

# Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka

## December 2024



A heated altercation broke out between the police and school development officers who were demonstrating outside the Ministry of Education. Courtesy: World Socialist Web Site.

Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka in September 2024.

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# 1. Executive Summary

**Context:** The Ministry of Public Security plans to establish special criminal investigation bureaus in all provinces, supervised by the Inspector General of Police, focusing on unsolved cases, organized crime, drug trafficking, and region-specific offenses.

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has appointed Major General Lasantha Rodrigo as the 25th Army Commander and Rear Admiral Kanchana Banagoda as the Navy Commander.

The new Chief of the Department of Excise, U. L. Udaya Kumara Perera, has shifted the focus from minor offenders to large-scale raids on illicit liquor dens and narcotics operations, aiming to reduce the industry and improve law enforcement's impact.

The Cabinet approves President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's proposal to amend the Anti-Corruption Act, addressing legal, interpretation, and technical challenges faced by the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption.

The Financial Crimes Investigation Division (FCID) will be restructured into a fully-fledged investigative body, similar to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). The Central Crime Investigation Bureau will oversee all units, aiming to streamline operations and address inefficiencies. Special divisions will be established in each province to clear pending complaints.

Sri Lanka's Human Rights Commission has requested President Anura Kumara Dissanayake to inspect the welfare and detention conditions of 115 Myanmar asylum seekers, including over 40 children, in line with Sri Lankan law and international human rights obligations.

MP T. Raviharan has criticized the Forest Department for seizing agricultural and residential land in the Vanni region, which was once Tamil-owned and protected by the LTTE. He called for immediate release of these seized lands, citing displacement and encroachment without informing local authorities or landowners. Raviharan urges the newly elected government to address this issue.

The Government plans to amend the Buddhist Temporalities Ordinance to address concerns about individuals and organizations distorting religious teachings and practices. The amendment aims to address issues caused by pseudo-monks and priests, such as Jerome Fernando, who self-proclaimed to be a 'prophet'.

The Podujana Progressive Employees Union accuses the government of political retaliation in the trade union sector, with leaders transferred and offices closed. The union urges the government to engage in democratic dialogue and warns against taking action against the government if it intends to suppress trade unions.

Sri Lanka Police are investigating alleged misuse of the President's Fund, led by Acting IGP Priyantha Weerasuriya, following a complaint from the Organisation of Lawyers to Protect Public Funds.

Health Minister Dr Nalinda Jayatissa announced the new Constitution will recognize healthcare access as a fundamental human right, allowing individuals to seek legal recourse if it is violated.

Dr Nalinda Jayatissa, Cabinet Spokesman, emphasized the government's commitment to combating underworld activities and drug trafficking through systematic security forces' long-term efforts.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) held the first National Conference for Families of Missing Persons in Sri Lanka, involving 51 families from diverse communities. The conference aimed to share experiences, discuss challenges, and improving processes for missing persons.

Sri Lanka's government, Central Bank, and Financial Intelligence Unit discussed preparations for APG's Mutual Evaluation, focusing on preventing money laundering and countering terrorism financing. Key participants emphasized legal reforms, capacity building, and inter-agency cooperation.

The government has reduced tri-forces personnel from former presidents' security, focusing on police officers, with reviews every six months, due to high costs.

The Asian Human Rights Commission has urged Sri Lanka's President to implement urgent legal reforms, including daily criminal case hearings, legislation against bribery and corruption, and improved Attorney General's Department.

The Coalition against Repressive Laws (CARL) has called on President Anura Kumara Dissanayake to repeal repressive laws, including the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and the Online Safety Act, which they argue violate fundamental rights and freedoms. They argue that the NPP and JVP have historically opposed such laws, and that the government is using the PTA to restrict social media freedom.

The government continues to prohibit promoting banned organisations or glorifying acts of terrorism. Suspects are accused of inciting violence and spreading misleading content promoting a proscribed organisation's activities. Investigations have revealed that seven individuals organized illegal celebrations promoting the LTTE organization in the Northern Province. Minister of Public Security Ananda Wijepala claimed photos from past LTTE celebrations were circulated on social media to create false narratives.

Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya mistakenly thanked the 'Republic of China' instead of the 'People's Republic of China' during a school uniform consignment event, causing a diplomatic mishap. She arrived late, keeping the Chinese Ambassador waiting at Colombo Port. Amarasuriya apologised privately, but no public acknowledgement was made.

The Hind Rajab Foundation accuses Israeli soldier Gal Ferenbook of war crimes, including killing a Palestinian civilian and degrading the body. Ferenbook, nicknamed the "Terminator" is in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The Foundation urges Sri Lankan authorities to arrest him and cooperate with the International Criminal Court.

The Sri Lankan Ministry of Defence has mandated all firearm licensees to return their firearms for inspection by January 2025, with 85% complied with thus far. Those wishing to retain firearms must submit appeals by October 2024.

Sri Lanka Navy and Police reported over 100 Myanmar refugees arriving at Mullivaikkal due to illegal transportation and food and water shortages.

The Parliamentary Opposition in Sri Lanka has called for an inquiry into forced cremation of bodies, particularly Muslim ones, during the Covid-19 pandemic, despite Dr Nalinda Jayatissa's refusal due to medical ethics and Right to Information Act provisions.

The Child Protection Alliance has submitted a proposal to the Sri Lankan government, urging them to protect children, who make up 25% of the population and are ranked among the top five crimes.

The Supreme Court dismissed a petition by attorney Sarith Maheeputhra Pathirathne, challenging the Constitutional Council's rejection of her nomination as a Supreme Court judge. The court found the council did not infringe on the petitioner's Fundamental Rights and ordered him to pay Rs. 2 million in costs.

Former Colombo Crimes Division Director, ASP Neville Silva, has been arrested and is placed in custody. The CID is investigating his alleged partial behavior towards a complainant.

Deputy Minister Muneer Mulaffar plans to introduce an inclusive mechanism to strengthen national unity, focusing on involving all groups in decision-making processes and continuing the truth and reconciliation commission.

Jaffna Police are investigating a complaint from Jaffna Hospital officials accusing Independent MP Archchuna Ramanathan of disrupting hospital operations and blocking an investigation into a pregnant woman's death.

President Anura Kumara Disسانayake has called for public disclosure of the reasons behind withdrawing 40 out of 69 Bribery or Corruption Commission cases in 2021 and 45 out of 89 cases in 2022.

In December 2023, Welikada Prison prisoners were sent to improve prison officers' homes 233 times, with 62 trips made using nine vehicles. Despite Budget Circular No. 1/2023 requiring strict overtime control, the Department of Prisons still spent Rs. 982 million on overtime and holiday allowances, an increase of Rs. 106 million from the previous year.

