

Repression of Dissent

September 2022



*Mobile signature campaign demanding the repeal of draconian anti-terror law Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) reached the city of Anuradhapura on 19th September. A Buddhist monk and a Hindu priest signing the petition.
Photo Courtesy: Shanakiyan Rajaputhiran Rasamanickam via Twitter*

Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka in September 2022.

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<https://www.inform.lk/>

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. Executive Summary

Context: Inflation rates increased slightly compared to previous month, reporting 74% in the month of September, from 70% in the previous month. A group of detainees detained under prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) for several years, launched a hunger strike demanding their release, while some of them were hospitalized. An island wide mobile signature campaign demanding the repeal of PTA was collectively launched by three organizations. In the context that a number of protesters were arrested under PTA, the campaign received wide public support. Former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa who fled the country returned in early September. Amidst Sri Lankan economic crisis, there was much discussion about the human rights situation in Sri Lanka among the international community. While Announcing financial support to Sri Lanka, USAID highlighted the importance of Political reforms and accountability. Sri Lanka's human rights situation was discussed at the 51st Session of the UNHRC. Foreign Minister Ali Sabry told the media that Sri Lanka will seek a vote on an upcoming resolution at the UNHRC as the resolution is "unfair" and aimed at tarnishing the country's image at a time of economic crisis. The Justice Minister said that the Sri Lankan government will proceed to pass and enact a proposed 22nd amendment to the constitution which civil society organizations criticised for not curtailing the powers of the president and not introducing checks and balances in any meaningful manner, though it claimed to curtail the powers of the President.

Case updates: Arrested convener of Higher National Diploma (HND) students' union Haritha Darshana was ordered to be remanded until 16th September, who got arrested for violating a court order during a protest. Supreme Court permitted Basil Rajapaksa, former minister of Finance and Rajapaksa family member to travel to USA for a period of one month, for medical treatment. Former CID Sub Inspector Sugath Mendis who was arrested along with former CID Director Shani Abeysekera has not been paid his salary arrears as previously instructed by the Supreme Court, Mendis informed the court filing a motion. The Court of Appeal issued notices to MP Sanath Nishantha in relation to two petitions alleging him of contempt of court and ordered him to appear before the court on 13th October 2022. Attorney at law Dushmantha Weeratne who had been arrested for tooting his vehicle horn to support the protesters on 09th September was discharged from the case.

Repression of Media and Journalists: Mankulam Police has summoned the Tamil Senior Journalist Shanmugan Thavaseelan to record a statement over a fuel scam that happened at the Pudukuduirippu Divisional Secretariats which he had reported. Secretray of the Batticaloa District Tamil Journalist Association Selvakumar Nilanthan was summoned to the Counter Terrorism Investigation Division Colombo for allegedly having links with former Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Batticaloa political head. Police officers attached to the Batticaloa police station handed over a summon notice to Balasingham Krishnakumar, President of the Batticaloa District Tamil Journalists Union asking him to appear at the Counter Terrorism Investigation Division Headquarters at Colombo. Government has ordered the civil servants to avoid sharing their opinions in social media after some officials had claimed that some school students were fainting due to lack of food due to the country's economic crisis. Freelance writer Dulani Priyadarshini was summoned to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) headquarters in Colombo and questioned for around 5 hours on her involvement with the protest movement.

Repression of Freedom of Assembly: Three including two provincial and local politicians were arrested for participating at a protest against a state backed construction of a Buddhist temple in

Mullaitivu. Police arrested 84 protesters including three monks and four women on 23rd September in Colombo city during a protest as authorities claimed that the protest was “illegal” a day after President Ranil Wickremesinghe declared several war-time high security zones in Colombo. It was reported that at least 7 protesters were hospitalised due to assaults by Police. Sri Lankan military have halted and threatened the travelling memorial dedicated to Thileepan, the former LTTE political wing leader who died fasting unto death in 1987. A number of protesters were summoned to the Criminal Investigation department to question their involvement in the anti-government protests including at least eight trade union members of a state bank and a Central Executive Committee member of Ceylon Teachers Union. Oshantha Prasad Dabare who had been actively involved in the recent protest campaign and brutally assaulted by pro-government mobs on 9th May was summoned to the Criminal Investigation Department in Colombo, to obtain a statement. Former student activist, National organizer of ‘Youth for Change’ and a leader of anti-government protests Lahiru Weerasekara was arrested on 9th Friday while returning from a candlelight vigil held in memory of those who lost their lives in the protest movement. Actress Damitha Abeyratne was arrested by the Colombo Crimes Division, while taking part in a protest for unlawfully entering the President's Office during the recent protests in July 2022. Alliance of Trade Unions & Mass Organisations were forced to change the venue of a meeting, as the auditorium belonging to Sri Lanka Ex-Servicemen's Association denied them access to the auditorium allegedly under the orders of the Defence Secretary. A power cut was reported when a public rally organized by the Inter-University student Federation and Alliance of Trade Unions and Mass organizations was happening at the Hyde in Colombo city. Police in civilian clothes attempted to arrest an activist named Nipun during a protest held in Colombo Fort, without providing any legal documents.

