

# Human Rights Situation in Sri Lanka

## July 2025



Chemmani massgrave forensic excavation site in July 2025. Courtesy: [Tamil Guardian](https://www.tamilguardian.com).

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Published in October 2025.

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Colombo, Sri Lanka

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

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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# 1. Executive Summary

**Freedom of Expression and Press:** Two former military intelligence officers who had previously been arrested and charged with the abduction and torture of journalist Keith Noyahr in 2008 were acquitted by the Colombo Magistrate's Court. The Senior Assistant Secretary to the President has denied information requested from the Presidential Secretariat under the Right to Information Act on all positions in the Presidential Media Division, the names of those appointed to them, the date of appointment, and the salary for each position, stating that information on the names of the officers of the Presidential Media Division could not be provided.

The *Young Journalists' Association* has addressed a letter to President Dissanayake, expressing significant concerns regarding the current appointment procedure to fill a vacancy in the Right to Information Commission, claiming that it violates the Right To Information Act. The Digital Journalists Association of Sri Lanka was launched, with the intention of building a collective of journalists engaged in the digital media space. It is intended to collaborate with the state and other media and associated organizations on matters concerning online media, digital safety, and the freedom of expression, information, and publication.

**Freedom of Association:** Non-Governmental Coordination Committee meetings were held for the first quarter with the aim of reviewing the progress of the activities of NGOs operating in the Gampaha and Kegalle districts and their proposed activities for 2025. This could be seen as a state intervention to civil society action

**Right to Assembly:** The Supreme Court declared that then President Ranil Wickremesinghe violated the fundamental rights of citizens by invoking Emergency Regulations under the Public Security Ordinance to evict '*Aragalaya*' protesters from Galle Face Green on 17 July 2022.

**Accountability on Sri Lanka's alleged war crimes:** UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy has ruled out the possibility of the International Criminal Court investigating alleged war crimes in Sri Lanka, stating that the country is not a signatory to the Rome Statute and therefore falls outside the Court's jurisdiction.

Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath asserted that international intervention is unnecessary and emphasized the government's commitment to addressing human rights concerns through domestic legal frameworks.

**Easter Sunday Attacks:** Public Security Minister Ananda Wijepala informed Parliament that the Taj Samudra Hotel alerted the State Intelligence Service (SIS) via email minutes after bomber Abdul Latheef Mohamed Jameel checked in on April 20, 2019. Despite Jameel being on a security watch list, the SIS failed to act on this warning. Jameel was originally assigned to bomb the Taj but later died in an explosion at another location after his initial attempt failed. ITAK MP Shanakiyan Rasamanickam called for a special prosecutor's office with international assistance to conduct an independent inquiry into the attacks. He urged the government to provide a clear update on investigation progress and questioned why reports related to the attacks have not been tabled in Parliament, six years after the incident.

The Archdiocese of Colombo, represented by Rev. Fr. Cyril Gamini Fernando, welcomed the disciplinary action against former SIS Chief SDIG Nilantha Jayawardena but insisted that criminal charges should be filed as recommended by the Presidential Commission of Inquiry. The Church continues to call for the full implementation of all Presidential Col recommendations, including prosecution under the Penal Code.

The National Police Commission announced Jayawardena's dismissal in July, concluding that he had failed to act on critical intelligence before the attacks that killed over 250 people and injured hundreds. The charges against him were serious enough under the Establishments Code to warrant immediate removal. Jayawardena had been on compulsory leave during the inquiry.

**Land Encroachment and Occupation in the North and East:** Northern and Eastern provinces continue to face persistent land ownership and usage challenges, with tensions intensifying over military occupation, state-led resettlement initiatives, environmental exploitation, and allegations of demographic engineering.

Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Land and Irrigation Susil Ranasinghe acknowledged the deep-rooted complications surrounding land ownership in the North-East, particularly in Vavuniya. He noted that a gazette notification on land titles was recently suspended due to a legal challenge by MP Sumanthiran of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), though the government remains committed to resolving disputes via local officials and public awareness campaigns. He stated that the government plans to negotiate the return of these lands, especially agricultural lands acquired by the Forest Department. A target of 24,000 acres in Vavuniya and 50,000 acres across the Vanni has been set for release, with coordination between the Forest Department, Divisional Secretariats, and the Ministry of Lands.