Cabinet approval was granted to publish the Proceeds of Crime Bill in the Government Gazette and present it in Parliament. The International Monetary Fund submitted observations, which were referred to a committee appointed by the Minister of Justice, Prison Reforms and

Constitutional Reforms. The committee recommended amending the bill, and the proposal was approved by the Cabinet.

The NPP government plans to introduce a new constitution within three years, aiming to facilitate public discourse on key issues like Provincial Councils and power distribution.

The Cabinet of Ministers has approved the establishment of a 'Clean Sri Lanka' Fund and appointed a Presidential Task Force to tackle Sri Lanka's economic, political, social, spiritual, and environmental issues.

Opposition SJB Parliamentarian Mujibur Rahman criticizes the government for excluding Tamil and Muslim representatives from the 'Clean Sri Lanka' Presidential Task Force, arguing that it would have failed to effectively address the needs of Tamil-speaking communities.

Archchuna Ramanathan, an Independent Member of Parliament from Jaffna District, was attacked by MP Sujith Sanjaya Perera at the Opposition Leader's Office. Perera had recommended consulting with party leaders or the Speaker, but Perera dismissed such criticism as inappropriate.

The military has not complied with a Cabinet decision to vacate a camp in Karkovalam, Jaffna, despite the land's supposed return to Tamil owners.

Tamil families of the disappeared have protested in Jaffna, demanding an international investigation into their enforced disappearances. They have sought justice for over a decade, but Sri Lankan governments have not addressed the issue. They call on the international community for intervention.

The Ministry of Women and Child Affairs is set to open a new shelter in Nuwara Eliya in January 2025, providing additional support for women and children affected by gender-based violence.

**Case Updates:** Arjuna Aloysius, owner of Mendis Company and son-in-law of former Central Bank Governor Arjuna Mahendran, was presented before the Colombo Chief Magistrate's Court to address deficiencies in the 2015 Central Bank Treasury Bonds case file, including irregularities in his bail signing.

The government plans to reopen the investigation into rugby player Wasim Thajudeen's murder, but has not yet contacted his family or their lawyer. Concerns have been raised over Dr. Hans Wijesuriya's appointment as Chief Advisor to the President, who was accused of suppressing evidence.

A petition has been filed in the Court of Appeal to reopen legal action over the deaths of 11 inmates during the 2020 Mahara Prison riots. The petition challenges the Attorney General's Department's decision to close the case, citing gunshot wounds as evidence of excessive force and a previous order from the Welisara Magistrate's Court.

The Colombo High Court accepted Kalib Sameer's confession as government evidence in the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks, despite his lawyers arguing it was not voluntary, and plans to appeal.

Sri Lanka's government mandates NGOs to register with the National Secretariat, despite existing legal compliance, requiring scrutiny from multiple ministries. Temporary certificates will be issued.

The Supreme Court ruled that former Governor Azath Salley's 2021 arrest under the Prevention of Terrorism Act was illegal and ordered his compensation of Rs. 75,000.

The Committee for Protecting Prisoners (CPRP) protested against the Attorney General's interference in the 2020 Mahara prison massacre and plans to file a complaint with the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka.

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The Kokkuthoduvai mass grave case, involving LTTE fighter remains, has been adjourned until February 27, 2025, due to setbacks and legal challenges. The case began in June 2023 and has faced delays, funding issues, and evidence mishandling concerns.

Renuka Perera, Administrative Secretary of SLPP, was arrested by CID for spreading false information about Northern 'Mahaviru' commemorations on social media.

**Repression of Media and Journalists:** Sri Lanka Police's CID has obtained a statement from journalist S. Aslam, following a Ministry of Public Security complaint (The Morning, 2024).

A Tamil journalist and author, Murugaiyah Thamilselvan known for his coverage of illegal drug trafficking, was assaulted in Kilinochchi by a van-attacking group, who then escaped.

**Freedom of Assembly and Association:** Ananda Wijepala, Minister of Public Security and Parliamentary Affairs, reported that 10 of 244 Maaveerar Naal commemoration events in Northern Province featured LTTE-related symbols, prompting police action. Four individuals were arrested during a protest in Battaramulla demanding permanent teaching positions for school development officers. The protest, organised by around 500 members, led to traffic disruption and injuries to three police officers. The Education Ministry



has emphasised the need for recruitment to follow Public Service Commission recommendations and a Supreme Court directive.

**Repressive Legal and Policy Action:** President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has ordered the armed forces to maintain public order in all administrative districts of Sri Lanka, in accordance with Section 12 of the Public Security Ordinance.

**Other Incidents:** HRCSL Commissioner Nimal G. Punchihewa reported 8,000 pending human rights violations since COVID-19, with 70 daily complaints. Complaints mainly come from education, police, and health sectors. Women arrested during massage parlour raids are particularly prevalent.

A garment factory worker in Kotmale has been protesting for five days, demanding a salary increase of Rs. 5,000 to cope with rising living costs. The management offered Rs. 2,000 due to financial constraints and the need to reduce welfare benefits if more are provided. Protestors also accused the Labour Office of favouring the management.

A Gothatuwa Police Station constable was arrested for allegedly using obscene language to sexually harass the OIC of the Children and Women's Bureau over the phone.

Five Excise Department officers were released on bail after being arrested by Gothatuwa Police for allegedly harassing residents. The incident involved a house attack, a woman's tattered clothes, and a child's hospitalisation.

The Ministry of Public Security has granted full authority to investigate and take action against police officers involved in misconduct, with 30-40 officers suspended and ongoing investigations. Officers involved in bribery and corruption will face equal treatment.

## 2. Context

### New developments in the law enforcement and armed forces

The Ministry of Public Security plans to establish special criminal investigation bureaus in all provinces by early 2025 to combat crime more effectively. These bureaus, structured similarly to the Colombo Crime Division will be supervised by the Inspector General of Police, with Senior Deputy Inspectors General taking on operational roles. They will focus on unsolved cases, organized crime, drug trafficking, and region-specific offenses like human smuggling. Each bureau will have a public hotline for tips (Samaraweera, 2024).

### President appoints new Army and Navy Commanders



Major General Lasantha Rodrigo, the recently appointed Army Commander, receiving blessings from Buddhist.

Source: <http://army.lk/>

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has appointed Major General Lasantha Rodrigo as the 25th Commander of the Sri Lankan Army, succeeding Vikum Liyanage. Rear Admiral Kanchana Banagoda has been appointed as the Navy Commander, succeeding Vice Admiral Priyantha Perera (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

## **Chief of the Department of Excise warns officers**

The new Chief of the Department of Excise, U. L. Udaya Kumara Perera has instructed officials to prioritise major raids on large-scale illicit liquor dens and narcotics operations instead of targeting minor offenders. The traditional target-based evaluation system, which required officials to produce 250-300 court cases annually, will be replaced with a focus on impactful, large-scale cases. Minor cases involving small amounts of illicit liquor or drugs will no longer count toward performance metrics. The goal is to reduce the illicit liquor industry and improve law enforcement's impact on society by focusing on high-value targets (Kariyakarawana, 2024).

