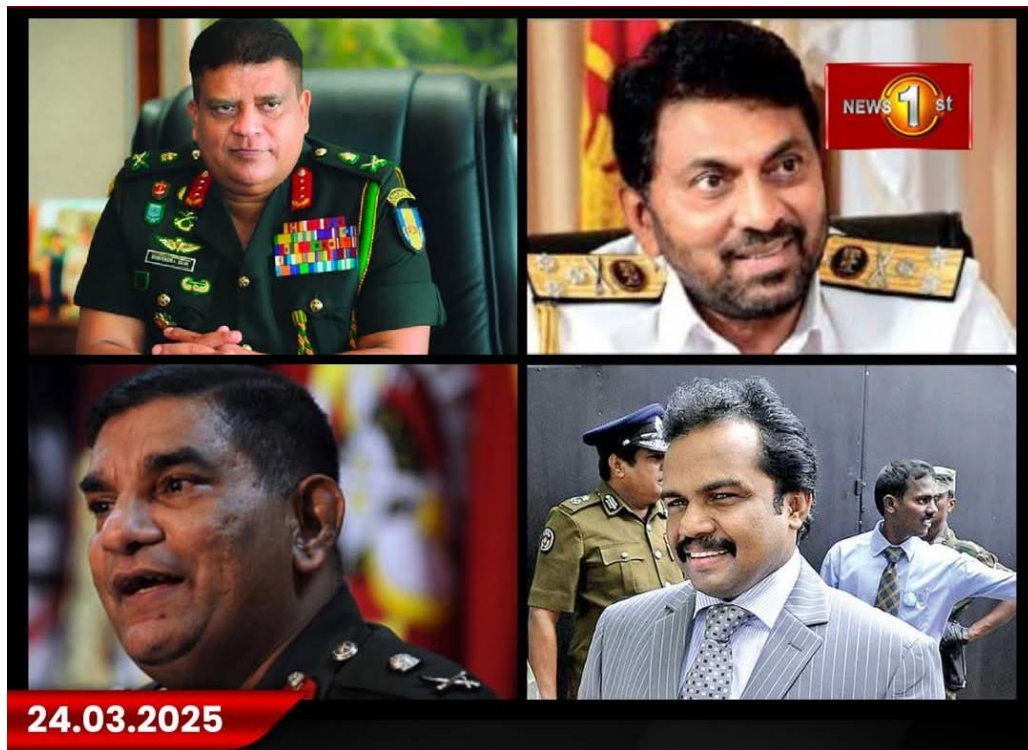


# Human Rights Situation in Sri Lanka

## April 2025



The UK Government sanctioned former Sri Lankan commanders and an ex-Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) commander responsible for serious human rights violations and abuses during the civil war. The Foreign Ministry of Sri Lanka formally objected sanctions against its military leaders. Photo: News first

# INFORM

Human Rights Documentation Centre

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Human Rights Situation in Sri Lanka in April 2025.

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*INFORM was established in 1990 to monitor and document the 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 levels. INFORM also focused on working with other communities whose rights were frequently and systematically violated. Currently, INFORM focuses on election monitoring, freedom of expression and human rights defenders. INFORM is based in Colombo Sri Lanka, and works closely with local activists, groups and networks as well as regional (Asian) and international human rights networks.*

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## Executive Summary

**Legal Reforms and Amendments:** The government has embarked on an ambitious reform agenda encompassing constitutional reforms, anti-corruption legislation, and criminal justice reforms. The Minister of Justice and National Integration recently reaffirmed that abolishing the executive presidency and introducing a new constitution remain key priorities, to be realized within the next five years. He emphasized the government's commitment to holding long-overdue local government and provincial council elections, with the latter expected by year's end. The Prime Minister, addressing Parliament during the Prime Minister's Questions session, echoed this stance.

In parallel, the government has taken a decisive step in tackling financial crime with the unanimous passage of the Proceeds of Crime Act. This legislation introduces non-conviction-based asset forfeiture, enables the seizure of illicit assets even in the absence of criminal convictions, shifts the burden of proof in key proceedings, and establishes mechanisms for international cooperation in tracing assets held abroad.

Furthering its justice reform agenda, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the final draft of amendments to the Community Based Corrections Act, No. 46 of 1999. The revisions aim to strengthen non-custodial sentencing, focusing on community-based rehabilitation, reintegration, and restorative justice. This shift emphasizes rehabilitation over incarceration, marking a significant evolution in Sri Lanka's criminal justice policy.

**Police Brutality and Misconduct:** The Parliament unanimously passed a resolution to appoint a Committee of Inquiry to investigate Tennakoon's removal under the Removal of Officers (Procedure) Act, No. 5 of 2002, Sections 3(d), 3(e), and 5 of the Act.

Subsequently, a high-level three-member Committee of Inquiry was appointed. The committee was formed in line with parliamentary standing orders and legal provisions. It is mandated to examine the charges and submit findings that may lead to Tennakoon's formal removal from office.

Tamil civilians and activists continue to face various forms of systemic discrimination, which are often manifested in police harassment, suppression of linguistic rights, and the abuse of power by law enforcement.

**Accountability:** The United Kingdom's recent imposition of sanctions on four Sri Lankan individuals—former Army Commanders Shavendra Silva and Jagath Jayasuriya, former Navy Commander Wasantha Karannagoda, and former LTTE commander Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan (Karuna Amman)—highlighting persistent tensions around wartime accountability and justice in Sri Lanka.

At a demonstration in Vavuniya, Tamil families of the disappeared praised the sanctions but stressed these must be extended to former presidents and others responsible for mass atrocities, reiterating that accountability can only come through international mechanisms, not through the Sri Lankan state, which has consistently failed to provide credible answers on enforced disappearances and other wartime crimes.

**Freedom of Assembly:** Some of the recent court actions reflect the authorities' efforts to curb public demonstrations in key areas of the capital. Additionally, the Batticaloa Magistrate's Court issued a restraining order against a planned memorial procession to honor Annai Poopathy, the Tamil mother who died in 1988 after a hunger strike protesting the actions of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF). The procession was blocked by the court at the request of the local police, who argued that it could be viewed as an attempt to commemorate the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), potentially inciting unrest. The court, however, clarified that individual commemorations at Poopathy's memorial site were allowed.

**Custodial Death:** The death of a 26-year-old while in police custody at the Welikada Police Station sparked widespread concern and calls for accountability from legal and human rights groups.