The *Tamil National People's Front* (TNPF) reported that over 600 acres of land in Vavuniya North are being occupied by Sinhalese settlers. These lands, once declared forest reserves after the civil war, were later handed over to the Mahaweli Authority, allegedly without proper community consultation. Tamil landowners attempting to cultivate these lands have faced arrests despite court acquittals.

**Mass Graves:** Attention has been recently drawn to the Chemmani mass grave in Jaffna, following the discovery of over 101 skeletal remains, including those of infants and children, during renewed excavation efforts at the Sindhubaththi Hindu Cemetery. Alongside the remains, personal belongings including a UNICEF school bag, toys for kids, a feeding bottle, glass bangles, and pieces of clothing were discovered, raising suspicions that many of the victims were civilians who had been the targets of extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances during the 1990s Sri Lankan civil war.

The *Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi* submitted a formal letter to President Dissanayake, calling for: a consolidated inquiry combining the 1999 and 2025 findings; engagement of international forensic experts; public release of all forensic and DNA data; repatriation of the 1999-exhumed remains (allegedly held at the University of Glasgow); and significantly enhanced funding and technical support. The *Eelam People's Democratic Party*, led by Douglas Devananda, also wrote to the president supporting continued investigations—not just in Chemmani but in Mannar, Kokkulai, Thunukkai, and Mandaithivu, where similar grave sites are suspected. While endorsing evidence-based inquiries, the EPDP strongly refuted allegations of its own involvement in wartime atrocities, challenging critics to provide concrete evidence if credible accusations exist.

The presence of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, at the site has underscored the growing international demand for justice, transparency, and accountability.

**Forcibly Disappeared:** The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka has recommended the government to establish a new permanent institution—a "*Special Office for the Investigation and Prosecution of Serious Crimes by State Officials*"—that is independent of regular law enforcement authorities and empowered to investigate and prosecute enforced disappearances. Also encouraged the government to consider becoming a party to the *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* (ICC), which classifies widespread and systematic enforced disappearance as a crime against humanity.

**Political Prisoners:** Civil society organisations gathered in Jaffna to demand the immediate release of Tamil political prisoners held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

**Police Misconduct:** The Supreme Court ruled that Mery Ruwan Kumara, a police constable attached to the Special Task Force, was unlawfully arrested and detained by officers of the Tissamaharama Police in 2012, in violation of the Constitution. While he was placed in custody, he was subjected to humiliating treatment, including being stripped naked during interrogation.

The Supreme Court ruled that two farmers who had participated in a 2018 protest in Kalukele had their rights violated when they were remanded based on an unlawful police report.

Meanwhile, in response to a fundamental rights petition filed, the Acting Inspector General of Police, Priyantha Weerasooriya, issued a circular mandating reforms in the way police summon individuals to record statements. The new guidelines require police to provide suspects with specific charges or allegations, inform witnesses of the purpose and relevance of their statements, and offer adequate context for all other summonses. These reforms aim to ensure compliance with the *Criminal Procedure Code* and uphold citizens' due process rights, particularly in the digital era.

Civil society activist Chirantha Amarasinghe raised alarms over unauthorized access to telephone data by the Criminal Investigation Department. In a letter addressed to the Secretary of the Public Security Ministry, Amarasinghe revealed that the Telecommunication Regulatory Commission had confirmed the existence of a special arrangement that enabled the CID to obtain phone records without court approval.

Parliament was officially informed that suspended Inspector General of Police Deshabandu Tennakoon had been found guilty of gross abuse of power by a Committee of Inquiry (Col) constituted under the Removal of Officers (Procedure) Act.

Amidst these developments, the Sri Lanka Police issued a public notice warning that legal action would be taken against individuals using abusive language on its official Facebook page.

**Prevention of Terrorism Act:** A 21-year-old Muslim boy from Mawanella, has been held for nearly nine months under the PTA following his arrest in October 2024. He was first arrested by officers attached to the Dehiwala Police while he was in Colombo searching for rental accommodation. He was re-arrested at his residence in Mawanella, relating to an Instagram video he posted. Police also accused this person of pasting anti-Israeli stickers, though inconsistencies in these allegations were noted in court. However, the Magistrate expressed dismay over the continued detention and questioned why he was held so long without evidence or direction from the Attorney General. On July 31, he was finally granted bail by the

Mount Lavinia Additional Magistrate after the Attorney General instructed police to release him. He was released on personal bail of Rs. 500,000 each with two sureties.