## **New Anti-Corruption Measures**

The Cabinet has granted approval for a proposal submitted by President Anura Kumara Disسانayake to amend the Anti-Corruption Act. The Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption has faced legal, interpretation, and technical challenges in enforcing the Anti-Corruption Act, No.9 of 2023. To address these issues, the Commission has proposed amendments to certain sections of the Act and the introduction of new sections. The President proposed the formation of a committee to review the Anti-Corruption Act and provide recommendations on necessary amendments and new sections (Office of the Cabinet of Ministers - Sri Lanka, 2024).

## **Government plans to transform the FCID into a comprehensive investigative arm**

The Financial Crimes Investigation Division (FCID) will be revamped and transformed into a fully-fledged investigative body, similar to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). Both the CID and FCID will operate under a Senior Deputy Inspector General of Police (Senior DIG) as part of a broader restructuring plan. A special body called the Central Crime Investigation Bureau will be established to oversee all criminal investigative units across the country. This bureau aims to streamline operations and address inefficiencies. President Anura Kumara Disسانayake chaired a meeting to discuss police restructuring and operational improvements. Special criminal investigative divisions, such as the Colombo Crime Division, will be set up in each province. These units will help clear the CID's backlog of 29,000 pending complaints and expedite investigations into disregarded complaints from outstation areas (Bandara, 2024).

## **Underworld will be suppressed, assures Cabinet Spokesman**

Dr Nalinda Jayatissa, Cabinet Spokesman, pledged the government's commitment to combating underworld activities and drug trafficking through long-term security forces' systematic efforts (Ada Derana, 2024).

## **HRCSL urges to facilitate access to Myanmar asylum seekers detained in Mullaitivu**

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) has urged President Anura Kumara Dissanayake to facilitate the inspection of the welfare and detention conditions of 115 Myanmar asylum seekers, which includes more than 40 children, currently detained in Sri Lanka. HRCSL officials were denied access to the Mullaitivu detention site on December 26, 2024, by Air Force officials, who cited instructions from the Controller General of Immigration and Emigration. Subsequent attempts to gain access through communication with relevant authorities were unsuccessful, with the Department of Immigration and Emigration stating ministerial approval was required. The HRCSL emphasised its authority under the Human Rights Act to monitor the welfare of all detained persons including asylum seekers and to inspect places of detention. It urged immediate access to the Mullaitivu Air Force Base to assess living conditions and welfare particularly for the children. The HRCSL requested President Dissanayake to direct relevant institutions to facilitate its officers' access to carry out their investigation. The Commission stressed the importance of protecting the rights of vulnerable individuals, particularly children, in line with Sri Lankan law and international human rights obligations (Ada Derana, 2024).

## **Transfers to trade union leaders: Allegations from the Podujana Progressive Workers' Union**

The Podujana Progressive Employees Union has accused the current government of initiating political retaliation in the trade union sector. The Secretary, Bandula Saman Kumara, claims that trade union leaders in several state institutions, including the State Engineering Design Corporation and the Foreign Employment Bureau, have been transferred without reason. Many trade union offices in various institutions have been closed to the extent that they are unable to operate, though efforts are being made to resolve the issue without legal action. The Secretary urges the government to stop its actions and engage in discussions with trade unions, emphasising that the unions are ready for democratic dialogue. The union has warned that if the government intends to suppress trade unions, the union will not hesitate to take action against it (Balasooriya, 2024).

## **Government plans to amend the Buddhist Temporalities Ordinance**

The Government plans to amend the Buddhist Temporalities Ordinance in response to concerns from religious institutions about individuals and organisations distorting religious teachings and practices. Articles 42 and 43 of the Ordinance will be amended. Article 42 addresses the offense of passing off as a bhikkhu, while Article 43 grants power to make regulations. Religious leaders, including Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, have raised concerns about the issue. The Government is ready to assist religious institutions in addressing these concerns. The amendment aims to tackle issues caused by pseudo-monks who distort religious practices. Concerns were raised about individuals like Jerome Fernando, who was involved in a controversial incident as he self-proclaimed to be a 'Prophet' (Tennekoon, 2024).

## **MP Ravikaran: Forest Department encroaching on Tamil people's lands**



MP T. Ravikaran speaking about the release of land occupied by the Tamil people by the Forest Department in the Vavuniya North Divisional Secretariat areas. Source:

MP T. Ravikaran stated that the Forest Department has seized a significant amount of agricultural and residential land in the Vanni region, which previously belonged to Tamil people and was protected by the LTTE before 2009. Also emphasised that these seized

lands must be released immediately to their rightful owners. The people of the Vanni region experienced displacement due to the conflict, and resettlement has occurred over varying periods. Lands that were once cultivated now appear as dense forests due to prolonged displacement. The Forest Department is marking boundaries and taking over lands without informing local authorities (District Secretary, Divisional Secretary, Grama Niladhari) or the rightful landowners. The encroachment has deprived people of their lands, adversely affecting their ability to sustain livelihoods. Raviharan called on the newly elected government, including the Deputy Minister for Development Coordination, President, and Prime Minister, to address this issue and ensure the lands are returned to their rightful owners (Tamilwin, 2024).

### **TPA calls for immediate halt of plantation resident evictions**

MP Mano Ganesan, leader of the Tamil Progressive Alliance, has called for an immediate moratorium on estate management's eviction of plantation residents. Ganesan argued that plantation residents are lawful citizens and should not be displaced. He criticized Sunderland Estate's management, comparing it to modern-day slavery, and called for government freeze on evictions until systemic reforms are implemented (Newswire, 2024).

### **Deputy Minister claims some police officers are on the payroll of underworld figures**

Deputy Minister of Public Security, Sunil Watagala alleged that some police officers are taking regular payments from underworld and drug trafficking activities. He emphasized that certain actions to combat these activities cannot be disclosed publicly. Following intelligence reports, many officers in Ruwanwella and Avissawella were transferred due to their involvement in the underworld network. Watagala mentioned discussions with the Acting IGP and revealed that the current underworld leader is operating in Mathugama. He emphasized the seriousness of the issue and the implementation of measures by a police-led team, urging officers to respect their duty to the public (Ada Derana, 2024).

### **Acting IGP directs CID to investigate alleged misuse of President's Fund**

Sri Lanka Police are investigating alleged misuse of the President's Fund, led by Acting IGP Priyantha Weerasuriya, following a complaint from the Organisation of Lawyers to Protect Public Funds. The fund, intended for public welfare, has been criticized for lack of transparency, with millions allocated to MPs and officials for personal health needs (Daily FT, 2024).