In response, the Acting IGP recommended to the National Police Commission (NPC) that the Officer-in-Charge (OIC) of the Welikada Police Station be transferred to ensure an impartial

investigation. Additionally, a Police Sergeant and a Police Constable attached to the station were suspended over alleged dereliction of duty.

Colombo Additional Magistrate has ordered the exhumation of the body of the victim, to conduct a fresh postmortem examination. This decision was made following a request by the aggrieved party, particularly the deceased's mother, who filed an affidavit stating that she could not find closure from the initial postmortem, which failed to specify a definitive cause of death.

**Prevention of Terrorism Act:** Amnesty International has expressed grave concern over the arrest of 22-year-old Mohamad Rusdi in Colombo under the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). Authorities allege that Rusdi was affiliated with extremist groups and engaged in ideologically motivated actions harmful to communal harmony. However, almost two weeks after his arrest, no credible evidence or formal charges had been brought against him. Amnesty International has also criticized Sri Lanka's PTA for arbitrary detention and abuse, particularly targeting Tamil and Muslim communities.

The *All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama* (ACJU), decried the arrest, stating it was provoked by Rusdi's display of a sticker criticizing the Israeli military actions in Gaza. While police denied that the sticker was the sole cause, they offered no substantive explanation for his detention. In response to growing criticism, Prime Minister Dr. Harini Amarasuriya announced that the government is moving forward with repealing the PTA. A Cabinet Paper has been approved to form a committee to conduct broad consultations before drafting replacement legislation.

**Land Encroachment:** Issues concerning land rights in the Northern and Eastern provinces continue to dominate the political and social discourse, with Tamil communities persistently demanding the return of lands still occupied by the military and other state agencies, even 15 years after the end of the civil war.

**Mass Graves:** The Jaffna Magistrate's Court stated that excavation efforts at the Hindu cemetery in Chemmani, Jaffna, where human skeletal remains were recently uncovered, have stalled due to a lack of government funding.

**Freedom of the Press:** A tense situation escalated as landowners from the *Valikamam North Land Release Committee* held a press briefing to demand the release of their lands within the Palaly High Security Zone and the full reopening of the Palaly Road without restrictions. As the press conference began, a team from the Palaly Police Station, led by the Officer-in-Charge, arrived at the scene claiming the event could not proceed and started taking photographs of participants.

Journalists have raised concerns about access to government press briefings. Journalists who join Cabinet briefings via Zoom have been reportedly denied the opportunity to ask questions. Initially, remote participants were allowed to ask questions, but this practice changed, with many Zoom participants being sidelined, despite their repeated requests.

Meanwhile, the government has issued a controversial directive requiring journalists to hold media accreditation issued by the Government Information Department to attend Cabinet press briefings.

**Easter Sunday Attacks:** Civil society activists, including those from the *Centre for Society and Religion* (CSR), have raised concerns over unresolved aspects of the investigation, presenting a 13-page document to authorities urging a deeper probe into several key individuals and events linked to the attacks.

Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, speaking on the sixth anniversary, called for the establishment of an independent prosecution office dedicated to holding those responsible for the bombings accountable. He also urged the government to address the broader political culture, which he argued contributed to the environment that allowed such attacks to occur.

**Enforced Disappearances:** Prime Minister Dr. Harini Amarasuriya recently expressed that the Sri Lankan government is committed to delivering justice for the victims of enforced disappearances, acknowledging the widespread public distrust in institutions like the Office for Reparations (OR) and the Office on Missing Persons (OMP). However, Tamil families, particularly from the North-East, have consistently rejected these domestic mechanisms, viewing them as ineffective and inadequate.

## Legal Reforms and Amendments

“Introducing a new constitution and abolishing the executive presidency will be key priorities of the Government.”

-- Minister of Justice and National Integration Attorney-at-Law Harshana Nanayakkara.

The National People's Power (NPP) government has embarked on an ambitious reform agenda encompassing constitutional reforms, anti-corruption legislation, and criminal justice reforms. Minister of Justice and National Integration Harshana Nanayakkara recently reaffirmed on a TV program that abolishing the executive presidency and introducing a new constitution remain key priorities, to be realized within the next five years. He emphasized the government's commitment to holding long-overdue local government and provincial council elections, with the latter expected by year's end. Prime Minister Dr. Harini Amarasuriya, addressing Parliament during the Prime Minister's Questions session, echoed this stance, noting

that while no funds have been allocated in the current budget for constitutional reform, the process will resume following upcoming elections, building upon the public consultations initiated under the previous administration (Ada Derana, 2025).

In parallel, the government has taken a decisive step in tackling financial crime with the unanimous passage of the Proceeds of Crime Act on April 8, 2025. This legislation introduces non-conviction-based asset forfeiture, enables the seizure of illicit assets even in the absence of criminal convictions, shifts the burden of proof in key proceedings, and establishes mechanisms for international cooperation in tracing assets held abroad. Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL) welcomed the Act as a landmark in the fight against grand corruption and kleptocracy, highlighting its focus on asset recovery rather than punishment. However, TISL also raised concerns regarding implementation, urging strong judicial safeguards, transparent governance of the newly created *Proceeds of Crime Management Authority*, and robust oversight of the *Victims of Crime Reparations Trust Fund*. TISL also criticized the lawmaking process for lacking adequate public consultation and warned of translation discrepancies between English and Sinhala versions, which could affect the law's legal integrity (The Island, 2025; TISL, 2025).

Furthering its justice reform agenda, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the final draft of amendments to the *Community Based Corrections Act, No. 46 of 1999*. The revisions, proposed by Minister Nanayakkara and refined by the Attorney General, aim to strengthen non-custodial sentencing, focusing on community-based rehabilitation, reintegration, and restorative justice. This shift emphasizes rehabilitation over incarceration, marking a significant evolution in Sri Lanka's criminal justice policy (Cabinet Office, 2025; Daily FT, 2025).

MP Ravi Karunanayake presented a private member bill to repeal the *Online Safety Act*, a repressive law that was introduced by a government led by his party leader.



Meanwhile, a Private Members' Bill introduced by MP Ravi Karunanayake to repeal the *Online Safety Act, No. 9 of 2024*, has been gazetted. If enacted, the *Online Safety (Repeal) Act of 2025* will nullify the contentious legislation and all its associated regulations, reflecting ongoing debates over digital rights and state regulation (Siriwardana, 2025). MP Ravi Karunanayake represents the New Democratic Front led by Ranil Wickramasinghe, whose government introduced the *Online Safety Act*.

