manner due to sensitivity pertaining to the current political situation in the country, even though the journalists were well known among the MPs.³⁹ Prageeth Perea has been working as a Parliament correspondent for Swarnawahini Tv Channel for over 20 years, while Kasun Samaraweera working as a Parliament correspondent for over 7 years.

4.4. YouTuber Darshana Handungoda summoned to CID

The Vlogger and Youtuber Darshana Handungoda was summoned to the Criminal Investigation Department on 25th May 2022 over the certain revelations he made on social media. Journalist Darshana Handungoda stated that he has not received any official written document claiming that he was summoned to the CID, and that he only received a message

³⁸ <https://www.newswire.lk/2022/05/17/s-mps-accused-of-snatching-mobile-phones-of-two-parliament-journalists/>

³⁹ <https://sinhala.srilankabrief.org/?p=41615>

over the phone requesting for his presence.⁴⁰ The Criminal Investigation Department requested his presence on 24th May but Journalist Handungoda has raised his concern over his counsel to send a proper written request to him. After the Criminal Investigation Department sends a proper written summon request he has presented before the CID and he has questioned over 4 hours over a video that had been shared on YouTube during one of his discussions on the current economic and political crises in Sri Lanka. ⁴¹



Political vlogger Darshana Hadungoda. Photo Courtesy: Newswire

4.5. Mob attacked a Journalist in Palamunai

Shaheer Khan Farookh was assaulted by a group of people while he was covering a clash between police and residents in Palamunai area in the Eastern town of Akkaraipattu in Ampara district on 05th May 2022. He was admitted to the Akkaraipattu Base Hospital and received the necessary treatment. ⁴² Shaheer Khan Farook is a regional Journalist.

4.6. Freelance journalist Mohamed Buhari was assaulted in Muttur

Mohammed Bhuhari a freelance journalist was subjected to an attack while he went to record a crowd queuing outside a petrol station in the Eastern town of Muttur in Trincomalee district on 21st May 2022. He has been subjected to this attack in the presence of the police. Mohammed Buhari is a member of the Trincomalee District Journalist Association. He was hospitalised after the attack.⁴³

4.7. Three admins of a social media group including a journalist arrested

Three admins of a social media group including Wasundra Gamage a female TV presenter from state owned media channel Rupavahini Corporation was arrested by Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in relation to violence erupted following the pro-government

⁴⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=squk3rxo-T8>

⁴¹ <https://www.newswire.lk/2022/05/24/political-vloggerdarshana-handungoda-summoned-by-cid/>

⁴² [Tweet](#) JDS

⁴³ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1528260457408217088>

attack on GoGotaGama anti-government demonstrators on 9th May. They were accused of allegedly instigating and aiding and abetting the violence. Wasundara Gamage was arrested on 19th May 2022 at her residence located in Narahenpita, Colombo 05 by the Computer Crimes Investigation Unit of the Criminal Investigation Department. ⁴⁴ A 22-year-old youth from Dickwella in Matara district, and another 21-year-old youth from Nugegoda in Colombo district were also arrested for allegedly sharing posts on social media calling the public that houses of police and three armed forces should be set on fire, and promoting violence on social media and posting information that threatens public safety.

4.8. Female Journalist and her husband summoned to Wariyapola Police:

Pushpa Weerasekara, a well-known freelance journalist and a prominent activist associated with GotaGoGama protest site in Kurunegala and her husband were summoned to the Wariyapola Police Station on 16th May 2022 to be questioned on an “arson investigation” . Pushpa Weerasekara a journalist and prominent activist associated with the “GotaGoGama” Kurunagela. ⁴⁵



Journalist Pushpa Weerasekara. Photo Courtesy: JDS

⁴⁴ https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/Three-social-media-admins-including-TV-presenter-arrested-over-recent-unrest/108-237338

⁴⁵ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1526132938445832192/photo/1>