Legal and Policy changes: On 23rd of September, a Gazette notification was issued declaring new High Security Zones in Colombo including a number of key government buildings under the Official Secret Act. Issuing a press release, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) stated that the Official Secret Act cannot be adopted to declare High-Security Zones. Issuing a tweet, UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Association, Clement Voule also raised concerns. A controversial draft Bill titled “[Bureau of Rehabilitation Act](#)” was gazetted. Human rights activists and others held that the bill was an attempt to target those who participated in the recent protests, to send them through a forcible process of rehabilitation, without following the judiciary procedures.

Other incidents: **Health Minister threatened to take action against** the President of Public Health Inspectors’ Union of Sri Lanka (PHIUSL), M. G. Upul Rohana who revealed the higher doses of aflatoxin detected in the government distributed nutrition supplement ‘Thripasha’. The Sri Lanka Police has refused to provide information on the number of citizens arrested and detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act at the Right to Information Commission. Laxmanarajani Jeyapragash, human rights activist based in Batticaloa, and Kanthaiya Kalaivani, attached to political party Tamil National Alliance were summoned to the Counter Terrorism Investigation Division in Colombo.

2. Context

Inflation increased up to 73.7% in the month of September, from 70.2% in the previous month. Food inflation increased to 85.8% in September 2022 from 84.6% in August 2022, while Non-Food inflation increased to 62.8% in September 2022 from 57.1% in August 2022.¹ A [report](#) published by UNICEF in June 2022, stated that more than 5.7 million people, including 2.3 million children, require humanitarian assistance, due to the rapidly unfolding economic crisis in Sri Lanka.² It was also reported that 6.3 million people – nearly 30 percent of the population – are food-insecure according to a study conducted by WFP and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).³

Former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa who fled the country when anti-government protesters occupied major government buildings demanding his resignation in July 2022, returned to the country on 3rd September 2022.⁴

On the 6th of September, a group of 13 detainees who have been detained under Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) for several years, launched a hunger strike demanding their release.⁵ Six of them were hospitalized by mid-September, according to a news report.⁶ An island wide mobile signature campaign demanding the repeal of PTA was collectively launched by three organisations: Ilankai Thamilarasu Katchi (ITAK) Youth Front, Justice for All and the Alliance of Trade Unions & Mass organisations. The campaign organized events to collect signatures from 9th September to 5th October covering a number of cities throughout the country.⁷ In the context that a number of protesters were arrested under PTA, the campaign received wide public support.



1

https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/sites/default/files/cbslweb_documents/press/pr/press_20221021_inflation_in_september_2022_ncpi_e.pdf

2 <https://www.unicef.org/media/126106/file/ROSA-Humanitarian-SitRep-30-June-2022.pdf>

3 <https://www.wfp.org/stories/sri-lanka-rising-prices-reduce-access-food-millions>

4 <https://thediomat.com/2022/09/former-president-gotabaya-rajapaksa-returns-to-sri-lanka/>

5 <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1567675377555849216>

6 <https://www.themorning.lk/six-fasting-tamil-pta-prisoners-hospitalised/>

7 <https://www.dailynews.lk/2022/09/10/local/286930/mobile-signature-campaign-calling-repeal-pta>

Amidst Sri Lankan economic crisis, there was much discussion about the human rights situation in Sri Lanka among the international community. USAID announced a 40 million USD grant to support Sri Lankan farmers, and an additional 20 million USD grant to address hunger and malnutrition, Head of the USAID Samantha Power stated that she had discussed with the President on the fact that Political reforms and accountability including addressing corruption, space for civil society, and repeal of PTA need to progress in parallel to economic reforms.⁸ Meanwhile, President Ranil Wickramasinghe stated that the previous stance of the Sri Lankan government to decline two resolutions co-sponsored by Sri Lanka at the UNHRC was unconstitutional. The 51st Session of the UNHRC was held from 12 September to 07 October, 2022 and Interactive Dialogue on Report of OHCHR on Sri Lanka started on 12th of September in which Sri Lanka human rights situation was highlighted and discussed.⁹ Foreign Minister Ali Sabry told the media that Sri Lanka will seek a vote on an upcoming resolution at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) with the help of its friends as the resolution is “unfair” and aimed at tarnishing the country’s image at a time of economic crisis, particularly focusing on outside evidence gathering.^{10 11}

Justice Minister Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe said that the Sri Lankan government will proceed to pass and enact a proposed 22nd amendment to the constitution subject to revisions based on a Supreme Court determination. Issuing a statement in August on the Amendment, CPA noted that whilst the Bill addresses some of the problems with the previous version of the Bill, it does not curtail the powers of the President nor introduce checks and balances in any meaningful manner, contrary to the demands of the people of Sri Lanka¹², though it claimed to curtail the powers of the President.