## Police Brutality and Misconduct

The parliament passed a resolution to appoint a committee to remove the suspended Inspector General of Police (IGP) Deshabandu Tennakoon who was earlier found guilty of torture, and accused of multiple crimes, and human rights violations.

The Parliament unanimously passed a resolution<sup>1</sup>—with 151 Members of Parliament voting in favor and none against—to appoint a Committee of Inquiry to investigate Tennakoon's removal under the *Removal of Officers (Procedure) Act, No. 5 of 2002*, citing Sections 3(d), 3(e), and 5 of the Act. The motion, presented by government MP Lakmali Hemachandra, was adopted without debate after Speaker Dr. Jagath Wickremaratne informed the Committee on Parliamentary Affairs of its tabling (Ada Derana, 2025; Ceylon Today, 2025). Subsequently, a high-level three-member Committee of Inquiry was appointed, chaired by Supreme Court Justice Preethi Padman Surasena. The committee was formed in line with parliamentary standing orders and legal provisions, requiring input from the Chief Justice, the Prime Minister, and the Leader of the Opposition. It is mandated to examine the charges and submit findings that may lead to Tennakoon's formal removal from office (Ada Derana, 2025; Ceylon Today, 2025; Daily Mirror, 2025).

Tamil civilians and activists continue to face various forms of systemic discrimination, which are often manifested in police harassment, suppression of linguistic rights, and the abuse of power by law enforcement. On April 13, a Tamil driver in Vavuniya was forcefully dragged by traffic police officers at the Kurumankaattu junction after requesting that a traffic fine be issued in Tamil instead of Sinhala. Reportedly the driver, who had temporarily parked his vehicle for unloading, was manhandled and forcibly taken to the Vavuniya Police Station after objecting to a fine notice

<sup>1</sup> The resolution followed Tennakoon's arrest and remand related to a shooting incident that took place outside the W15 Hotel in Weligama, Matara in 2023. He had evaded arrest for nearly 20 days before surrendering to the Matara Magistrate's Court on March 19. The Court had earlier issued warrants against Tennakoon and seven other police officers, including former Colombo Crimes Division (CCD) personnel, in connection with the case. After being remanded, Tennakoon was granted bail on April 10, under two sureties of Rs. 1 million each, following the Court of Appeal's dismissal of his petition to block the arrest order (Ada Derana, 2025).

issued in Sinhala—an incident widely condemned as a violation of his constitutional right to receive official communication in Tamil (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

In another case, the Officer-in-Charge of the Omanthai Police Station allegedly threatened a Tamil quarry operator in the Kondakkaran Kulam area for failing to produce receipts for quarry dust—materials typically traded without documentation. It was reported that a police officer, dressed in civilian attire, allegedly acted maliciously despite the operator's explanation, and a viral video of the incident has since circulated (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

The situation worsened further when, on April 22, Tamil National People's Front (TNPf) organizer Jagatheeswaran Sargunadevi was harassed by the Maruthankerni police after not attending a meeting for local election candidates—despite no longer being a candidate due to her party's nomination rejection. When police arrived at her residence demanding an explanation, her son intervened to defend her and was subsequently arrested at gunpoint, dragged shirtless through the streets in a scene that has shocked the public and gone viral online. TNPf MP Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam denounced the incident as part of a broader pattern of police targeting Sargunadevi and her family with false cases due to her political integrity and activism (Tamil Guardian, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025). Collectively, these incidents reflect ongoing police brutality, and violence particularly directed at ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups.

## Accountability

The United Kingdom's recent imposition of sanctions on four Sri Lankan individuals—former Army Commanders Shavendra Silva and Jagath Jayasuriya, former Navy Commander Wasantha Karannagoda, and former LTTE commander Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan (Karuna Amman)—has sparked significant domestic and international reactions, highlighting persistent tensions around wartime accountability and justice in Sri Lanka (Tamil Guardian, 2025). At a demonstration in Vavuniya, Tamil families of the disappeared praised the sanctions but stressed they must extend them to former presidents and others responsible for mass atrocities, reiterating that accountability can only come through international mechanisms, not through the Sri Lankan state, which has consistently failed to provide credible answers on enforced disappearances and other wartime crimes (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

The UK Government sanctioned former Sri Lankan commanders and an ex-Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) commander responsible for serious human rights violations and abuses during the civil war, for which the Foreign Ministry of Sri Lankan government has formally objected.



In response, the government appointed a ministerial committee comprising Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath, Justice Minister Harshana Nanayakkara, and Deputy Defence Minister Aruna Jayasekara to study the UK's actions and provide recommendations. The Ministry of Defence confirmed that no direct action could be taken until the committee reports its findings (Ada Derana, 2025; Daily Mirror, 2025; The Daily Morning, 2025). The Foreign Ministry has formally objected to the UK's unilateral sanctions, claiming they hinder national reconciliation, and it has offered no substantive engagement with the evidence behind the accusations (Samaraweera, 2025).

Meanwhile, this development unfolds against a backdrop of renewed attention to past abuses, including the tabling of the long-buried Batalanda Commission report in Parliament following a widely criticized interview of former President Ranil Wickremesinghe with Al Jazeera. The NPP government's sudden interest in Batalanda, while ignoring key wartime commission reports such as the Udalgama, LLRC, Paranagama, and Nawaz reports, has been criticized as a politically selective move aimed at discrediting Wickremesinghe while avoiding broader questions related to justice, accountability and human rights (Thanabalasingham, 2025).

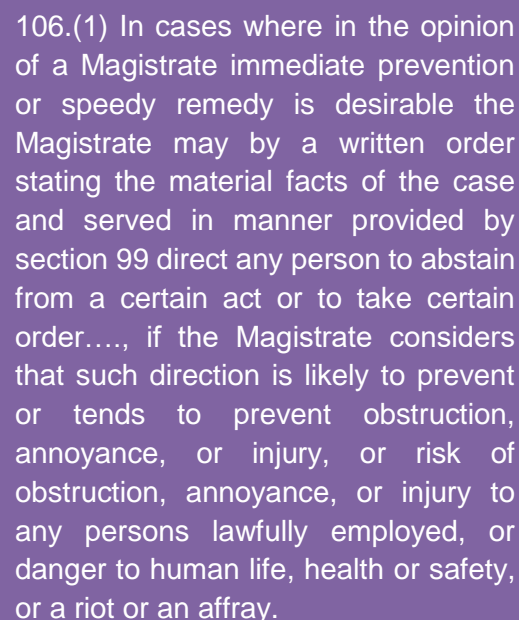
At the same time, nationalist forces pioneered by figures like Mahinda Rajapaksa, Wimal Weerawansa, and Sarath Weerasekera—have used the sanctions to reassert themselves, condemning foreign interference and defending military leaders as heroes who defeated terrorism. Wickremesinghe himself has shifted toward a more nationalist tone, accusing Western nations of hypocrisy and suggesting Sri Lanka should exit the UNHRC, aligning himself with rhetoric previously used by right-wing nationalist figures (Thanabalasingham, 2025).