5. Repression of Freedom of Assembly

5.1. pro-government supporters attack the peaceful anti-government demonstrators in Colombo



Supporters of Sri Lanka's ruling party attack an anti-government demonstrator in Colombo [Dinuka Liyanawatte/Reuters]

On the 9th May 2022, the ruling party Sri Lanka Podujana peramuna (SLPP) organised a meeting to support former Prime Minister (PM) Mahinda Rajapakse at the Temple Trees with the participation of Provincial council members, Parliamentarians and supporters amidst calls from anti-government demonstrators demanding President Gotabaya Rajapakse and other Rajapakse family members to resign from their positions in the government. A protest site specifically calling for the PM's resignation was established under the name of "MainaGoGama." After the meeting held at the Temple Trees, the party supporters attacked the peaceful anti-government demonstrators who were near the Temple Trees and then in the Galleface. While there was around 1.5 Kilometres distance from Temple Trees to the Galleface protest site, the Police did not use adequate power to stop them, obviously knowing that they were heading to attack demonstrators in GotaGoGama, after they assaulted the demonstrators near the Temple trees. The attack led to unrest throughout the country, while mobs of people attacked and burnt the residences, offices and business places of the ruling party Parliamentarians, and Provincial council members.⁴⁶ Prior to the attack Sri Lanka Young Journalists Association made a Police complaint regarding the imminent attack and has attempted to contact the police media correspondent to alert the situation.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ http://www.colombopage.com/archive_22A/May09_1652108808CH.php

⁴⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5P7ITxDMGI>



Pro-government mobs destroying the huts of anti-government demonstrators in MainaGoGama in front of Temple trees, the official residence of the PM. Photo Courtesy: [Colombo Page](#).

5.2. Removing structures in Galle Face, court case postponed:

Sri Lanka police requested the court to issue an urgent order to remove the huts built by demonstrators claiming that they obstruct the access to the Presidential Secretariat and private companies in the area. The managers of two private companies in the area informed the court through their lawyers that they had not made any request to remove the protesters from Galle Face Green. The Chief Magistrate stated that it appears that there is no need for the police to pursue this request and ordered the prosecution to appear on June 13.^{48 49}

5.3. Kanthale police arrested a library assistant who was actively participating in the anti-government protest:

Susantha Rambukwella a Library Assistant of the Kanthale Mahaweli Pura Vidyalaya in the eastern province was arrested by the Kanthale police on 16th May 2022. He has been actively involved in the ongoing anti-government protest campaign.⁵⁰

5.4. Katunayake Free Trade Zone worker arrested:

Police have arrested Prabodha Lakshan an employee working in the Lanka Naigai (pvt) Ltd in Katunayake Export Processing Zone on 13th May 2022 night. Police had previously attempted

⁴⁸ <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/05/12/court-postpones-police-request-to-remove-obstacles-in-galle-face-to-june-2022/>

⁴⁹ http://www.colombopage.com/archive_22A/May12_1652379585CH.php

⁵⁰ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1526178388125306880/photo/1>

to arrest him in the morning of the same day while he was at the workplace, but his fellow workers thwarted his arrest.⁵¹

5.5. Police fire tear gas and water at Student Protest:

The Inter-University Student Federation (IUSF) marched from the university of the Visual Arts and Performing Arts to the World Trade Centre in Colombo on 19th May 2022 demanding resignation of the government. The protesters attempted to enter the Bank of Ceylon Mawatha and marched towards the protest site in Galleface. Police fired tear gas and water to disperse the protesters.⁵² The protest was themed with the slogan “Let’s oust the Gota-Ranil conspiracy government – overthrow the system”.⁵³