## **Access to healthcare to be a Fundamental Right**

Health Minister Dr Nalinda Jayatissa announced that the new Constitution would recognise the right to access healthcare as a fundamental human right. The constitutional provision would allow individuals to seek legal recourse if their right to healthcare is violated. Dr Jayatissa emphasised the government's responsibility to protect citizens' health and its commitment to this goal (Ceylon Today, 2024).

## **AHRC calls on President Dissanayake to prioritise urgent legal reforms**

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has urged Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake to implement urgent legal reforms. The AHRC highlighted three key areas for reform: daily hearings of serious criminal cases to speed up the judicial process and reduce delays, legislation to combat bribery and corruption to restore public trust and accountability, and reforming the Attorney General's Department to improve its independence, efficiency, and transparency (Ada Derana, 2024).

**Day-to-Day Hearing of Trials for Serious Crimes:** The effectiveness of punishment relies on the certainty of justice. Trials for serious crimes should be heard daily to avoid delays, with a focus on reducing the long delays in criminal cases, ensuring timely resolutions, and increasing public confidence in the justice system.

**Corruption Control Reform:** The AHRC proposes making corruption control more efficient by selecting investigators from outside the police force for the Commission Against Bribery and Corruption, inspired by the independent model of Hong Kong's ICAC. This will ensure impartiality and effectiveness in combating corruption.

**Reforming the Attorney General's Department:** The AHRC suggests transforming the Attorney General's Department, which has been shaped by arbitrary governance post-1978. The department should return to functioning under the rule of law to restore justice and accountability. These reforms are crucial for reversing the damage caused by previous governance changes and are vital for the restoration of law and human rights in Sri Lanka (Asian Human Rights Commission, 2024).

## **Defence Ministry sets deadline to return licensed firearms provided to civilians**

The Sri Lankan Ministry of Defence has directed all firearm licensees to return their licensed firearms for inspection by January 20, 2025 to ensure proper regulation and minimise misuse. About 85% have complied so far. Licensees wishing to retain firearms had to submit appeals by October 30, 2024, with only one firearm per person allowed after review.



Firearms issued by the Army and Police were supposed to be returned by December 31, 2024. Non-compliance will result in legal action under the Firearm Ordinance No. 33 of 1916 (Ada Derana, 2024).

### **Jackson Anthony's son-in-law complains of police harassment**

A police investigation is underway to determine whether popular author Kasun Mahendra was mistreated by Athurugiriya police upon his arrest. Heenatigala claims he was arrested by three men in civilian clothes from the Athurugiriya Police for not carrying his National Identity Card. He alleges that he was mistreated during transport to the station and was verbally abused by officers, including the officer in charge. Heenatigala was released after over two hours. The investigation will determine if the officers violated the law, and appropriate action will be taken if necessary (Sunday Times, 2024). Three police officers, including a Sub-Inspector, have been temporarily transferred to the Mirihana Police Headquarters as part of the investigation. Heenatigala was mistreated by the Athurugiriya Police after his arrest. The probe is being led by the Deputy (Ada Derana, 2024).



Author Kasun Mahendra Heenatigala, Son-in-Law of later actor Jackson Anthony spoke to the media about his encounter of police brutality. Source: Ada Derana.



## **Withdrawal of Tri-Forces security for ex-presidents**

The government has decided to withdraw tri-forces personnel from the security of former presidents. Only police officers will provide security, with a reduced number assigned. The government assured that the safety of former presidents will still be maintained and security arrangements will be reviewed every six months. This decision was made due to the high costs of maintaining the previous security measures (Ada Derana, 2024).

## **Sri Lanka holds first-ever national conference for families of missing persons**

The first National Conference for Families of Missing Persons in Sri Lanka, organised by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), was held in Colombo, bringing together 51 families from diverse communities across the country. The conference provided a platform for these families to share experiences, discuss challenges, and explore ways to collectively address the search for their missing loved ones. Families engaged with authorities, including the Minister of Justice and officials from the Office on Missing Persons, to discuss improving processes and receiving support. The conference was inspired by the success of a global family event held the previous year (Ada Derana, 2024; The Morning, 2024).



Panelists at the first National Conference for Families of Missing Persons in Sri Lanka. Source: Ceylon Today

### **Prime Minister blames Media**

Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya mistakenly thanked the 'Republic of China' (Taiwan) instead of the 'People's Republic of China' during a school uniform consignment event, causing a diplomatic mishap. The Prime Minister arrived an hour late, keeping the Chinese Ambassador waiting at the Colombo Port, who had to leave and return later. The incident was reported by The Sunday Times and later reproduced by The Daily Mirror. Instead of admitting the mistake the Prime Minister criticised the media and opposition in Parliament accusing them of attempting to undermine the government's international relations. Amarasuriya reportedly apologised to the Chinese Ambassador privately but no public acknowledgment of her lateness or error was made (Ada Derana, 2024).

### **Belgium-based NGO claims Israel soldier 'terminator' in SL**

The Belgium-based Hind Rajab Foundation accuses Israeli soldier Gal Ferenbook of war crimes, including killing a Palestinian civilian and degrading the body. Ferenbook, nicknamed the "Terminator" for allegedly killing Palestinian civilians, is reportedly in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The Foundation urged Sri Lankan authorities to arrest Ferenbook and cooperate with the International Criminal Court (ICC). A complaint has been lodged with the ICC, and Interpol has been contacted to issue a Red Notice for his apprehension. Ferenbook allegedly posted a video in August 2024 showing himself in an armored vehicle in Gaza, laughing and boasting about a civilian's death, treating the body as a war trophy. The Foundation demands swift action from Sri Lankan authorities, the ICC, and Interpol to ensure accountability. Sri Lanka's Public Security Ministry stated it has not received specific information about the matter (Balasuriya, 2024).

### **President leads discussion on Sri Lanka's framework for combating money laundering and terrorism financing**

Sri Lanka held a high-level meeting to discuss preparations for its Mutual Evaluation by the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG). The focus was on preventing money laundering and countering terrorism financing. Key participants included government officials, the Central Bank, and the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU). They discussed urgent action plans for legal reforms, capacity building, and inter-agency cooperation. President Anura Kumara Disanayake emphasised the importance of collaboration and establishing dedicated teams to ensure compliance. The goal is to strengthen Sri Lanka's AML/CFT framework and maintain financial stability (Presidential Secretariat, 2024).