## Freedom of Assembly

Court issued orders restricting at least 3 peaceful protests, two organized by student activists in Colombo, one memorial event held in Batticaloa.

On 27 March, Madushan Chandrajith, Convenor of the Inter-University Students' Federation (IUSF), and 25 other individuals were arrested for staging a protest outside the Ministry of Health, defying a court order that prohibited demonstrations in the area. They were later granted bail, with Chandrajith and his co-accused released on surety bails of Rs. 1 million each. The protest had occurred after a group of union representatives failed to reach an agreement with the Ministry of Health Secretary, leading to the defiance of the court order and their subsequent arrests (Ada Derana, 2025).

On 5 April, the Sri Lanka Police secured a court order from the Fort Magistrate's Court preventing members of the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) and the IUSF from entering the Colombo Fort and Galle Face areas, where a protest was planned. This order specifically targeted Duminda Nagamuwa and Pubudu Jayagoda, senior members of the FSP, as well as other activists involved in the protest (Ada Derana, 2025; Daily Mirror, 2025).



Section 106 (1) of Criminal Code of Procedure, is a legal section Police often uses to obtain court orders against peaceful assemblies, without the presence of the other party.

Figure 1: The restraining court order issued banning a planned memorial procession in Batticaloa, under the section 106(1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure Act (No. 15 of 1979). Courtesy: Tamil Guardian

These court actions reflect the authorities' efforts to curb public demonstrations in key areas of the capital. Additionally, earlier in the month, the Batticaloa Magistrate's Court issued a restraining order against a planned memorial procession to honor Annai Poopathy, the Tamil mother who died in 1988 after a hunger strike protesting the actions of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF). The procession, organized by Sabarethin Sivayoganathan, was blocked by the court at the request of the local police, who argued that it could be viewed as an attempt to commemorate the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), potentially inciting unrest. The court, however, clarified that individual commemorations at Poopathy's memorial site were allowed. Despite the ban, the 37th anniversary of her death was still marked by tributes and the lighting of lamps across the North-East and among the diaspora (Tamil Guardian, 2025).





*Figure 2: IUSF made a complaint at the CID of the Police accusing the Minister of Health for providing information of Allied of health graduates to the ruling Party members.*

On 25th 2025. Inter University Student Federation made a complaint at the CID of the Police accusing the Minister of Health for providing information of allied of health graduates to the local representatives of the ruling Party, NPP. Allied of health graduates along with the Inter University Student Federation (IUSF) organized a number of protests in the recent past.

## Custodial Death

The death of 26-year-old Sathsara Nimesh while in police custody at the Welikada Police Station has sparked widespread concern and calls for accountability from legal and human rights groups. Nimesh was arrested on April 1, in connection with an alleged unauthorized entry into a house in Nawala. According to the police, he displayed signs of mental distress during questioning and was detained "for his own safety." While in custody, he reportedly exhibited erratic behaviour, including repeatedly banging his body against the walls of his cell, leading officers to transfer him to the National Institute of Mental Health in Angoda. He died there in the early hours of April 2 while receiving treatment (Balasuriya, 2025).



Figure 3: The protest held by activists in front of the Welikada Police in Rajagiriya, Colombo, demanding justice for the custodial death. Courtesy: Daily Mirror

Following the incident, Attorney-at-Law Senaka Perera, representing the Committee for Protecting Rights of Prisoners, submitted a formal request to Acting Inspector General of Police (IGP) Priyantha Weerasooriya to investigate the circumstances surrounding Nimesh's death. The victim's mother, Lekamwasam Liyanage Samanthi, was informed by police that her son had attempted suicide, yet she later found the clothes he had been wearing at the time of arrest within the police station premises, further fuelling suspicions of foul play (Balasuriya, 2025). In response, the Acting IGP recommended to the National Police Commission (NPC) that the Officer-in-Charge (OIC) of the Welikada Police Station be transferred to ensure an impartial investigation. Additionally, a Police Sergeant and a Police Constable attached to the station were suspended over alleged dereliction of duty (Ada Derana, 2025; Chamara, 2025; Daily Morning, 2025).

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) has since been directed to take over the investigation and examine the conduct of all officers involved (Jayawardena, 2025). The Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL) issued a strong statement expressing grave concern over the

incident. It emphasized the need for an immediate and impartial inquiry and warned that recurring custodial deaths erode public confidence in the administration of justice. The BASL criticized what it described as a historically slow and inadequate response by authorities to such incidents and reaffirmed its call for a zero-tolerance policy on custodial deaths. It also pledged support for institutional reforms and police capacity-building measures to prevent further tragedies (Ada Derana, 2025; Chamara, 2025; Daily Mirror, 2025).

Colombo Additional Magistrate Kemintha Perera has ordered the exhumation of the body of Sathsara Nimesh, to conduct a fresh postmortem examination. This decision was made following a request by the aggrieved party, particularly the deceased's mother, who filed an affidavit stating that she could not find closure from the initial postmortem, which failed to specify a definitive cause of death (Silva, 2025; Shantha, 2025).

In a report submitted on April 8, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) informed the court that further investigations were ongoing, including the analysis of blood samples sent to the Government Analyst and inquiries into the deceased's unusual behavioral patterns and interactions prior to his death. Statements had also been recorded from 14 to 17 individuals, including police sergeants, the Officer-in-Charge of the Welikada Police, other detainees, civilians, and witnesses from a psychiatric institution (Silva, 2025; Shantha, 2025). The court accordingly instructed the Colombo Chief Judicial Medical Officer to conduct a full postmortem through a panel of three medical experts. The panel—comprising Dr. Shriyanta Amararatne (Chief JMO of Colombo), Dr. P. Rohana Ruwanpura (Karapitiya Hospital), and Professor Muditha Vidanapathirana (University of Uva Wellassa)—was appointed to carry out the examination and submit a comprehensive report (Ada Derana, 2025; Silva, 2025).