5.6. The Police fired tear gas on Higher National Diploma (HND) students protesting in Fort:

On a request made by the Fort Police., the Colombo Fort Magistrate has issued an order on a protest march by students of the Higher National Diploma (HND), banning them from entering certain roads in Fort, state institutions or damaging property and obstructing duties of Police. Despite the court order, Higher National Diploma (HND) students marched in protest towards the Bank of Ceylon Mawatha, on 21st May.⁵⁴ To disperse the protest police used tear gas and water cannons. As per the court order demonstrators were prohibited from entering York Street, Bank Street, Chaithya Road, Lower Chatham Street, Leyden Bastian Road, Sir Baron Jayatilake Mawatha, Mudalige Mawatha, Hospital Road, and Canal Road in Colombo.⁵⁵

5.7. The Colombo Magistrate issued travel ban on eyewitness of the 9th May mob attack:

On 12th May 2022, a travel ban was issued by the Colombo Magistrate Court to seven people who were eyewitnesses including those injured during the 9th May pro-government mob attack, as per the request of the Attorney General. Police claimed that they need to be present in Sri Lanka for further investigation.⁵⁶

5.8. Police attacked the medical student's protest in Colombo with teargas and water cannons

Riot Police have used tear gas and water cannons to disperse a protest organised by the Medical Faculty Student Activist Committee in Colombo on 29th May 2022. Police fired tear gas and water cannons when the protestors attempted to enter the Bank of Ceylon Mawatha. The protest

⁵¹ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1525482246957850624>

⁵² https://twitter.com/AdaDerana_24/status/1527249565270757376

⁵³ <https://ceylontoday.lk/2022/05/19/just-in-police-fire-tear-gas-at-iusf-protesters/>

⁵⁴ <https://colombogazette.com/2022/05/21/police-fire-tear-gas-on-students-protesting-in-fort/>

⁵⁵ <https://colombogazette.com/2022/05/21/court-issues-order-on-hnda-protest-march/>

⁵⁶ <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/05/12/travel-ban-on-ex-pm-mahinda-rajapaksa-and-16-others/>

march began near the Nelum Pokuna Theatre, under the theme of ‘No to ‘deal politics’ that defend thieves, and bow the public opinion’,⁵⁷

5.9. President of the Sri Lanka Information Technology Professionals' Association Indika Gamage arrested:

Social activist and president of the Sri Lanka Information Technology Professionals Association, Indika Gamage was arrested by the Matale police on 27th May 2022 in relation to the attack on protestors on 9th May. He was produced before the Matale court and detained at the Pallekele prison.⁵⁸

5.10. Devalēgama Pamarathana Thero and Wekandawala Rahula thero was arrested by the Weeraketiya police:

Dewalegama Premarthana Thero was summoned to the Weeraketiya police station on the 26th May 2022. Dewalegama Peramarathana thero went to the police station accompanied with the environmental activist and the Chief Buddhist Monk at the Bodhirukkārāma temple in Kudabibula, Wekandawala Rahula Thero. The buddhist monks waited till the evening of the same day at Weeraketiya police station, at the evening police station was informed that the Dewalegama Premarthana Thero was arrested and will be produced before the court on 27th May 2022. Rahula Thero and other monks were returned back and at the gate of the Weeraketiya police station a police officer informed the Rahula thero to come back to the police station. Wekandawala Rahula Thero was returned back to the police station and questioned him over the destruction of the parents grave of the president Gotabaya Rajapaksha and several other incidents that occurred in the 9th May 2022. Police had informed the son of a politician, that Rahula Thero was present at the site of the burning of a house. Rahula Thero was arrested and detained by the Weeraketiya police on the night of 26th May 2022. Police have informed that Rahula thero was produced before the Judicial Medical officer on 27th May 2022, instead of it Rahual thero was produced before the Walasmulla Magistrate's court. The lawyer representing the Rahula Thero has stated the 7 cases have been filed against the thero and all the cases are in connection with incidents of assault and arson. The Walasmulla Magistrate court has ordered to remand Rahula Thero and others until 31th May. On 31st May the case was taken up to hear and Wekandawala Rahula Thero was granted bail by the Walasmulla Magistrate Court on a surety of Rs.10000.