The case has drawn condemnation from the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, which has been formally notified. Previously, HRCSL ruled that the PTA was misused in the case of another Muslim youth, who was detained for pasting pro-Palestinian stickers. The Commission called for clearer guidelines on 'reasonable suspicion' and compensation for victims of wrongful detention.

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk has also voiced concern about Sri Lanka's use of the PTA, urging the government to suspend its application and release detainees held without charge.

**Pushback Against Decriminalisation of Same-Sex Relationships:** Archbishop Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, speaking at St. Mary's Church in Beruwala, criticized the growing acceptance of same-sex unions.

The Citizens of the People's Struggle addressed a letter to the Siam Sect's Malwathu Chapter's Mahanayaka Thero, Thibbatuwawe Sri Siddhartha Sumangala Thero, expressing concerns over recent remarks by United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk, urging the government to do the needful to decriminalize same-sex relations among consenting adults.

## 2. Freedom of Expression and Press

### 2.1. Abduction of Keith Noyahr in 2008

Two former military intelligence officers who had previously been arrested and charged with the abduction and torture of journalist Keith Noyahr in 2008 were acquitted by the Colombo Magistrate's Court, as the court ruled that the prosecution had failed to prove the charges beyond reasonable doubt (Silva, 2025). In May 2008, Keith Noyahr, the former Deputy Editor of *The Nation* newspaper and a columnist on Sri Lanka's security situation, was abducted and tortured, and later released after appeals were made to former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, by then Public Administration Minister Karu Jayasuriya (Fonseka, 2023; Sunday Observer, 2008).

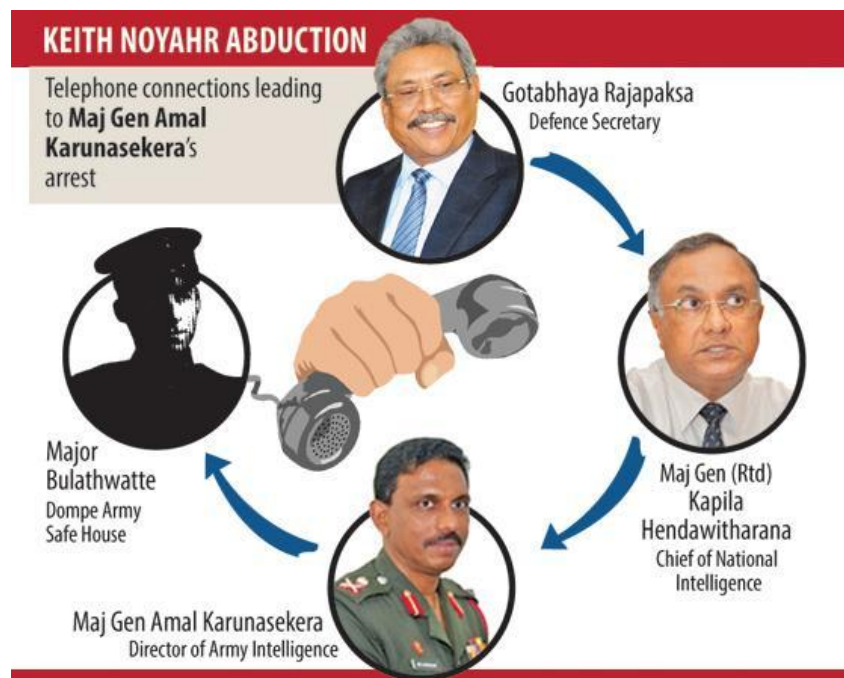


Figure 1: CID investigations revealed Keith Noyahr was released following an order issued by then Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapakse based on a request made by then President Mahinda Rajapakse. Courtesy: Sunday Observer

### 2.2. Right to Information

Social activist Anuruddha Bandara made a request to the Presidential Secretariat on June 02, under the Right to Information Act No. 12 of 2016, to provide information on all positions in the Presidential Media Division, the names of those appointed to them, the date of appointment, and the salary for each position (News 19, 2025). In response, the written notification issued by the Senior Assistant Secretary to the President states that information on the names of the officers of the Presidential Media Division cannot be provided under Section 5 (1) (a) of the Right to Information Act, No. 12 of 2016 (Ruhunage, 2025).

The Young Journalists' Association of Sri Lanka (YJA) has addressed a letter to President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, expressing significant concerns regarding the current appointment procedure to fill a vacancy in the Right to Information (RTI) Commission, claiming that it contravenes the RTI Act. The letter states that the process initiated by the Constitutional



Council (CC) to call for applications from the public to fill the vacancy does not align with the procedures outlined in the RTI Act (Asian Mirror, 2025).