## Prevention of Terrorism Act

Amnesty International has expressed grave concern over the arrest of 22-year-old Mohamad Rusdi on 22 March in Colombo under Sri Lanka's controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). Rusdi was detained after President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, acting as Minister of Defense, signed a 90-day detention order on 25 March 2025. Authorities allege that Rusdi was affiliated with extremist groups and engaged in ideologically motivated actions harmful to communal harmony. However, almost two weeks after his arrest, no credible evidence or formal charges had been brought against him (Amnesty International, 2025).



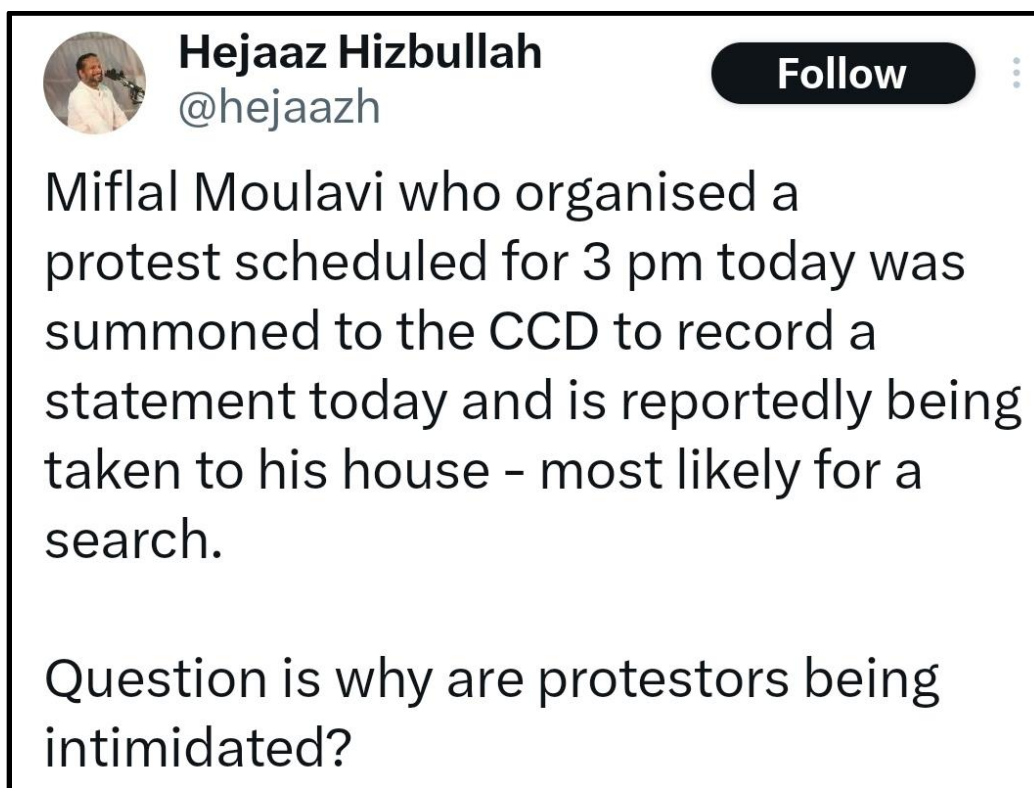


Figure 4: Miflal Moulavi, a community leader who organized a protest against the arrest of the youth under PTA, was summoned to the Colombo Crimes Division (CCD).

Amnesty International has criticized Sri Lanka's PTA for arbitrary detention and abuse, particularly targeting Tamil and Muslim communities. They call for Rusdi's immediate release unless charges are filed and urge a moratorium on the PTA (Amnesty International, 2025).

Rusdi's detention has sparked both domestic and international outrage. The All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU), Sri Lanka's foremost Muslim clerical body, decried the arrest, stating it was provoked by Rusdi's display of a sticker criticizing Israeli military actions in Gaza. While police denied that the sticker was the sole cause, they offered no substantive explanation for his detention. The ACJU urged the government to uphold the democratic right to peaceful expression while addressing national security concerns (Tamil Guardian, 2025; The Morning, 2025).

The Rusdi case has amplified doubts over the sincerity of President Dissanayake's administration in delivering on its promises of reform. The government's continued use of the PTA against peaceful dissenters like Rusdi has undermined its human rights credibility. Rights organizations continue to demand both justice for detainees and the complete repeal of the PTA, emphasizing the need for authentic, rights-based legal reform (Amnesty, 2025; Tamil Guardian, 2025; The Morning, 2025).



In response to growing criticism, Prime Minister Dr. Harini Amarasuriya announced that the government is moving forward with repealing the PTA. A Cabinet Paper has been approved to form a committee chaired by President's Counsel Rienzie Arsecularatne, which will conduct broad consultations before drafting replacement legislation. Dr. Amarasuriya emphasized the new law would seek to balance national security with constitutional rights, aligning with the NPP's manifesto commitment to create a society free from oppression and discrimination (Daily Mirror, 2025; Perera and Siriwardana, 2025).

The committee, with support from the Ministry of Justice and National Integration, has been tasked with identifying actionable steps to dismantle the PTA. Public consultations were set to begin in May, involving civil society, international actors, and affected communities. At a preliminary meeting on 11 April, Justice Minister Harsha Nanayakkara reaffirmed the government's pledge to repeal the PTA and introduce legislation that meets global counterterrorism standards while safeguarding civil liberties (Ada Derana, 2025).

Despite these pledges, the continued use of the PTA has cast doubt on the government's intentions. This contradiction was starkly illustrated with the arrest of former State Minister Sivanesanathurai Chandrakanthan—known as 'Pillayan' in Batticaloa. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) detained him under the PTA for 90 days in connection with the 2006 abduction and disappearance of Eastern University Vice Chancellor Prof. Sivasubramaniam Ravindranath (Newswire, 2025). Pillayan's arrest has reignited scrutiny of the PTA's role as a political and ethnic repression tool, particularly amid the government's proclaimed commitment to repeal it.