## **PTA and Its Implications**

The Coalition against Repressive Laws (CARL), consisting of over 60 civil society and media organizations, has called on President Anura Kumara Dissanayake to repeal repressive laws including the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and the Online Safety Act. The CARL emphasised that these laws violate fundamental rights and freedoms. They noted the National People's Power (NPP) and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) have historically opposed such laws. The continued use of the PTA for detentions followed by charges under alternative legal frameworks contradicts the positions previously upheld by the NPP and JVP. CARL urged the President to fulfill his commitment by repealing these laws immediately (Daily Mirror, 2024). Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa accused the government of using the Prevention of Terrorism Act to restrict social media freedom, despite announcing its promise to abolish it (Ada Derana, 2024). A signature campaign has been launched in Vavuniya by the Poralih Welfare Association, calling for the release of political prisoners detained under Sri Lanka's Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) (Tamil Guardian, 2024). Minister of Mass Media Dr Nalinda Jayatissa stated that the National People's Power Party's position is to repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act and that the new government will act accordingly (Gamage, 2024).

## **Supreme Court clears obstacles to appoint SC Judge**

The Supreme Court dismissed a Fundamental Rights petition by attorney Sarith Maheeputhra Pathirathne, challenging the Constitutional Council's rejection of Nissanka Bandula Karunaratne's nomination as a Supreme Court judge. The court concluded that the Constitutional Council and its members did not infringe on the petitioner's Fundamental Rights. Furthermore the court determined that the petition was not filed to serve the public good but rather to pursue personal or ulterior motives. As a consequence of filing a baseless and bad-faith case, the court penalised the petitioner by ordering him to pay Rs. 2 million in costs partly to compensate specific respondents and partly as state costs (Daily News, 2024).

## **Colombo University Computer Department Director issued notice for evading providing phone records for 8 years**

Colombo Additional Magistrate ordered the issuance of a notice to the Director of the Computer Department of the University of Colombo to appear before the court, who has

allegedly evaded a court order for 8 years to provide a report regarding a phone containing pornographic images seized by the Criminal Investigation Department (Shantha, 2024).

### **Myanmar refugees reaches Mullaitivu**



A boat carrying refugees from Myanmar. Photo Courtesy: Ada Derana.

Sri Lanka Navy and Police officers in Mullaitivu reported that a boat carrying over 100 Myanmar refugees has arrived at the Mullivaikkal area in Mullaitivu (Rodrigo, 2024). Refugees from Myanmar were reportedly being illegally transported to another country due to a shortage of food and water, resulting in the boat landing at the Mullivaikkal coast (Ada Derana, 2024). A Special Gazette Notification has declared the Sri Lanka Air Force Mullaitivu Camp as a “Detention Centre,” effective from January 31. This decision was approved by the Minister of Public Security, Ananda Wijepala. The 103 Myanmar refugees, previously held at the Mirihana Detention Centre, were transferred to the Mullaitivu Air Force Base for temporary detention due to overcrowding at the Mirihana facility (News Center, 2024).

### **Welikada Prison: Auditor General exposes exploitation of inmates and over expenditure**

An Auditor General's report shows that in December 2023, 233 times prisoners from Welikada Prison were sent to clean, fix, and improve the homes of prison officers (The Island Online, 2024). The report titled ‘Uneconomic Transactions’ notes that prisoners were

moved to the homes of prison officers 62 times. Nine vehicles from the Prisons Department's central depot made these trips, traveling a total of 372 kilometers (The Island Online, 2024). The report states that after Budget Circular No. 1/2023 was issued on January 27, 2023, asking for strict control over overtime costs, the Department of Prisons still spent Rs. 982 million on overtime and holiday allowances in 2023. This is an increase of Rs. 106 million from the year before (The Island Online, 2024).

### **Forced Covid cremations: Oppositions urges probes**

The Parliamentary Opposition has called for a departmental inquiry into the forced cremation of bodies, especially Muslim ones, during the Covid-19 pandemic under former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's administration. Opposition MP and SLMC leader Rauff Hakeem called on the Government to disclose the details of individuals cremated during the pandemic. Dr Nalinda Jayatissa denied Hakeem's request for specific information due to medical ethics and Right to Information Act provisions, pledging to prevent such injustices for political gain (Tennakoon, 2024).

### **Anyone found guilty of wrongdoing will face consequences: President**

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake stated that the government will not shield anyone from wrongdoing, stating that anyone found guilty will face the consequences regardless of their status or rank (Ada Derana, 2024; Siriwardana, 2024).

### **CSO presents child rights proposals to President**

The Child Protection Alliance has submitted a proposal to the government for the protection and promotion of child rights, titled 'A Summary Proposal for a New Era'. The letter urges Sri Lanka's Government to implement a proposal to protect children, who constitute 25% of the population and are ranked among the top five crimes in the 2023 annual grave crimes report (Chamara, 2024).

### **Former CCD Director remanded**

ASP Neville Silva, former Director of the Colombo Crimes Division, has been ordered to remain in custody after being presented to the Ratnapura Magistrate's Court. The former CCD Director was arrested by the Criminal Investigations Department and the CID initiated an investigation into ASP Silva's alleged partial behavior towards a complainant during a case filed with the CCD in August 2023 (Ada Derana, 2024).

### **Inclusive Mechanism to strengthen National Unity**

The government plans to introduce an inclusive mechanism to strengthen national unity, based on the people's mandate received at the last General Election, according to Deputy Minister Muneer Mulaffar. Mulaffar emphasises the need for detailed discussion on the continuation of the truth and reconciliation commission, emphasizing the importance of involving all groups in decision-making processes for unity (Tennakoon, 2024).

### **MP Archchuna Ramanathan faces police complaints over hospital disruptions**

Jaffna Police are looking into a complaint from Jaffna Hospital officials. They have accused Independent MP Archchuna Ramanathan of causing disruptions to hospital operations. Mannar Hospital had a complaint against Ramanathan, a doctor, for blocking an investigation into a pregnant woman's death. The police sought to arrest him for the same incident (The Morning, 2024).

### **President: Bribery Commission must reveal reasons for withdrawing cases**

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake says that the reasons for withdrawing 40 out of 69 cases filed by the Bribery or Corruption Commission in 2021 and 45 out of 89 cases filed in 2022 should be disclosed to the public (Herath, 2024).

### **Proceeds of Crime Bill**

Cabinet approval was granted to publish the Proceeds of Crime Bill prepared by the Legal Draftsman in the Government Gazette and present it in Parliament. However, after publishing the said Bill in the Government Gazette, several observations have been submitted by the International Monetary Fund. Accordingly, the observations submitted by the International Monetary Fund have been referred to the Committee appointed by the then Minister of Justice, Prison Reforms and Constitutional Reforms under the Chairmanship of a Judge of the Supreme Court to prepare the initial draft relating to this bill and the said Committee has recommended to amend the already prepared Proceeds of Crime Bill by incorporating certain further provisions. The proposal made by the Minister of Justice and National Integration to instruct the Legal Draftsman to further amend the Proceeds of Crime Bill, based on the recommendations of the said Committee, was approved by the Cabinet (Office of the Cabinet of Ministries, 2024).