Thanuja Abeysekara, the Kandy District Government Information Officer, has established a media organization under his chairmanship, contrary to the law. He, a public official and an employee of the Government Information Department, has no morality or legal rights to act as the chairman of a media organization (Kandyprime, 2025).

### **2.3. Three restraining orders and an Injunction order preventing defamation on social media**

Three conditional restraining orders have been issued against three youtubers to prevent the publication of defamatory and false information on the internet against Hayeshika Fernando, aka 'Teacher Amma', who conducts online tutoring classes for primary school children. These conditional injunctions were issued after considering three complaints filed by Hayeshika Fernando under Section 24 of the Online Safety Act, No. 9 of 2024 (Wijesinghe, 2025).

The Colombo District Court issued an order preventing the issuance of statements that are defamatory of Pradeep Nilanga, who serves as the *Diyawadana Nilame*, the chief lay custodian of the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, Kandy, Sri Lanka. This case was filed by Pradeep Nilanga Dela, against the defendants Sudantha Thilakasiri and Damith Nuwan Kodithuwakku Arachchi. According to the order, it is prohibited to make statements, publish news, or engage in any other defamatory activity that directly or indirectly defames the Diyawadana Nilame. The injunction also prohibits the posting of such content through the YouTube channels owned by the defendants (What News, 2025).

### **2.4. The Digital Journalists Association launched**

The Digital Journalists Association of Sri Lanka (DJASL) was launched in Colombo, with the intention of building a collective of journalists engaged in the digital media space. Moving ahead, the DJASL will also collaborate with the state and other media and associated organizations on matters concerning online media, digital safety, and the freedom of expression, information, and publication (Newswire, 2025).

### 3. Civil Society Situation

#### 3.1. New IUSF group established

A newly formed group has claimed to represent the Inter-University Students' Federation (IUSF), using its logo and letterhead in official statements. The IUSF is the largest student movement in Sri Lanka, comprising multiple student unions from state universities across the country. It has long been a vocal critic of successive governments, organizing mass student rallies and advocating for reforms in education and other social issues for decades. As a result, IUSF student activists have frequently faced reprisals from authorities, including surveillance, arrests, assaults, and various legal actions taken against them.

This newly formed 'IUSF' faction declared itself an "independent and representative" body, distancing itself from what it described as years of political manipulation (Jayawardhana, 2025). Given the IUSF's well-known political affiliation with the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP)—FSP is a breakaway group from the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) currently leading the coalition government—the new group positioned itself as an independent alternative. However, INFORM is concerned over whether this faction was established as a means of controlling the student movement by any state actors.

#### 3.2. Government Institutions hold meetings to review NGO activity

Non-Governmental Coordination Committee meetings were held for the first quarter with the aim of reviewing the progress of the activities of NGOs registered under the NGO secretariat operating in the Gampaha and Kegalle districts and their proposed activities for 2025. (District Media Unit News, 2025; District Secretariat Kegalle, 2025). This has been a persistent and problematic practice over many years, with state officials regularly intervening in, influencing, and directing the civil society agenda—undermining the independence and freedom of civil society. While many rights-based civil society organizations have chosen not to register with the NGO Secretariat, the current government has issued a notice making it mandatory for all NGOs operating in Sri Lanka to register with the Secretariat.



*Figure 2: A representative from a Civil Society Organization working in Gampaha District presents the progress of their work to government officials and other civil society members. Source: Gamapha District Media Unit News*

## 4. Arbitrary Arrest, Repressive Legislation, and the Push for Reform

### 4.1. Police Misconduct

Delivering a landmark judgement the Supreme Court ruled that Mery Ruwan Kumara, a police constable attached to the Special Task Force (STF), was unlawfully arrested and detained by officers of the Tissamaharama Police in 2012, in violation of Articles 13(1) and 13(2) of the Constitution. Kumara was taken into custody over the alleged theft of a rare Valampuri conch shell and detained for three days without being produced before a magistrate. During this period, he was allegedly subjected to humiliating treatment, including being stripped naked during interrogation. The Court found that the arrest lacked credible justification and that the prolonged detention violated legal safeguards requiring judicial oversight within 24 hours. Although the Court rejected the petitioner's claim under Article 11, which prohibits torture, due to lack of supporting medical or independent evidence, it ordered the three police officers involved to personally pay Rs. 250,000 each in compensation, and further ordered the State to pay Rs. 50,000 (Supreme Court of Sri Lanka, 2025).