⁸ <https://www.themorning.lk/economic-and-political-reforms-must-go-hand-in-hand-samantha-power/>

⁹ <https://www.themorning.lk/ranil-changes-stance-on-unhrc/>

¹⁰ <https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-will-ask-for-vote-on-upcoming-unfair-un-resolution-foreign-minister-100513/>

¹¹ <https://srilankabrief.org/sri-lanka-human-rights-update-september-2022/>

¹² <https://www.cpalanka.org/cpa-statement-on-the-governments-revised-twenty-second-amendment-to-the-constitution-bill/>



A memorial to remember the 32nd anniversary of the Sathurukondan massacre was held in Batticaloa.
Photo courtesy: JDS Lanka

On 14th of September 2022, a collective of civil society groups covering all eight districts in Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri-Lanka held a campaign against the continuing state-sponsored intimidations against civil society organizations in North and East.¹³

A memorial to remember the 32nd anniversary of the Batticaloa massacre known as Sathurukondan massacre was held in Batticaloa. 184 Tamil people were allegedly killed by Sri Lankan government military on 9th September 1990, after being taken to the nearby army camp.¹⁴

The Gampaha High Court has acquitted two key suspects who were arrested over the murder of former Minister Jeyaraj Fernandopulle. The two suspects were accused of murdering 16 people including former Minister Jeyaraj Fernandopulle on April 6, 2008, in a bomb attack near Weliveriya Kanti Stadium.¹⁵

¹³ <https://srilankabrief.org/necc-provides-a-list-of-state-sponsored-intimidation-of-tamil-hrds-civil-society-and-calls-upon-the-un-to-protect-human-rights-in-sri-lanka/>

¹⁴ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1568263559582457857>

¹⁵ <https://www.newswire.lk/2022/09/01/jeyaraj-fernandopulle-murder-court-acquits-former-sp-ltte-member/>

3. Case Updates

Indictment served against Shehan Malaka Gamage

On 28th September, the Colombo High Court served indictments on civil activist, Shehan Malaka Gamage in relation to a statement he had made on the Easter Sunday bomb attacks.¹⁶ The Attorney General filed indictments against the civil activist under Penal Code offences for allegedly exciting or attempting to excite feelings of disaffection to the State. The case is to be taken up for trial on January 13 next year. Issuing a video statement¹⁷ Shehan Malaka reaffirmed that he will stand by his statement and prove its correctness.¹⁸

Student activist further remanded

Arrested student activist, the convener of Higher National Diploma (HND) students' union Haritha Darshana was ordered to be remanded until 16th September. Haritha was arrested after being asked to report to the Thebuwana Police Station to record a statement regarding a protest organized by HND students on 21st May 2022, to demand the resignation of the President. He was accused of allegedly violating a court order issued against the protest.¹⁹ Previously Colombo Fort Magistrate issued an order preventing HND students from entering certain roads in Colombo as requested by Police. Despite the Court order, Higher National Diploma Students marched into these roads facing the tear gas and water cannon attacks of the riot Police.²⁰

Travel ban lifted for Rajapakse brother: Supreme Court permitted Basil Rajapaksa, former minister of Finance and Rajapaksa family member to travel to USA for a period of one month, for medical treatment. The travel ban was imposed on him, several other politicians and high ranking government officials in relation to a Fundamental Rights petition filed in relation to the accountability of the country's economic crisis.²¹

Ex-CID officer not paid salary arrears: Former CID Sub Inspector Sugath Mendis who was arrested along with former CID Director Shani Abeysekera has not been paid his salary arrears as previously instructed by the Supreme Court, Mendis informed the court filing a motion. On May 18, the supreme court ordered that former CID sub inspector Sugath Mendis be paid his full salary and entitlements with effect from 23rd March 2022. This petition is to be taken up for argument on 21st of September. Sub-inspector Mendis was arrested and remanded for 11 months in connection with allegations that his superior officer SSP Shani Abeysekera had planted weapons in certain premises to frame former DIG Vaas-Gunawardena who was convicted along with his son and four others by a trial-at-bar for murdering millionaire businessman Mohamed Shyam. Shani Abeysekera and his team conducted investigations into several high profile cases against military, and politicians.²² It is believed the case

¹⁶ https://www.dailymirror.lk/latest_news/Civil-activist-Shehan-Malaka-indicted-in-High-Court/342-245774

¹⁷ https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1085761605639912&extid=CL-UNK-UNK-UNK-AN_GK0T-GK1C&mibextid=OzUgd7&ref=sharing

¹⁸ <https://srilankabrief.org/sri-lanka-human-rights-update-september-2022/>

¹⁹ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1565604311832449025>

²⁰ INFORM archives.