### **Kelum Jayasumana granted bail**

Kelum Jayasumana, a social activist arrested for sharing Mahavir commemoration posts on social media, has been granted bail after being released on bail after being produced before the Colombo Magistrate's Court. The officers of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) testified in court during the trial that the accused had downloaded and shared a photograph originally posted by a French woman on Facebook, which featured the banned symbols of the LTTE organization. Officers report disturbance to public order and ethnic harmony, requesting an extension of suspect's remand in custody due to ongoing investigation and noting no similar event was held in the North (Ada Derana, 2024). The Colombo Magistrate subsequently inquired of the CID officers whether any statements indicating that public order had been disrupted as a result of this act had been documented and presented to the court. In reply, the CID officers affirmed that no such statements had been documented or submitted to the court. The Magistrate expressed concerns regarding the possibility of further remanding the suspect in the absence of evidence substantiating that a public disturbance had taken place, asserting that suspects cannot be held for an extended period without adequate proof (Ada Derana, 2024).



Premanath C. Dolawatta, a former SLPP MP and NDF candidate for Colombo in the most recent elections, spoke to the media outside the Colombo Magistrates court on behalf of one of the suspects. He accused the police of selectively enforcing the law and asserted that they had not yet taken action against newly elected members of Parliament who worshipped and celebrated former terrorist leader Velupillai Prabakaran. Photo Courtesy: Ada Derana.

### **New Constitution to take at least 3 years**

The National People's Power (NPP) Government has declared that the introduction of a new Constitution is expected to take approximately three years. This timeframe is intended to

facilitate extensive public discourse on significant matters, such as the Provincial Councils (PCs) system and the distribution of power (Tenakoon, 2024).

### **British citizen arrested over alleged terrorism financing in Colombo and Vanni**

A 43-year-old British citizen of Sri Lankan origin was arrested at Bandaranaike International Airport, for allegedly collecting and distributing funds for a terrorist group. The suspect, originally from Kilinochchi, had left Sri Lanka in 2009 and later obtained British citizenship. The arrest followed an overseas travel ban issued by the Colombo Magistrate's Court. Police allege the suspect raised funds in the UK, directing the money to individuals in Colombo and the Vanni region. Investigations are ongoing (Ada Derana, 2024).



The 43-year-old Sri Lankan-born British national was accused of funding and promoting a terrorist organization at the Colombo Magistrate Court. Source: Tamil Guardian

### **Cabinet nod to establish 'Clean Sri Lanka Fund', appoint task force**

The Cabinet of Ministers has approved the creation of a 'Clean Sri Lanka' Fund and the appointment of a Presidential Task Force for its management. Minister Dr Nalinda Jayatissa announced the implementation of the "Clean Sri Lanka" program as a national mission to address Sri Lanka's economic, political, social, spiritual, and environmental setbacks (Ada Derana, 2024). Samagi Jana Balawegaya and Illankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi have expressed concerns over the exclusion of minority community representatives from the newly formed



'Clean Sri Lanka' Presidential Task Force. Opposition SJB Parliamentarian Mujibur Rahman stated that the government should have included Tamil and Muslim representatives in the Presidential Task Force (PTF) to meet its goals. He questioned how the PTF would address the needs of Tamil-speaking communities without their representation, expressing doubt about how they would gather minority views and work effectively in Tamil-speaking areas. He believes the Government made a mistake from the beginning (The Morning, 2024).

### **MP Archchuna Ramanathan alleges assault in Parliament**

Archchuna Ramanathan, the Independent Member of Parliament for the Jaffna District, has claimed that he was attacked inside the premises of the Opposition Leader's Office located within the Parliament Complex. He claimed that he was attacked by MP Sujith Sanjaya Perera at the Opposition Leader's Office (Ada Derana, 2024). Perera stated that he had recommended to Archchuna the importance of consulting with party leaders or the Speaker to address his concerns, a suggestion that was disregarded by the latter. He also remarked, "It was inappropriate to criticize the opposition leader and staff in such a manner" (Ada Derana, 2024).

### **Families of the Forcefully Disappeared**

Tamil families of the disappeared protested in Jaffna, demanding an international investigation into the enforced disappearances of their loved ones. Holding photographs of the missing, they marched from Jaffna Muniyappa temple to the central bus station. The families have sought justice and answers for over a decade, but Sri Lankan governments have not addressed the issue. With domestic accountability mechanisms not yielding results, they call on the international community for intervention (Tamil Guardian, 2024). On Human Rights Day, Tamil families of the disappeared protested in Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya, and Trincomalee, demanding justice and answers about their loved ones forcibly disappeared by Sri Lanka's military, particularly after the end of the armed conflict in May 2009 (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

### **Female SSPs to lead CID, SIU**

For the first time in Sri Lanka's police history, several female officers have been appointed to senior roles in important divisions like the Criminal Investigations Department and the Special Investigation Unit (Balasuriya, 2024).

### **Temporary shelter for providing protection to female victims of violence**

A new shelter operated by the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs is set to open in Nuwara Eliya in January 2025, expanding the support for women and children affected by gender-based violence (Ada Derana, 2024).

### **Military refuses to evacuate a camp in Karkovalam**

Despite a Cabinet decision for the military to vacate a camp in Karkovalam, Jaffna, the military has refused to comply, leaving the camp operational. The land, which was occupied by the military since 1995, was supposed to be returned to its rightful Tamil owners within 14 days, but over two weeks later, no action has been taken (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

### **3. Case Updates**

#### **Arjuna Aloysius appears in court over bail conditions**

Arjuna Aloysius, the owner of Mendis Company and son-in-law of former Central Bank Governor Arjuna Mahendran was presented before the Colombo Chief Magistrate's Court. Aloysius, currently serving a prison sentence for VAT non-payment is also on bail in connection with the 2015 Central Bank Treasury Bonds case. He was brought to court to address deficiencies in the case file as the bail conditions granted by the High Court were not properly recorded. The Magistrate had previously identified irregularities regarding the signing of his bail in relation to an investigation under the Money Laundering Act. Aloysius submitted the required documents to correct these issues (Ada Derana, 2024).

#### **Easter Sunday Cases Court decides preliminary legal issues by Pujith and Nilantha to be addressed at case conclusion**

The Negombo district court has determined that the Preliminary Issues of Law raised by former IGP Pujith Jayasundara and former State Intelligence Service Director Nilantha Jayawardena, under Section 88 of the Police Ordinance, cannot be decided as preliminary issues. These will instead be addressed at the conclusion of the trial. The defendants had argued that the case should be dismissed because it was not filed within the three-month time frame stipulated by the Police Ordinance. However, the court's decision allows the plaintiff to present evidence during the trial to explain the delay in filing. The ruling was issued in a case filed by Dona Nayana Rasika Kumari, a victim of the Easter Sunday attack at the Katuwapitiya Church (Sooriyagoda, 2024).