In a related case that further underscores judicial oversight of police practices, the Supreme Court ruled that two farmers who had participated in a 2018 protest in Kalukele had their rights violated when they were remanded based on an unlawful police report. Although the Court did not find their arrest itself unlawful under Article 13(1), it held that their remand custody constituted a violation of Article 13(2) due to arbitrary and unjustified reasons presented by the police. The former Officer-in-Charge (OIC) of the Aralaganwila Police Station was ordered to pay Rs. 30,000 in compensation to the petitioners. The Court emphasized the importance of educating magistrates on the proper exercise of discretion when granting remand custody (The Island, 2025).

Meanwhile, in response to a fundamental rights petition filed by Vidura Ralapanawa (SC/FR 266/2023), the Acting Inspector General of Police, Priyantha Weerasooriya, issued a circular mandating reforms in the way police summon individuals to record statements. Ralapanawa had been summoned over a social media post concerning the Ceylon Electricity Board, without being informed of any charges or the purpose of the summons. The new guidelines require police to provide suspects with specific charges or allegations, inform witnesses of the purpose and relevance of their statements, and offer adequate context for all other summonses. These reforms aim to ensure compliance with the *Criminal Procedure Code* and uphold citizens' due process rights, particularly in the digital era (The Island, 2025).

In a separate but related concern, civil society activist Chirantha Amarasinghe raised alarms over unauthorized access to telephone data by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). In a letter dated July 14, 2025, addressed to the Secretary of the Public Security Ministry, Amarasinghe revealed that the Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (TRC) had confirmed the existence of a special arrangement that enabled the CID to obtain phone records without court approval. This occurred following a complaint lodged by former Bishop of Mannar, Rev. Emmanuel Fernando, after Amarasinghe criticized the bishop's public reception of then-President Ranil Wickremesinghe. Amarasinghe, invoking the Right to

Information (RTI) Act, called for full disclosure of documents authorizing such surveillance, which he condemned as unconstitutional and abusive (The Island, 2025).

Public concern over police accountability reached a constitutional milestone when Parliament was officially informed that suspended Inspector General of Police (IGP) Deshabandu Tennakoon had been found guilty of gross abuse of power by a Committee of Inquiry (CoI) constituted under the Removal of Officers (Procedure) Act, No. 5 of 2002. The CoI, chaired by Supreme Court Justice Padman Surasena and comprising Justice Neil Iddawala and National Police Commission Chair Lalith Ekanayake, unanimously recommended Tennakoon's removal. Speaker of the House, Dr. Jagath Wickramaratne, tabled the findings in Parliament, stating that it marked the first time in Sri Lankan history that such a recommendation for the removal of an IGP had been made under the constitutional process (The Island, 2025; The Morning, 2025).

Amidst these developments, the Sri Lanka Police issued a public notice warning that legal action would be taken against individuals using abusive language on its official Facebook page. While affirming its openness to public criticism and opinion, the department emphasized the need for respectful discourse, stating that offensive comments reflect poorly on the individuals making them (The Morning, 2025).

#### **4.2. Prevention of Terrorism Act**

Mohamed Rifai Mohamed Suhail, a 21-year-old aviation student from Mawanella, has been held for nearly nine months under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act<sup>1</sup> (PTA) following his arrest in October 2024. He was first arrested on 23 October 2024 by officers attached to the Dehiwala Police while he was in Colombo searching for rental accommodation. Police detained him near the Israeli Consular premises for not carrying his national identity card. Although his father later produced the ID in court, leading to Suhail's release by the Mount Lavinia Magistrate on 25 October, he was re-arrested the same evening at his residence in Mawanella (BBC Sinhala, 2025; Daily Mirror, 2025; Tamil Guardian, 2025).

The second arrest was allegedly tied to an Instagram video Suhail had posted, which showed the Israeli flag being trampled. The authorities interpreted this as grounds for detention under the PTA. Police also accused Suhail of pasting anti-Israeli stickers, though inconsistencies in these allegations were noted in court. Despite his re-arrest under the PTA, the Dehiwala Police failed to produce any substantive evidence. During a court hearing on July 9, 2025, Officer-in-Charge of Dehiwala Police admitted they had "no objection" to bail, conceding that no incriminating evidence had been found. Magistrate Hemali Halpathdeniya expressed dismay over the continued detention and questioned why Suhail was held so long without evidence or direction from the Attorney General (Sunday Times, 2025).