5.11. Two environmental activists arrested by the Police for engaging anti government protest:

Nuwan Neelamuni and Harshana Neelamuni environmental activists were arrested by the Ambalangoda police on 26th May 2022. They both were actively involved in the anti

⁵⁷ <https://www.colombotimes.net/another-tear-gas-attack-medicoes-dispersed-near-world-trade-center/>

⁵⁸ <https://twitter.com/Welikumbura/status/1530397104702889984>

government protest. They were released on bail on 28th May after they appeared before the Balapitiya Magistrate.⁵⁹

5.12. The court issued the court order to remove all tents, structures vehicles belonging to the protesters near the Temple Trees:

The Colombo Magistrate Court has issued an order to remove all the structures, vehicles and belongings to the protesters who have staged protests opposite to the Temple Trees on 4th May 2022. The Fort Magistrate Manjula Rathnayake had issued this order considering the police request stating that the demonstrators are obstructing the pedestrian using the pavement and inconveniencing the public. Delivering the order magistrate has emphasised the order is not an impediment to peaceful demonstrators carried out in a manner that does not obstruct the pedestrian to using the pavement and the public using the road.⁶⁰

5.13. A youth in Pannala was arrested by the Yakkala Police for attending anti government protest:

Saman Kumara Ranthilaka, a youth from Pannala in Kurunegala district was arrested by the Yakkala Police in Gampaha district, along with another person on 1st May 2022. These two were arrested for taking part and speaking to the media at an anti-government protest.⁶¹

5.14. YouTuber arrested for taking part at a protest violating a court order:

YouTuber Rathidu Senarathna alias “Ratta” was arrested by the Slave Island Police on 30th May. Ratta was arrested over allegations that he had violated a court order issued against a protest he took part in.⁶² Police alleged that he had protested opposite the Fort Magistrate’s court on the 25th of May 2022, and had obstructed the duties of the police officers present at the premises. He was granted bail after presenting before the magistrate.⁶³ The protest that led to his arrest had taken place demanding the arrest of suspects connected to the attack on peaceful demonstrators on 09th May. Ratta a popular youtuber who has around 1.4 million subscribers on YouTube, was a prominent figure in Sri Lanka’s anti-government protests demanding the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his government over the country’s worsening economic crisis.⁶⁴

5.15. Protestors against the Gas shortage assaulted:

A group of protesters protesting against the shortage of gas in the Dematagoda area in Colombo were assaulted by a mob led by a local politician. A person who shared the incident live on facebook was also assaulted.⁶⁵

5.16. Kurunegala GoGotaGama activist Amila Mendis Arrested:

⁵⁹ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1530195373767237634>

⁶⁰ <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/82193/court-order-issued-on-the-protesters-near-temple-trees>

⁶¹ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1521448919024214017>

⁶² <https://colombogazette.com/2022/05/30/popular-youtuber-ratta-arrested/>

⁶³ <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/05/30/ratta-sri-lankan-youtuber-arrested/>

⁶⁴ <https://economynext.com/sri-lankan-youtuber-and-anti-government-protestor-ratta-arrested-94936/>

⁶⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/mfuzly/videos/732557854589751/>

Amila Mendis of Wāriyapola, a youth activist actively took part in Kurunegala GotaGoGama protest campaign was arrested by the police and detained at Wehera Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) office following a complaint made by Mayor of Kurunegala on 16th May. He was released on bail on the same day, by the Kurunegala magistrate. The case was adjourned, with the next hearing set to be held on October 28.⁶⁶

6. Other incidents

6.1. Youth Service Officer arrested over a facebook post:

Arumugam Balasubramaniam, a government youth service officer from Hatton in the Central Province of Sri Lanka was arrested for criticising the mob attack on Galleface demonstrators backed by the state using his facebook page. He was granted bail after being presented before the Hatton District Court.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1526514449737195520/photo/1>

⁶⁷ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1527350028112896000>