Justice Minister Nanayakkara reiterated the government's repeal plan but acknowledged that a moratorium on the PTA had not been discussed. This omission has raised concerns among international observers, particularly the European Union, which has called for a moratorium as a prerequisite for retaining GSP+ trade benefits. Critics argue the current administration's reliance on the PTA mirrors past abuses, undermining the credibility of its reform agenda (Daily Mirror, 2025; Tamil Guardian, 2025).

These recent cases illustrate a broader pattern of selective enforcement under the guise of national security. Other recent incidents include the arrest of a Tamil father for circulating a photo of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and the detention of a British Tamil man attending his mother's funeral (Tamil Guardian, 2025). These arrests echo long-standing concerns over the PTA's use to disproportionately target Tamil and Muslim communities.

Suresh Premachandran of the Democratic Tamil National Alliance (DTNA) alleged that the PTA remains a strategic tool for suppressing dissent in Tamil-majority areas. He condemned the government for failing to halt military-backed temple constructions in the North and for neglecting Tamil political prisoners. Premachandran claimed the distinction between the NPP and its ideological predecessor, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), is superficial, with little substantive change in governance style or policy direction (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

The Pillayan case, much like Rusdi's, underscores the NPP government's ongoing dilemma: maintaining a progressive, reformist image while relying on repressive laws rooted in past

authoritarian practices. Allegations of politically motivated enforcement and legal misconduct have only intensified skepticism, domestically and internationally. While a thorough investigation into Prof. Ravindranath's disappearance is widely supported, critics argue that using the PTA in this context erodes the rule of law and discredits the judicial process (The Island, 2025).

## Land Encroachment and Related Issues



Figure 5: Villagers in Keppapilavil, Mullaitivu handed over a petition to the Mullaitivu District Secretariat addressing to the Prime Minister requesting the release of their land held by the military

Issues concerning land rights in the Northern and Eastern provinces continue to dominate the political and social discourse, with Tamil communities persistently demanding the return of lands still occupied by the military and other state agencies, even 15 years after the end of the civil war.

Ratnasingam Muralitharan, leader of the *Northern Provincial People's Organization for Land Rights*, recently stated that the tri-forces still occupy 1,209.22 acres of land in the Kilinochchi district, including 653.65 acres in Karaichi, 180.38 acres in Kandawali, 116.61 acres in Pachilappilli, and 248.18 acres in Poonagari. He urged that these lands be returned to their rightful owners (Tamilwin, 2025). In a partial move, 15 acres of Paranthan Chemical Factory land have been handed back to the Divisional Secretary of Kandawali, though the military still retains control over the remainder (Tamilwin, 2025). The *Trincomalee Land Recovery Network* staged a protest

in front of the Eastern Governor's Secretariat. Protesters demanded the return of lands taken for the proposed solar power project in Sampur and the expansion of the *Vidura* naval camp. Their slogans emphasized protection of livelihoods and human rights, and a formal memorandum was submitted to officials. This protest coincided with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Colombo to discuss the India-backed solar project (Tamilwin, 2025).

In Jaffna, long-standing restrictions are gradually being eased. The road from Achuveli to Pedroga Beach through the Palali High Security Zone was reopened on April 10 under strict conditions. Travel is permitted only between 6:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., with bans on photography, vehicle stopping, and private vehicle access. A similar reopening occurred for the 2.5-km stretch of the Palaly Road between Vasavilan Junction and Ponnalai–Point Pedro, marking its first public access in 35 years. Residents celebrated with cultural rituals including Pongal cooking and coconut breaking. This event coincided with the scheduled visit of Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya to Jaffna (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

Despite these minor openings, Northern Province Governor Nagalingam Vedhanayakan has raised concerns about land seizures under the guise of forest and wildlife conservation. He criticized the post-war gazettement of lands as forests using Google Maps, often without consultation with local or field officials (Tamilwin, 2025). These concerns were also echoed by MP Durairasa Ravikaran in a meeting with the governor, where he highlighted land and development issues in Mullaitivu, Mannar, and Vavuniya districts (Tamilwin, 2025).

The situation in Mullaitivu's Keppapilavu remains tense, with villagers repeatedly petitioning for the return of 171 acres of residential and communal land still under military control. Despite multiple appeals to local and national officials, including a meeting at the Presidential Secretariat on April 10, they were told that no information was available. In response, they submitted another petition on April 11 to the District Secretariat and protested in front of the office, carrying banners urging the President to act (Tamil Guardian, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025).

On April 12, landowners in Thaiyiddy, Valikamam North, protested the illegal construction of a Buddhist temple named Tissa Vihara on their lands. Joined by *Tamil National People's Front* members, priests, and civil society leaders like Father M. Sakthivel and MP Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam, the protesters accused the government of systematic 'Sinhalisation' and cultural encroachment. The chief monk of the vihara refused dialogue with the protestors, further escalating tensions (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

A positive development came on April 10 when the military released the headquarters of the *Achchuveli Multipurpose Cooperative Society* and about eight acres of surrounding land in Valikamam East. This property had been under military control since 1996, preventing the society from operating at its original location (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

The Vali North *Land Liberation Organization* sent an open letter to President Anura Kumara Disسانayake, calling for the immediate release of nearly 2,900 acres of land still under military control in areas like Keerimalai, Kangesanthurai, and Palaly. The letter highlighted the disconnect between the government's promises and its actions, criticizing the slow pace of land release, continued military occupation, and the lack of transparency. It also made demands concerning the use of Mylitti Fishing Harbour, road access, religious site restoration, and support for resettlement and reconstruction. The organization emphasized that these are not political demands but fundamental rights (Tamilwin, 2025). In the Eastern Province, efforts to restore civilian access continue. On April 22, preparations were made to reopen a road in the Puthunagar area of Batticaloa that had been blocked by the Air Force for years. With fences being removed in coordination with local officials and the Air Force, residents hope to reduce travel distances, particularly for those commuting from Batticaloa to Vavunathivu via the Weyiyar Bridge (Tamilwin, 2025).

Government MP M. Jegatheeswaran announced that controversial land demarcation efforts by the Department of Forest Conservation and the Department of Wildlife Conservation have been suspended following a high-level parliamentary meeting involving the Northern Province Governor, ministers, and officials. These demarcation practices, heavily reliant on GPS and gazette notifications, have been widely criticized for encroaching on lands historically inhabited or cultivated by Tamils (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

Meanwhile, in Mullaitivu, landowners from Vadduvakal demanded the return of over 600 acres of land, including coconut and palmyrah groves, that were seized by the Navy and converted into the "Gothabaya Naval Base." Despite holding legal deeds and being denied access for years, affected families have seen no restitution and continue to live in economic hardship (Tamil Guardian, 2025). In Jaffna, the Acting Director of the Jaffna Teaching Hospital, Dr. C. Jamunanantha, called for the release of 1.4 acres of military-occupied land vital for hospital expansion, highlighting the military's persistent hold over civilian land since 2009 (Tamil Guardian, 2025).