Police acknowledged submitting a report to the Attorney General's Department on May 27, 2025, but as of the July hearing, no response had been received. Consequently, the

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<sup>1</sup> The PTA, originally introduced in 1979 as a temporary measure, has remained in force for over four decades. It grants sweeping powers to the police, including the ability to detain individuals without trial for extended periods. Although successive governments, including the current administration, have promised to repeal or reform the law, it continues to be used, particularly against ethnic and religious minorities.

magistrate ordered Suhail to be produced in court on July 15, along with instructions from the AG's Department (Daily Morning, 2025; Sunday Times, 2025). On July 31, 2025, Suhail was finally granted bail by the Mount Lavinia Additional Magistrate after the Attorney General instructed police to release him. He was released on personal bail of Rs. 500,000 each with two sureties. The case was postponed to September 16 (Daily Mirror, 2025; Hiru News, 2025).

The case has drawn condemnation from the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL), which has been formally notified. In a comparable incident, HRCSL previously ruled that the PTA was misused in the case of another youth, Mohamed Rushdie, who was detained for pasting pro-Palestinian stickers. The Commission called for clearer guidelines on 'reasonable suspicion' and compensation for victims of wrongful detention (Doloswala, 2025).

#### **4.3. Push for reform**

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk has also voiced concern about Sri Lanka's use of the PTA, urging the government to suspend its application and release detainees held without charge (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

In this context, protests and signature campaigns continue to emerge across the Northern and Eastern provinces. Activists in Jaffna and Vavuniya have called for the law's repeal and justice for those arbitrarily detained, including Tamil political prisoner Vigneshwaranathan Parthipan, who has spent over 30 years in custody under the PTA (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

## 5. Accountability

### 5.1. Eviction of 'Aragalaya' protesters: SC rules President Wickramasinghe violated Fundamental Rights

the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka, by a 2-1 majority, declared that then Acting President Ranil Wickremesinghe violated the fundamental rights of citizens by invoking Emergency Regulations under the Public Security Ordinance to evict 'Aragalaya' protesters from Galle Face Green on 17 July 2022.

In a significant ruling delivered on 23 July 2025, the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka, by a 2-1 majority, declared that then Acting President Ranil Wickremesinghe violated the fundamental rights of citizens by invoking Emergency Regulations under the Public Security Ordinance to evict 'Aragalaya' protesters from Galle Face Green on 17 July 2022. The majority opinion, delivered by Chief Justice Murdu Fernando and Justice Yasantha Kodagoda, held that the Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions and Powers) Regulations No. 1 of 2022, gazetted on 17 July 2022, were arbitrary, vague, and

overbroad. The Court deemed them incompatible with the rule of law and in breach of Article 12(1) of the Constitution, thereby rendering the proclamation of the state of emergency and the subsequent regulations null and void (Ada Derana, 2025; Lakmal Sooriyagoda, 2025; The Island, 2025; The Morning, 2025).



Figure 3: Protesters being assaulted by security forces early morning of 22nd July 2022. Screenshot from video. Courtesy: [Ada Derana](#)

Justice Kodagoda noted that the regulations had been drafted in a stereotypical and repetitive manner, with no clear justification, and often disregarded their stated purposes. The Court further ruled that the scope of the regulations exceeded permissible limits under Article 15 of the Constitution, making them incapable of withstanding judicial scrutiny. In a dissenting

opinion, Justice Arjuna Obeysekera maintained that the emergency declaration was legal and did not violate any fundamental rights, thereby dismissing the petitions (Ada Derana, 2025; The Island, 2025; The Morning, 2025).

The fundamental rights petitions were filed by the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), former Human Rights Commissioner of Sri Lanka (HRCSL), Ambika Satkunanathan, and co-conveners of the Liberal Youth Movement, including Namini Panditha, Rusiru Egodage, and Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu. The petitioners argued that the emergency regulations were a form of prior restraint on rights, lacking in proportionality and necessity in a democratic society. The Court also ordered the government to bear the legal costs of the petitioners and instructed the Attorney General to submit a legal advisory to the Office of the President within three months, reflecting the legal principles outlined in the judgment (Sooriyagoda, 2025).