²¹ https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/Supreme-Court-allows-Basil-to-travel-USA-for-four-months/108-244203

²² https://www.dailymirror.lk/top_story/Ex-CID-officer-arrested-along-with-Shani-Abeysekera-PSC-fails-to-pay-his-salary-as-directed-by-SC/155-245203

against Sugath Mendis, Abeysekera and other Police officers is a reprisal for their involvement in these investigations.²³

MP Sanath Nishantha ordered to appear before the Court over Contempt of Court:

On 29th September, the Court of Appeal issued notices to MP Sanath Nishantha in relation to two petitions alleging him of contempt of court and ordered him to appear before the court on 13th October 2022.²⁴ The petitions were filed by Attorney-at-law Vijiith Kumara and Priyalal Sirisena. In their petitions they claimed that MP Nishantha had insulted the magistrates for granting bail to the Galle Face protesters during a media press conference held at the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna party headquarters on 23rd August 2022.^{25 26 27}

Lawyer charged for tooting horn in support of protesters released by the court:

Attorney at law Dushmantha Weeratne who had been arrested for tooting his vehicle horn to support the protesters on 09th September was discharged from the case by the Colombo Additional Magistrate M S Prabhakaran on 14th September 2022. Lawyer Dushmantha had installed his vehicle horn with the tune of the protest song “Kaputu Kaak Kaak Kaak”. The defence lawyers who appeared on behalf of Weerathne noted that it was a fundamental right recognized by the constitution to express one’s dissent using sounds or any other medium.²⁸

Protester released on bail: A youth activist involved with anti-government protests who was arrested in August was released on bail on 7th September 2022. He was arrested on 20th August and kept in remand prison for 19 days.²⁹

²³ http://www.colombopage.com/archive_19B/Nov24_1574608152CH.php

²⁴ <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/09/29/court-serves-summons-on-sanath-nishantha-for-alleged-contempt-of-court/>

²⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eq78yrpgl5s>

²⁶ <https://www.newswire.lk/2022/09/29/contempt-of-court-accusation-on-sanath-nishantha-court-update/>

²⁷ <https://www.dailynews.lk/2022/09/30/law-order/288252/statements-ca-orders-state-minister-nishantha-show-cause>

²⁸ <https://srilankabrief.org/sri-lanka-lawyer-released-from-charge-of-tooting-horn-to-famous-kaputu-kaak-kaak-kaak-tune/>

²⁹ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1567465838852153344>

4. Repression of Media and Journalists

4.1. Police summoned journalist Thavaseelan to record a statement:

Mankulam Police has summoned the Tamil Senior Journalist Shanmugan Thavaseelan to record a statement on 09th September 2022. He was questioned over a fuel scam that happened at the Pudukuduirippu Divisional Secretariats which he had reported on July 30th.³⁰

4.2. CTID summoned the Journalist Selvakumar Nilanthan:

Secretary of the Batticaloa District Tamil Journalist Association Selvakumar Nilanthan was summoned to the Counter Terrorism Investigation Division Colombo on 14th September 2022. Police officers attached to the Batticaloa police station visited his residence to hand over the summon notice and also took down the names and identity card numbers of the Nilanthan's family members. He was summoned to Counter Terrorism Investigation Department of Police for allegedly having links with Thayamihan, former Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Batticaloa political head.³¹ On 09th February this year Police officers related to the Criminal Investigation Department of Eravur Police station interrogated Selvakumar regarding his alleged connections with LTTE and diaspora.³²

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SRI LANKA POLICE

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Summons issued to Selvakumar Nilanthan by the Police. Photo Courtesy: Tamil Guardian

³⁰ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1566698684661874698>

31 <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-journalist-summoned-again-sri-lankas-terrorism-investigation-department>

³² <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1566406383205056518/photo/2>

4.3. Police summons the President of the Batticaloa District Tamil Journalists Union:

Police officers attached to the Batticaloa police station handed over a summon notice to Balasingham Krishnakumar, President of the Batticaloa District Tamil Journalists Union on 07th September 2022. He was summoned to the Counter Terrorism Investigation Division Headquarters at Colombo.³³



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Journalist Balasingham Krishnakumar and the summon notice. Photo Courtesy: JDS Lanka

4.4. Government banned the public servants from expressing opinion in social media on child hunger:

AFP reported that the Sri Lankan government has ordered the civil servants to avoid sharing their opinions in social media after some officials had claimed that some school students were fainting due to lack of food due to the country's economic crisis. Reportedly, the Ministry of Public Administration and Management has issued an order saying that a long established ban on speaking public servants to the media was extended to the social media posts. The order further said that “expressing opinions on social media by a public officer shall constitute an offence that leads to taking disciplinary action”.³⁴