#### **Mineral Sand Mining Project by Midwest Heavy Sands**

A proposed mineral sand mining project by Midwest Heavy Sands in Mullaitivu was halted after protests from local Tamils, led by Vanni MP Thurairasa Ravikaran. The protests were sparked by concerns over the environmental impact, the lack of local consent, and the degradation of agricultural land. Ravikaran highlighted the dangers to the Chemmalai saltwater barrier, which protects farmland from salinization, and questioned the legality of the mining operation, which lacked necessary permissions. The protest was supported by local leaders, resulting in the cessation of the project. This follows similar opposition to other

mining projects in the region, including one in Mannar and another involving public officials attempting to occupy coastal land for mining (Tamil Guardian, 2024).



Vanni MP Thurairasa Ravikaran leads the protest against the proposed mineral sand mining project of the Midwest Heavy Sands in Mullaitivu. Source: Tamil Guardian

### **Mahara Prison tragedy: Petition filed with CoA**

A petition has been filed in the Court of Appeal to resume legal action regarding the deaths of 11 inmates during the 2020 Mahara Prison riots. The Attorney General's Department issued a letter claiming the incident was an act of self-defense by the police and that actions taken were in line with the Prisons Ordinance, leading to the intention to close the case. The petition challenges this decision asserting that gunshot wounds above the abdomen, as shown in post-mortem reports, indicate excessive and indiscriminate force by the police violating the Prisons Ordinance. The petition cites a previous order from the Welisara Magistrate's Court which had instructed the CID to investigate and arrest suspects. The petitioner believes it was unjustly withdrawn. The petitioner is seeking a Writ of Certiorari to quash the Attorney General's document and Writs of Mandamus to instruct the Attorney General and CID Director to proceed with the case and follow the Magistrate's earlier order (Chamara, 2024).

### **SC upholds death sentence for Vass Gunawardena and four others**

The Supreme Court upheld the death sentence for former DIG Vass Gunawardena and four others convicted of the abduction and murder of businessman Mohammed Siyam in 2013. The defendants include Gunawardena and his son was informed of the decision in the Colombo High Court. The High Court Judge confirmed that their appeals were rejected and the death sentence imposed by the Colombo High Court bench was upheld. The defense raised concerns about the implementation date of the sentence but the Judge clarified that the timing of enforcement is under the Supreme Court's jurisdiction (Ada Derana, 2024).

### **Decision to admit the confession of the 11th accused as government evidence**

The Colombo High Court accepted the confession of Kalib Sameer, the 11th accused in the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks, as government evidence. Sameer made the confession before the Mount Lavinia Magistrate in 2019. But his lawyers argued it was not voluntary. The court conducted a 'voir dire' investigation and ruled the confession was made voluntarily. Sameer's lawyer intends to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court (Jayaweera, 2024).

### **SC rules Azath Salley's arrest under PTA unlawful**

The Supreme Court has ruled that the 2021 arrest and detention of former Western Province Governor Azath Salley under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) was illegal. The court ordered the respondents, including then Public Security Minister Sarath Weerasekara and the then Director of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), to pay Rs. 75,000 in compensation to Salley (Ada Derana, 2024).

### **SLPP's Administrative Secretary Renuka Perera granted bail**

Renuka Perera, the Administrative Secretary of the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramun (SLPP), was arrested by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). He was accused of spreading false information about the Northern 'Mahaviru' commemorations on social media, as confirmed by the police (Ada Derana, 2024; The Morning, 2024).

### **Kokkuthoduvai Mass Grave Case**

The Kokkuthoduvai mass grave case, involving the remains of suspected LTTE fighters, has been delayed once again and is now adjourned until February 27, 2025. This case, which

began in June 2023 following the discovery of skeletons in Mullaitivu, has faced numerous setbacks, including a request by the Medical Examiner for more time to complete analysis. While some remains have been identified, many families of the disappeared are frustrated by the slow pace of the investigation. Legal and logistical challenges, such as lack of funding and concerns about mishandling evidence, have further complicated the case (Tamil Guardian, 2024).

### **CPRP claims AG attempted to investigation into the Mahara prison shootings**

The Committee for Protecting the Rights of Prisoners (CPRP) organised a demonstration on December 11 outside the Presidential Secretariat, claiming that the Attorney General was trying to hinder the investigation into the Mahara prison massacre of 2020, during which 11 inmates lost their lives due to gunfire from prison staff. Additionally, the CPRP intended to submit a complaint to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka concerning police interference with their rights to association, assembly, and peaceful protest (Rodrigo, 2024).

### **Regarding the registration of organizations under the Voluntary Social Service Organizations (Registration and Supervision) Act No. 31 of 1980**

The Sri Lankan government has announced that both local and foreign NGOs must register with the National Secretariat even if they have already complied with other legal frameworks. This process will involve scrutiny from multiple ministries including Defence and Foreign Affairs. (National Secretariat for Non-governmental Organizations, 2024).

### **Thajudeen murder: New probe yet to contact the family**

The Government has pledged to reopen the investigation into the murder of rugby player Wasim Thajudeen but has yet to contact his family or their lawyer regarding the new probe. Thajudeen's family lawyer Attorney Misbah Sathar stated that neither the Police Department nor the Ministry of Public Security has reached out to the family. Concerns were raised over the appointment of Dr Hans Wijesuriya as Chief Advisor to the President amid allegations of his involvement in suppressing evidence related to the case. Thajudeen's murder which occurred in May 2012 was initially treated as a car accident but was later found to be a brutal murder staged to look like an accident (Tennekoon, 2024).

## 4. Repression of Media and Journalists

### **CID records statement from journalist over news article**

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Sri Lanka Police has obtained a statement from journalist S. Aslam. The statement, obtained by the Computer Crimes Investigation Division, was made subsequent to a complaint filed by the Ministry of Public Security (The Morning, 2024).

### **Journalist assaulted in Kilinochchi after failed abduction attempt**



Journalist and author Murugaiyah Thamilselvan seeking emergency treatment at Kilinochchi Hospital. Photo Courtesy: The Leader.

A Tamil journalist and author, Murugaiyah Thamilselvan known for his in-depth coverage of illegal drug trafficking, has faced an assault in the town of Kilinochchi. A report indicates that a group arrived in a van and attempted to abduct the journalist in the aforementioned town. The attempt was unsuccessful, leading them to attack him before escaping the location (Ceylon News, 2024; Sheshadhi, 2024; The Leader, 2024).