This ruling came amid heightened international scrutiny over Sri Lanka's civic freedoms. According to the June 2025 update from the CIVICUS Monitor, the country's civic space remains rated as "repressed." The report cites a pattern of suppressing peaceful protests—often with excessive force—as well as targeting activists and journalists through defamation, counter-terror laws, and intimidation. It also highlights the passage of new laws that stifle dissent without adequate consultation, in violation of international human rights standards (The Morning, 2025).

At the 58th and 59th sessions of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in March and June, the Sri Lanka Core Group—comprising Canada, Malawi, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and the United Kingdom—expressed concern over the government's limited progress on accountability, reconciliation, and good governance. They called on Sri Lanka to protect civil society, end surveillance and intimidation, and repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which continues to be used despite promises of abolition (The Morning, 2025).

## **5.2. Accountability on Sri Lanka's alleged war crimes**

UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy has ruled out the possibility of the International Criminal Court (ICC) investigating alleged war crimes in Sri Lanka, stating that the country is not a signatory to the Rome Statute and therefore falls outside the Court's jurisdiction. Lammy responded to British MP Uma Kumaran's question about whether the UK government would support the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' recommendation to refer Sri Lanka to the ICC, saying, "The Court wouldn't have jurisdiction to investigate any crimes that might be committed. That is the difficulty in what you recommend". Lammy expressed "very grave concerns" about the discovery of a mass grave in Chemmani, confirmed that the issue had been raised with the Sri Lankan government, and stated that the UK was in close contact with the families of the disappeared as well as NGOs. He also noted that the UK is considering providing technical assistance to support investigations at the Chemmani site, citing "capacity issues within the country" (The Island, 2025).

In response to international attention, Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath asserted that international intervention is unnecessary and emphasized the government's commitment to addressing human rights concerns through domestic legal frameworks. In an interview with a private television channel, Herath stated, "We do not need international intervention. Actions will be taken through Sri Lanka's constitution, law and judicial system." He welcomed the visit of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, to Sri Lanka, suggesting it would

help provide a balanced report due to first-hand observations. In addition, the government declared a gazette notification repealing the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) would be published by the first week of September (Tamilwin, 2025; Vijitha Herath Facebook page, 2025).

However, these statements were met with strong opposition from Tamil political representatives and activists. Sivagnanam Sritharan, leader of the Sri Lanka Tamil Arasu Party's parliamentary group, sharply criticized Herath's remarks, arguing that rejecting international involvement signals a majoritarian Sinhala-Buddhist agenda and marginalizes Tamils. "By saying that international intervention in internal affairs is not necessary, Vijitha Herath is reiterating that this is a Sinhala-Buddhist country and is treating Tamils with a stepmother mentality," Sritharan said (Tamilwin, 2025). He insisted that it would never be acceptable for the Sri Lankan government to investigate crimes allegedly committed by its own military, especially given the state's historical role in the civil war. Sritharan further accused Herath of attempting to safeguard Sri Lanka's international reputation, rather than genuinely seeking justice. He questioned how a government that refuses to acknowledge the UN Human Rights Council's 2015 resolution on Sri Lanka could credibly promise justice through internal mechanisms, asserting that victims must be allowed to express their own needs and that accountability cannot be self-managed by the accused state (Tamilwin, 2025).

### **5.3. Easter Sunday Attacks**

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake stated that the government must subject itself to a probe to uncover the truth behind the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks, describing the task as challenging but assuring that justice will be served for the victims. Speaking at an event marking 50 years of Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith's religious life, the President acknowledged the Cardinal's persistent calls for justice and said the government would heed them (Perera, 2025).

Opposition MP Mujibur Rahman responded by pointing out that the President should have been aware that networks involved in the attacks continue to operate under the present government. He urged the government to use capable investigators/officials such as CID Director Shani Abeysekera and Ministry of Public Security Secretary Ravi Seneviratne to conduct a proper investigation, including looking into the disappearance of Sarah Yasmine from the house of bomber Zahran Hashim in the Eastern Province (Perera and Siriwardana, 2025).