4.5. Freelance writer Dulani Priyadarshani summoned to CID

Freelance writer Dulani Priyadarshini was summoned to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) headquarters in Colombo on 6th of September. She had been questioned for around 5 hours on her involvement with the protest movement.³⁵

³³ <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankas-ctid-summons-another-tamil-journalist>

³⁴ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/sri-lanka-imposes-social-media-ban-after-child-hunger-posts/article65947522.ece>

³⁵ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1567152022696214528>



Freelance writer Dulani Priyadarshani. Photo courtesy: Journalists for Democracy (JDS)

5. Repression of Freedom of Assembly

5.1. Three arrested for protesting against state backed construction of Buddhist temple

Three including two provincial and local politicians were arrested for participating at a protest against a state backed construction of a Buddhist temple in Kurunthoormalai in Mullaitivu. The protest was held on 21st September, demanding to halt the construction of the Buddhist temple. Hours after the protest, police arrested former Northern Provincial Council Member T Ravikaran and civil society activist R Mayuran, accusing them of “criminal coercion”. On 23rd September, Sinnarajah Logeswaran, a member of Maritime Pattu Local Council in Mullaitivu district was arrested in relation to the same incident.^{36 37}

5.2. 84 protesters arrested during a protest against government repression

Police arrested 84 protesters including three monks and four women on 23rd September in Colombo city during a protest organized by socialist youth union. Authorities claimed that the protest was “illegal” and “without any permission” a day after President Ranil Wickremesinghe declared several war-time high security zones in Colombo. Police also used tear gas and water cannons to attack protesters. The protest was against Wickremesinghe government’s repressive measures on dissents.³⁸ Though we were unable to verify through other sources, a prominent journalist reported that 3 journalists were also arrested along with the protesters.³⁹ Eranga Gunasekara, Mandira Perera and Koswatte Mahanama Thero were granted bail by Māligakanda magistrate, on 25th of September, while the rest of the protesters who got arrested were released on police bail without being produced in courts.



³⁶ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1573285715563409408>

³⁷ <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/another-tamil-activist-arrested-mullaitivu>

³⁸ <https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-police-arrest-84-for-illegal-protest-after-presidents-high-security-zone-declaration-100287/>

³⁹ <https://twitter.com/sunandadesh/status/1573939873484005376>

Protesters were attacked with teargas and water cannons. Photo courtesy: Newswire

It was reported that at least 7 protesters were hospitalised due to assaults by Police while Priyantha Pushpakumara, a resident of Kitulgala in Kegalle district was treated at Neuro Trauma Emergency Treatment Unit of Colombo National Hospital.⁴⁰

5.3. Military threatens the travelling memorial dedicated to Thileepan

Sri Lankan military have halted and threatened the travelling memorial dedicated to Thileepan, the former LTTE political wing leader who died fasting unto death in 1987, demanding release of Tamil political prisoners and withdrawal of military forces from North Eastern areas of Sri Lanka. On 20th September, several armed Sri Lankan soldiers halted and questioned organisers of the travelling memorial at Madhu Road junction in Mannar.⁴¹



Military halted the travelling memorial and questioned the organizers. Photo courtesy: Tamil Guardian

5.4. Anti-government protester arrested

A protester who took part in the recent anti-government protests was arrested in Nittambuwa area in Gampaha District on 4th September. Kankanamge Dhanushka Lakmal (35), a resident of Nittambuwa in western Sri Lanka who actively participated in the recent anti-government protest movement with his family, was arrested by Bemmulla police and produced before the Gampaha magistrate.⁴²

5.5. Person who rented a sound system for student meetings interrogated

Sumith Shantha, a resident in Rukmalgama in Colombo district, western province of Sri Lanka, who rented sound systems for recent meetings of Inter-University Student Federation (IUSFSL), was

⁴⁰ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1573941275266613248>

⁴¹ <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-military-threatens-thileepan-commemoration-convoy>

⁴² <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1566332210826862594>

summoned by the CID and questioned for nearly 10 hours on 1st and 2nd September about his "phone conversations with arrested student leader, Wasantha Mudalige".⁴³

5.6. Youth activist arrested for his involvement in anti-government protests

On 6th September, Sakuna Lakshan, a youth activist, was arrested when he appeared at CID Headquarters after he was summoned there to record a statement over his involvement in the protests. He was granted bail after being produced before the Colombo Fort Magistrate on the same day.⁴⁴

5.7. Eight trade union members summoned to CID for taking part at protests

Buddhi Wettasinghe, the President of the National Savings Bank branch of Ceylon Bank Employees Union and its member Bhathiya Praneeth were summoned to the Criminal Investigation Department for an inquiry on their participation in recent anti-government protests on 19th September. Central Committee member Indika Janaka and Hemantha Gunasekara, a member of Moratuwa branch of the same bank were summoned on 20th September. Another member Kanchana Bandara was summoned on 22nd September.⁴⁵ Three more activists Malaka Liyanage, Ryan Wickrematunga & Shehan Kariyapperuma, members of the National Savings Bank branch of Ceylon Bank Employees Union were summoned on 29th September.⁴⁶