## 5. Repression of Freedom of Assembly and Association

### Maaveerar Naal Celebrations

Four individuals have been arrested by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) for allegedly promoting the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the name of commemorating war dead. The senior police officer clarified that the government prohibits promoting banned organizations like the LTTE or glorifying acts of terrorism, stating that while commemorating war dead is permitted, promoting the LTTE remains illegal<sup>1</sup>. Suspects arrested under Penal Code Section 120 and PTA No. 48 of 1978 are accused of inciting violence and spreading misleading content promoting a proscribed organization's activities (Tennakoon, 2024; The Morning, 2024). Senior DIG in charge of the Northern Province, Tilak Dhanapala, said that seven individuals who organized illegal celebrations promoting the LTTE organization, centered around the Northern Province, have been arrested and investigations have been initiated to strictly enforce the law against them. Investigations have revealed that four of the seven celebrations promoting the LTTE were held in the Point Pedro area. Two celebrations were held in the Kilinochchi area and one celebration was held in the Jaffna area (Divaina, 2024). Minister of Public Security Ananda Wijepala claimed that photos from past LTTE 'Maaveerar Naal' celebrations were circulated on social media to create the impression of similar events in the Northern Province. The speaker cautioned against actions that could lead to division and conflict between the North and South of the country, underlining the manipulative nature of the false narratives (The Morning, 2024). Minister of Public Security and Parliamentary Affairs, Ananda Wijepala, informed the Parliament that out of 244 Maaveerar Naal commemoration events held in the Northern Province, LTTE-related symbols were displayed at 10 of them and the police have taken necessary action (Ada Derana, 2024).

In relation to the Mahaviru commemoration event in the Northern Province, social media activists were arrested. In response, a group of activists participated in a protest near the Polduwa junction on the parliamentary road yesterday (Thathsara, 2024).

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<sup>1</sup> DIG Thalduwa stated that a gazette notification prohibits Mahaveerar Naal celebrations, but the government did not block the commemoration of the dead by relatives.



## Development Officers' Protest



A heated altercation broke out between the police and school development officers who were demonstrating outside the Ministry of Education. Courtesy: World Socialist Web Site.

Four individuals were arrested during a protest in front of the Education Ministry in Battaramulla. The protest, organised by around 500 members of the Joint School Development Officers' Union, demanded permanent teaching positions for school development officers. The suspects were charged with unlawful assembly, obstructing traffic, and injuring police officers. Three police officers sustained injuries during the clashes, with one admitted to the ICU of Colombo National Hospital and the others treated at the Colombo East Base Hospital. The Kaduwala Acting Magistrate Kamal Prasanna Wijesiri remanded the suspects until December 10 and ordered an identification parade on the same day. Protesters sought permanent teaching positions after working as temporary school development officers for five years. The protest escalated after blocking the Kottawa-Borella road, causing significant traffic disruption. A recent discussion at the Education Ministry addressed the integration of school development officers into teaching positions. The Ministry emphasized that recruitment must follow Public Service Commission recommendations and adhere to a Supreme Court directive. (Dayaratne, 2024). While some media reports claim that the Thalangama Police informed the Kaduwela

Magistrate about the involvement of an Army Intelligence officer, the police have denied any evidence supporting this. The Acting IGP has ordered the SIU to investigate whether police officers made such claims in court (Daily Mirror, 2024). Four protestors arrested in a tense situation before the Ministry of Education have been granted bail by the Kaduwela Magistrate's Court. Four individuals were arrested after three police officers sustained injuries. Later on, the Police have refuted claims suggesting that the person who reportedly harmed three police officers with a sharp object is an officer of army intelligence. This clarification was conveyed through a public statement and has been communicated to the Kaduwela Magistrate's Court (MC) (The Morning, 2024).

## **7. Repressive Legal and Policy Action**

### **President calls out armed forces to maintain public order**

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake issued a gazette notification ordering the armed forces to maintain public order across all administrative districts of Sri Lanka, in accordance with the powers vested in him by Section 12 of the Public Security Ordinance (Hiru News, 2024).

## 6. Other Incidents

### **HRCSL Chief declares police cannot raid spas**

The HRCSL Commissioner, Nimal G. Punchihewa, revealed that around 8,000 complaints of human rights violations have been pending since the COVID-19 period, with the HRCSL receiving approximately 70 complaints daily. The majority of complaints came from the education, police, and health sectors. There was a notable rise in complaints regarding individuals arrested during massage parlour raids, particularly women. Punchihewa emphasised that under Sri Lankan law, women could not be arrested at spas, and only authorized agencies could take action (Jayakody, 2024).

### **Workers at a garment factory in Kotmale go on Strike**



Kotmale garment factory workers go on strike demanding a salary increment. Photo Courtesy: Tamilwin

Workers at a garment factory in Kotmale have been protesting for five days demanding a Rs. 5,000 salary increase to cope with rising living costs. The management offered Rs. 2,000 citing financial constraints and the need to cut welfare benefits if more provided. Protesters

accused the Labor Office of favoring the management and highlighted inadequate wages, challenging work conditions, and health concerns. The management has threatened to close the factory until January 17 potentially evicting resident employees. Workers demanded compensation for any closure. Police maintained heavy security around the premises (Rajapaksha, 2024).

### **OIC of the Children and Women's Bureau of Gothatuwa has been subjected to verbal sexual harassment**

A constable from the Gothatuwa Police Station has been arrested for allegedly using obscene language to sexually harass the OIC of the Children and Women's Bureau over the phone (Jayasinghe, 2024).

### **Five Excise Department officers granted bail for allegedly abusing residents**

Five Excise Department officers were released on bail by Colombo Additional Magistrate after being arrested by the Gothatuwa Police on suspicion of harassing residents while posing as Special Task Force officers. They were released on a surety bond of Rs. 200,000 each. The incident involved the officers allegedly attacking a house in Madinnagoda, Gothatuwa, tearing a woman's clothes, taking her phone, deleting videos, and pushing away a child. The police report indicated that the child and two others were hospitalised after the assault (Abeyasinghe, 2024).

### **Action against Police Misconduct**

The Ministry of Public Security announced on December 29 that officials have been given full authority to investigate and take action against police officers involved in misconduct. Deputy Minister Sunil Watagala claimed some officers are accepting regular payments from organized crime and drug trafficking networks. Minister Ananda Wijepala confirmed that 30-40 officers have been suspended recently for such allegations, with ongoing investigations. Officers involved in bribery and corruption will face the same treatment as any other wrongdoer. As part of efforts to combat organized crime, nearly the entire police force in Ruwanwella and Avissawella has been transferred based on intelligence reports (Samaraweera, 2024).

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