President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, campaigning ahead of local elections, pledged to re-evaluate all lands marked by the Forest Department using Google Maps and return farmlands and reservoirs to rightful owners, while also committing to broader reconciliation, including the restoration of the Jaffna Public Library and economic support for farmers (Tamil Guardian, 2025). The President also addressed rising tensions surrounding the illegal construction of a Buddhist temple, Tissa Raja Maha Vihara, on private Tamil land in Thaiyiddy, where the Chief Incumbent of the Nagadeepa Temple, Navandagala Padumakiththi Tissa, publicly supported Tamil claims and blamed the army for facilitating the seizure (The Morning LK, 2025; Tamil Guardian, 2025). Civil society groups, such as the *People's Alliance for Right to Land* (PARL), and university academics like Dr. Mahendran Thiruvarangan, have pressured the government to return lands seized under the guise of conservation or archaeological protection, arguing that both Tamil and Muslim communities have been systematically dispossessed through military-backed bureaucratic measures (Tamil Guardian, 2025). *Tamil National People's Front* (TNPF) MP Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam reiterated these concerns in Parliament, condemning the military's ongoing role in illegal land grabs and the construction of Buddhist sites, despite official rulings confirming the lands belong to Tamil civilians (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

## Mass Graves

The Jaffna Magistrate's Court stated that excavation efforts at the Hindu cemetery in Chemmani, Jaffna, where human skeletal remains were recently uncovered, have stalled due to a lack of government funding (Tamil Guardian, 2025). The remains were found during construction for an electric cremation platform, prompting police involvement and a court-ordered investigation.

This site lies just metres from the notorious Chemmani mass grave, uncovered in 1998 after a soldier testified during the Krishanthi Kumaraswamy rape and murder trial that hundreds of Tamil civilians had been buried there following detention by the Sri Lankan military. Although 15 skeletons were found in 1999, the government failed to carry out a full exhumation or pursue accountability. Human rights groups and Tamil families have long suspected many more bodies remain buried and have repeatedly called for further investigation and international oversight. The recent delay

The case of the rape and murder of Krishanthi Kumarasamy, and murder of three others by the military in 1996, exposed the notorious Chemmani massgrave. The soldier who found guilty claimed that as many as 400 bodies had been buried at Chemmani massgrave. Further exhumations found 15 more bodies in 1999, some suspects have been identified though they were never prosecuted. The new site has been found meters away from the previous massgrave site.

has reinforced suspicions that the government continues to use financial and bureaucratic barriers to obstruct justice (Tamil Guardian , 2025).

Similar concerns echoed with regard to recent allegations made in Parliament during a debate on the Batalanda Commission Report. Deputy Minister of Buddhasasana, Religious, and Cultural Affairs, Gamagedara Dissanayake, accused President Ranil Wickremesinghe—then Minister of Employment—of leading the Batalanda torture chamber, where brutal operations were reportedly conducted under SP Douglas Peiris. Peiris, who failed the ASP exam three times, was allegedly promoted through retrospective legislation by Wickremesinghe and his allies. Dissanayake claimed that 155 bodies were found in a single grave, that implicated officials either fled the country or died under suspicious circumstances, and that the Matale district leadership ran 20 torture chambers responsible for over 7,000 deaths (Farzan, 2025).

## Freedom of the Press



Police disrupting the media conference. Photo courtesy: Tamilwin

Ahead of the President's visit to Jaffna, a tense situation escalated as landowners from the *Valikamam North Land Release Committee* held a press briefing to demand the release of their lands within the Palaly High Security Zone and the full reopening of the Palaly Road without restrictions. However, as the press conference began, a team from the Palaly Police Station, led by the Officer-in-Charge, arrived at the scene claiming the event could not proceed and started taking photographs of participants. They also recorded the names and national ID numbers of

those present, as well as journalists covering the event, with reports suggesting that the intention was to intimidate both the landowners and the press (Tamil Guardian, 2025). Despite the threats, the press conference continued as planned (Sri Lanka Brief, 2025).

The government has issued a controversial directive requiring journalists to hold media accreditation issued by the Government Information Department to attend Cabinet press briefings.

In a separate but related development, journalists have raised concerns about access to government press briefings. Journalists who join Cabinet briefings via Zoom have been reportedly denied the opportunity to ask questions. Initially, remote participants were allowed to ask questions, but this practice changed, with many Zoom participants being sidelined, despite their repeated requests. Journalists view this as problematic in the context of the government's emphasis on digitisation and modern technology (Jayawardena, 2025). This has raised alarm among media workers who argue that such actions undermine the right to free expression and the public's right to information.

In another incident, journalist Fazir Mohamed, the Secretary of the *Young Journalists Association* and a reporter for Satahan media, was physically removed from the Kuliypitiya Magistrate's Court while covering proceedings related to a case of police torture. Mohamed had been investigating a report on the alleged involvement of police officers in the torture and robbery of a jewelry shop owner. Despite presenting his media identity card, Mohamed was dragged out of the courtroom by police officers and had his phone confiscated, even though he was not recording the proceedings. *Young Journalists Association* has vowed to file complaints with the Judicial Service Commission and other relevant institutions (Sri Lanka Brief, 2025; Uduwaragedara, 2025).

Police have manhandled and forcefully removed the Journalist Mohamed Fazeer, the secretary of Young Journalist Association preventing him from covering a legal case on police torture.

Meanwhile, the government has issued a controversial directive requiring journalists to hold media accreditation issued by the Government Information Department to attend Cabinet press briefings. Minister Dr. Nalinda Jayatissa defended this move, claiming that it was not an attempt to suppress the media but rather a means of formalizing press participation. However, this policy has received strong backlash from journalists' organizations like the *Sri Lanka Professional Journalists Association* arguing that such measures constitute a threat to media freedom and are an attempt to control and intimidate journalists. They have called for the issuance of media identity cards to be handled by an independent body, rather than the government, to ensure that journalists can freely cover government events without undue influence (Chamara, 2025; Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association, 2025).