5.8. Committee member of the Ceylon Teachers union summoned to CID

Renukā Maliyagoda, a Central Executive Committee member of Ceylon Teachers Union and the daughter of veteran Sri Lankan trade unionist late Jayaratna Maliyagoda was summoned to the Criminal Investigation Department Headquarters in Colombo on 20th September 2022.⁴⁷

⁴³ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1565715436850876417>

⁴⁴ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1567152022696214528>

⁴⁵ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1572548574789115906>

⁴⁶ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1574327801812946944>

⁴⁷ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1571824019296456705>



*Central Executive Committee member Renuka Maliyagoda at the Colombo Crime Division Dematagoda.
photo Courtesy: The Leader*

5.9. Student activist monk summoned to Counter-Terrorism Unit

Tissapura Siri Sumedha thero, a member of Inter University Students Federation was summoned to Counter Terrorism Investigation Division of Police on 23rd September after police teams visited University of Kelaniya, his parents' house & his monastic college to inquire about his whereabouts.⁴⁸

5.10. CID has summoned a lawyer for an inquiry on 9th May violence

The Criminal Investigation Department of Sri Lanka Police summoned Shammika Wickremasinghe, an attorney-at-law from Gampaha district in western province for an inquiry on May 9th violence. On 9th May pro-government mobs attacked the peaceful protesters in Galleface.⁴⁹

5.11. Ex-servicemen's Association Auditorium refuses to provide venue for the trade union meeting

Journalists for Democracy (JDS) reported that Alliance of Trade Unions & Mass Organisations were forced to change the venue of a meeting on proposed IMF grant conditions, as the auditorium belonging to Sri Lanka Ex-Servicemen's Association denied them access to the auditorium allegedly under the orders of Defence Secretary General Kamal Gunaratne.^{50 51}

5.12. CID visit the house of an activist and summons for an inquiry

⁴⁸ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1573186665862029312>

⁴⁹ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1572124664784392193>

⁵⁰ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1571427443860176897>

⁵¹ <https://english.theleader.lk/news/2415-defence-secretary-s-order-denies-venue-for-tu-meeting>

Officers attached to Criminal Investigation Department visited the house of activist Shashika Bandara of Kurunegala in northwestern Province of Sri Lanka on 14th of September and informed him to be present at the CID Headquarters in Colombo on 20th September for an inquiry. He was accused of “illegally entering the Prime Minister’s premises and causing harm to the property” during protests.⁵²

5.13. Freelance Photographer summoned to Mutwal police

Sachini Kaushalya, an activist & freelance photographer involved in recent protests, residing in Battaramulla in suburban Colombo was summoned to Mutwal police station in Colombo on 16th September. She was previously arrested regarding her involvement in protests and has been granted bail by Colombo Fort magistrate two days before.⁵³

5.14. A youth in Kuliypitiya involved with protests summoned to the CID:

Achinthe Imesh Pathiraja, a young man involved with anti-government protests was summoned to the Criminal Investigation Department on 12th September. He was questioned over 5 hours regarding his involvement in the recent protests.⁵⁴ Police have accused him of being involved in damaging the property on 9th May violence.⁵⁵

5.15. A carpentry worker involved with protests arrested

Rashen Chamikara de Mel (27), a carpentry worker from Moratumulla in Moratuwa in Colombo district who participated in recent local protests, was arrested by the Police, then granted bail after being presented before the Rawatawatta Magistrate on 12th September.⁵⁶ Police have accused him of being involved in damaging the property on 9th May violence.⁵⁷

5.16. Activist Lahiru Weerasekara arrested

Former student activist, National organizer of ‘Youth for Change’ and a leader of anti-government protests Lahiru Weerasekara was arrested on 9th Friday while returning from a candlelight vigil held in memory of those who lost their lives in the ‘Aragalaya’ protest movement, at Galle Face Green main protest area in Colombo. He was released on bail by Maligakanda Magistrate court on the following day and admitted to Colombo National Hospital after being produced before the judicial medical officer.⁵⁸ Weerasekara was accused of allegedly obstructing police from carrying out their duties during a protest held at Maradana on 30 August.⁵⁹

5.17. Two youth activists involved in protests arrested and granted bail

⁵² <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1570678405133369345/>

⁵³ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1570671053030166531>

⁵⁴ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1569315364592562179>

⁵⁵ <https://theleader.lk/news/13333-2022-09-12-arrested>

⁵⁶ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1569249785554542601>

⁵⁷ <https://theleader.lk/news/13333-2022-09-12-arrested>

⁵⁸ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1568594471956189185>

⁵⁹ <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/84866/lahiru-weerasekara-produced-before-judicial-medical-officer>

Nadeera Francis and Nalinda Cooray, two youth activists involved in the anti-government protest movement, were released on bail by Colombo Fort Magistrate on 13th September. They were arrested the previous day by the CID when they appeared at CID Headquarters upon summons.⁶⁰

5.18. Anti-government protester actress Damitha Abeyratne arrested

Actress Damitha Abeyratne was arrested by the Colombo Crimes Division on 7th September⁶¹, while taking part in a protest-themed 'The Silent Hour' at the Parliament Round-about opposite Diyatha Uyana in Battaramulla in Colombo suburbs. Police said that she was arrested for unlawfully entering the President's Office during the recent protests in July 2022. On 12th of September, she was granted bail by the Fort magistrate Court. According to the Police, she was accused of unlawful assembly, unlawful entry into the President's office and other charges.⁶² She was a leading figure in the anti-government protest site.



Arresting actress Damitha Abeyrathna for taking part in the protest held near the Parliament . Photo Courtesy: NewsCutter

⁶⁰ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1569598000732803072>

⁶¹ <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/09/07/actress-damitha-abeyrathne-arrested/>

⁶² <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/09/12/damitha-abeyratne-released-on-bail/>

5.19. Victim of 9th May pro-government assault summoned to CID

On 7th September, Oshantha Prasad Dābare, a resident of Wellawatta area in Colombo city, who had been actively involved in the recent protest campaign and brutally assaulted by pro-government mobs on 9th May was summoned to the Criminal Investigation Department in Colombo, to obtain a statement.⁶³

5.20. Power Cut on anti-government meeting

A power cut was reported when a public rally organized by the Inter-University student Federation and Alliance of Trade Unions and Mass organizations was happening at the Hyde in Colombo city. “The powercut is an attempt to disrupt the rally by the government” activists have said, according to the Vikalpa website.⁶⁴

5.21. Police in civilian clothes attempt to arrest an activist

On 15th September, Police in civilian clothes attempted to arrest an activist named Nipun during a protest held in Colombo Fort, without providing any legal documents.⁶⁵

5.22. Police Arrested a local council member participated at a protest:

Sinnarajah Logeswaran, a member of Maritime Pattu Local Council in Mullaitivu district was arrested by the police on 22nd September after he was summoned to the police station for an inquiry about the mass protest held two days before against state backed land grab in Kurunthoormalai in Mullaitivu district. He was remanded until 29th September by Mullaitivu magistrate.



Sinnarajah Logeswaran in Jail cell at Mullaitivu police station. Photo courtesy: JDS Lanka

⁶³ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1567395925978451968>

⁶⁴ <https://twitter.com/vikalpavoices/status/1570769677831516161>

⁶⁵ <https://twitter.com/sunandadesh/status/1570401516447764480>

6. Legal and Policy Actions

6.1. A number of new High Security Zones declared in Colombo city

On 23rd of September, a Gazette notification was issued declaring new High Security Zones in Colombo including Parliament, Supreme Court, High courts & Magistrate Courts in Colombo, Attorney General Department, Presidential Secretariat, President's House, Navy, Air Force and Police Headquarters, Ministry of Defence, Sri Lankan Army Headquarters in Akuregoda, Prime Minister's Office, Temple Trees, and Official Residences of Defence secretary and Commanders of Tri Forces⁶⁶ under the Official Secret Act. Issuing a press release, Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) stated that it is deeply concerned about the Government's approach to adopting the Official Secret Act and making a declaration which grossly violates the fundamental rights of the people of this country, and it reiterated that the Official Secret Act cannot be adopted to declare High-Security Zones.⁶⁷ Soon after the declaration, the protests that were conducted in close proximity to these government buildings and premises were said to be illegal by the Police, and around 84 protesters were arrested on the next day, as discussed in the previous section. Issuing a tweet, UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Association, Clement Voule raised concerns saying that the declaration of High-Security Zones in Sri Lanka move is considered as prohibiting public gatherings and Sri Lankan authorities must respect the people's rights to protest.⁶⁸

6.2. The Bill of Bureau of rehabilitation

A controversial Bill titled "[Bureau of Rehabilitation Act](#)" was published in the Gazette on 9th September 2022 and placed on the order paper of the parliament on 23rd September 2022. Human rights activists and others held that the bill was an attempt to target those who participated in the recent protests, to send them through a forcible process of rehabilitation, without following the judiciary procedures. Former Human Rights Commissioner Ambika Satkunanathan and Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) went to the Supreme court challenging the bill, as it violates the fundamental rights provided by the constitution.⁶⁹ ⁷⁰ Opposition politicians urged the government to withdraw the bill immediately.⁷¹ Persons to whom the proposed law applies included former combatants, individuals who have "engaged in extreme or destructive acts of sabotage" ("members of violent extremist groups"), persons who have a drug dependency, and "any other group of persons who require treatments and rehabilitation." Satkunanathan and others pointed out that these terms are not adequately legally defined, and could be easily turned into a repressive law that violates fundamental rights, and used against peaceful protesters.⁷²