This climate of intimidation against the press and journalists has been a long-standing issue, particularly in the Tamil-populated Northern and Eastern regions. On the 20th anniversary of the

assassination of Tamil journalist Dharmeratnam "Taraki" Sivaram, whose death remains unresolved, journalists and activists gathered in Jaffna to honor his memory. Despite the event's peaceful nature, participants reported heavy surveillance by police and intelligence services, with officers photographing attendees and journalists. Sivaram's assassination in 2005 has come to symbolize the dangers faced by Tamil journalists, who continue to face harassment, violence, and threats while reporting on issues like militarisation, land grabs, and ongoing human rights abuses in the post-conflict North-East (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

## Easter Sunday Attacks

In the wake of calls from various religious and civil society organizations urging the disclosure of information regarding the masterminds behind the 2019 Easter Sunday terror attacks, *Bodu Bala Sena* (BBS) General Secretary, Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thera, stated he would only share such information if summoned by the relevant authorities. He emphasized that revealing details outside of official channels could cause unnecessary complications. Despite his claims of knowing the mastermind behind the attacks, including details on their identity and training of National Thowheed Jama'ath leader Mohamed Cassim Mohamed Zahran, Gnanasara Thera refused to discuss the matter further with civil society groups. When asked about whether he would provide a statement to the Police or Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Minister of Public Security Ananda Wijepala dismissed the importance of Gnanasara's statements, affirming that a proper investigation was underway (Samaraweera, 2025).

Meanwhile, civil society activists, including those from the *Centre for Society and Religion* (CSR), have raised concerns over unresolved aspects of the investigation, presenting a 13-page document to authorities urging a deeper probe into several key individuals and events linked to the attacks. They have also pointed to unaddressed evidence, such as the involvement of Abdul Latheef Mohamed Jameel and the possible connections between controversial figures like Pillayan and the perpetrators. CSR investigation team member Tharindu Jayawardena highlighted how the authorities had ignored critical information regarding Saharan's family and their detention with Tamil politician Pillayan. Jayawardena questioned whether the attack was orchestrated for purposes beyond religious extremism (Kariyakarawana, 2025).

*The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka* emphasized the need for justice and identifying perpetrators of the Easter Sunday attacks, acknowledging the government's efforts but focusing on identifying the perpetrators and their accomplices (Perera, 2025).

In response, a joint statement from Muslim organizations condemned the attacks and reaffirmed their commitment to justice for all affected communities, urging the government to bring the investigation to a credible conclusion. They rejected any notion of collective blame against the Muslim community and emphasized that justice must be delivered not only for the victims of the Easter Sunday attacks but for all communities that have suffered injustice in Sri Lanka's history, including Tamil civilians and Sinhala youth (Ada Derana, 2025).



Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, speaking on the sixth anniversary, called for the establishment of an independent prosecution office dedicated to holding those responsible for the bombings accountable.

Health and Mass Media Minister Dr. Nalinda Jayatissa assured the public that evidence was being gathered, and summaries of the findings would be released soon.

Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, speaking on the sixth anniversary, called for the establishment of an independent prosecution office dedicated to holding those responsible for the bombings accountable. He also urged the government to address the broader political culture, which he argued contributed to the environment that allowed such attacks to occur (Perera, 2025).

In response to ongoing investigations, Health and Mass Media Minister Dr. Nalinda Jayatissa questioned why some former government members, now in the Opposition, seemed so concerned about the progress of the Easter Sunday attack investigations. He argued that attempts to suppress the investigation over the past five years had delayed exposing the masterminds. He assured the public that evidence was being gathered, and summaries of the findings would be released soon (Samarawickrama, 2025).

Further strengthening the investigation process, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Shani Abeysekara was appointed to the Special Police Committee tasked with reviewing the findings of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry (PCoI) into the Easter Sunday attacks. The committee, led by Senior Deputy Inspector General of Police Asanga Karawita, now includes Abeysekara, a figure previously involved in the investigation. This has raised concerns among some political figures, including Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) MP Namal Rajapaksa, who criticized Abeysekara's inclusion as a conflict of interest. Rajapaksa argued that Abeysekara's involvement undermines the impartiality of the review committee and further erodes public trust. He emphasized that the investigation must be transparent and credible to ensure justice for the victims of the attacks (Jayawardena, 2025).

## Justice for Enforced Disappearances

Prime Minister Dr. Harini Amarasuriya recently expressed that the Sri Lankan government is committed to delivering justice for the victims of enforced disappearances, acknowledging the widespread public distrust in institutions like the Office for Reparations (OR) and the Office on Missing Persons (OMP). In response to a question raised in Parliament, she admitted that these institutions had failed in the past due to a lack of strength and resources, but she assured that they would be reformed. However, Tamil families, particularly from the North-East, have consistently rejected these domestic mechanisms, viewing them as ineffective and inadequate. For over eight years, Tamil families have carried out continuous protests, demanding the truth about the fate of their loved ones who disappeared during and after Sri Lanka's civil conflict.

These protests, led largely by Tamil women, have become the longest-running continuous demonstrations in the country. These families of the disappeared have been calling for international accountability for years through the International Criminal Court (ICC), as they believe these local bodies only serve to placate international pressure without delivering justice (Tamil Guardian, 2025).



*Figure 6: Kilinochchi, On 29<sup>th</sup> April Families of the disappeared continued protests marking 2,984 days of unanswered grief. Courtesy: Tamil Guardian*

The OMP, established in 2017 under international pressure, has failed to trace any disappeared persons or clarify their fates, with the United Nations noting its inability to make any meaningful progress. Instead of uncovering the truth, it has been accused of focusing on administrative closure, reducing caseloads without providing any real answers (Tamil Guardian, 2025). Tamil families have repeatedly rejected offers of death certificates and compensation, viewing them as attempts to prematurely close cases without addressing the underlying issues. In protest, families have expressed that accepting such offers would mean abandoning the search for truth. In Mullaitivu, one mother pointedly asked, "If the death certificate is the answer to why our children are still missing, then who are the murderers?" (Ada Derana, 2025).

The Prime Minister's assurances that the government will reform these institutions have been met with skepticism. Tamil families, having heard similar promises from previous governments, view these statements as empty rhetoric. The government's focus on domestic mechanisms, despite their consistent failure, has led to accusations of evading international oversight and prolonging impunity (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

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