⁶⁶ <https://www.newswire.lk/2022/09/23/gazette-issued-declaring-several-high-security-zones-in-colombo/>

⁶⁷ https://www.hrcsl.lk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Press-Release-on-26_09_2022.pdf

⁶⁸ <https://www.newswire.lk/2022/09/30/un-special-rapporteur-concerned-over-declaration-of-high-security-zones/>

⁶⁹ <https://island.lk/ex-hrcsl-head-challenges-bureau-of-rehabilitation-bill/>

⁷⁰ <https://www.cpalanka.org/centre-for-policy-alternatives-guarantee-ltd-and-dr-paikiasothy-saravanamuttu-vs-the-attorney-general-in-re-the-bill-titled-bureau-of-rehabilitation-act/>

⁷¹ <https://www.newswire.lk/2022/10/02/sumanthiran-urges-president-to-withdraw-bureau-of-rehabilitation-bill/>

⁷² <https://web.archive.org/web/20220930020145/https://www.themorning.lk/the-danger-of-the-proposed-bureau-of-rehabilitation/>

7. Other Incidents

7.1. Minister threatens to take action against the whistleblower who exposed harmful aflatoxin levels in food supplement

Speaking to the media, the President of Public Health Inspectors' Union of Sri Lanka (PHIUSL), M. G. Upul Rohana revealed that higher doses of aflatoxin were detected in the Thriposha the nutrition supplement that is distributed to infants below the age of 5 years and pregnant and breastfeeding women free of charge by the government.⁷³ He further said that the Thriposha manufacturer was withdrawing all stocks of the supplementary food which had been distributed to MoHs after aflatoxin, the harmful substance produced by mould, was detected in samples that were tested by the Government Analyst, and asked to take action against those who are responsible. The Government manufacturer temporarily suspended production a few months earlier when the imported maize was tested by Customs contained Aflatoxin.⁷⁴ After this was questioned in the parliament, the Minister of Health Keheliya Rambukwella refused the claims and said that legal action will be taken against the health official who made that statement.⁷⁵ He further said that the officials should obtain prior permission from the Secretary to the Ministry before making such statements, and they will be punished for not following the proper procedure.⁷⁶ Sri Lanka Thriposha Limited Chairman Deepthi Kularathne said several Thriposha samples tested before August this year had been found with aflatoxin above the permitted amount and therefore, those stocks had been recalled with immediate effect.⁷⁷ Later PHIUSL reconfirmed their statement, and warned that they would take trade union action if the Ministry takes action against their President.⁷⁸

7.2. Police refuses to disclose the number of people detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act

The Sri Lanka Police has refused to provide the number of citizens arrested and detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act at the Right to Information Commission. Wasantha Kumara Kotiakumbura, the police inspector and lawyer of the Police Legal Division, who represented the Inspector General of Police, refused to provide such information saying that it could be a serious prejudice to national security. In the recent past, a number of persons have been arrested under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) for taking part at anti-government protesters.⁷⁹ The case will be taken up on 7th October 2022.

7.3. Batticaloa based female human right activist summoned to the Counter Terrorism Investigation Department (CTID) in Colombo:

⁷³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bug1iRX9dzw>

⁷⁴ <https://ceylontoday.lk/2022/09/22/probe-toxic-thriposha-stocks/>

⁷⁵ <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/85071/health-minister-rubbishes-reports-of-aflatoxin-in-thriposha-vows-legal-action>

⁷⁶ <https://island.lk/health-minister-wants-to-punish-officers-for-blowing-whistle-on-contaminated-thriposha/>

⁷⁷ <https://www.dailynews.lk/2022/09/23/local/287799/no-toxins-thriposha-stocks-released-now-chairman>

⁷⁸ <https://www.themorning.lk/thriposha-ltd-to-provide-aflatoxins-report/>

⁷⁹ <https://srilankabrief.org/sri-lanka-police-police-refuses-to-disclose-the-number-of-people-detained-under-the-prevention-of-terrorism-act/>

Laxmanarajani Jeyapragash, human rights activist based in Batticaloa was summoned to the Counter Terrorism Investigation Department in Colombo on 13th September 2022, over an inquiry for which the police officer who gave the summoned notice refrained from giving further details.⁸⁰

7.4. Female Member of Tamil National Alliance summoned to Terrorism Investigation Division.

Kanthaiya Kalaivani, a leading female activist in Batticaloa attached to political party Tamil National Alliance was summoned to the Colombo Terrorism Investigation Division head office on 12th September, for the third time.⁸¹

⁸⁰ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1568170104801591296>

⁸¹ <https://twitter.com/JDSLanka/status/1567375435566137344>