Further revelations came from Public Security Minister Ananda Wijepala, who informed Parliament that former State Minister Sivanesanathurai Chandrakanthan<sup>2</sup>, alias 'Pillayan', had prior knowledge of the attacks while in Batticaloa Prison on charges related to the murder of MP Joseph Pararajasingham. Investigations indicated that Pillayan maintained close contacts with army intelligence officers in the prison at that time (Ajith Siriwardana and Yohan Perera). Minister Wijepala also disclosed that the Taj Samudra Hotel alerted the State Intelligence Service (SIS) via email minutes after bomber Abdul Latheef Mohamed Jameel checked in on April 20, 2019. Despite Jameel being on a security watch list, the SIS failed to act on this warning. Jameel was originally assigned to bomb the Taj but later died in an explosion at

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<sup>2</sup> Former LTTE child soldier, and paramilitary leader.



another location after his initial attempt failed (Daily Mirror). The Minister further noted that investigations into a 2018 killing of two police officers revealed a former LTTE member named Ajantha was falsely implicated; CID findings showed an intelligence officer framed him, who has since been arrested (The Island, 2025).

ITAK MP Shanakiyan Rasamanickam called for a special prosecutor's office with international assistance to conduct an independent inquiry into the attacks. He urged the government to provide a clear update on investigation progress and questioned why reports related to the attacks have not been tabled in Parliament, six years after the incident (The Morning, 2025).

The Archdiocese of Colombo, represented by Rev. Fr. Cyril Gamini Fernando, welcomed the disciplinary action against former SIS Chief SDIG Nilantha Jayawardena but insisted that criminal charges should be filed as recommended by the Presidential Commission of Inquiry (Col)

The Archdiocese of Colombo, represented by Rev. Fr. Cyril Gamini Fernando, welcomed the disciplinary action against former SIS Chief SDIG Nilantha Jayawardena but insisted that criminal charges should be filed as recommended by the Presidential Commission of Inquiry (Col). Jayawardena was dismissed from police service by the National Police Commission (NPC) following a disciplinary inquiry that found him guilty of failing to prevent the attacks. This decision was based on a Supreme Court ruling in a fundamental rights petition. The Church continues to call for the full implementation of all Presidential Col recommendations, including prosecution under the Penal Code (The Island, 2025; The Morning, 2025).

The NPC announced Jayawardena's dismissal in July 2025, concluding that he had failed to act on critical intelligence before the attacks that killed over 250 people and injured hundreds. The charges against him were serious enough under the Establishments Code to warrant immediate removal. Jayawardena had been on compulsory leave during the inquiry (Doloswala, 2025; Shaheid, 2025; The Sunday Morning, 2025).

The main opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) questioned the role of Deputy Defence Minister (Retired) Major General Aruna Jayasekera, who commanded the Eastern Province when a bomb exploded in Sainthamaruthu shortly after Easter Sunday. The SJB highlighted suspicions around whether Jayasekera had knowledge of or involvement in the attacks, especially concerning the fate of bomber Zahran Hashim's wife, Sarah Jasmine, believed to be connected to that area. They called for DNA testing and further investigation into Jayasekera's conduct, given his statement acknowledging groups within the security forces linked to the attackers (Chamara, 2025).

#### **5.4. Forcibly Disappeared**

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) has recommended that the government establish a new permanent institution—a "*Special Office for the Investigation and Prosecution of Serious Crimes by State Officials*"—that is independent of regular law enforcement authorities and empowered to investigate and prosecute enforced disappearances. The HRCSL also encouraged the government to consider becoming a party to the *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC)*, which classifies widespread and systematic enforced

disappearance as a crime against humanity. This recommendation was part of the HRCSL's parallel report submitted to the *United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearance* under the *International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance*. The report highlighted challenges including intimidation by state officials and limited progress in court cases. It recalled that over 27,000 missing persons' cases were considered by past commissions of inquiry, with over 21,000 complaints submitted to the *Office on Missing Persons* (OMP). The report also cited findings from the *Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission* about more than 1,000 disappearances following the surrender of individuals to security forces in May 2009 (The Morning, 2025).



Figure 4: Tamil Families of the Forcibly Disappeared during a protest held near the old bus stand in Vavuniya, July 2025. Courtesy: [Tamil Guardian](#)

The HRCSL recommended completing investigations into recent enforced disappearance cases such as that of Gonapinuwala Kapila Kumara De Silva in 2024 under the *International Convention Act No. 5 of 2018*. It also urged legislative reforms to prioritize habeas corpus and enforced disappearance cases for expeditious resolution, inclusion of 'widespread and systematic enforced disappearance' as a specific offence, and provisions safeguarding the physical integrity and rights of persons deprived of liberty. Additionally, the HRCSL called for the development of compensation guidelines aligned with international standards, adequate resources for forensic exhumations at mass grave sites, regular training of police and armed forces on related laws, criminalization of wrongful removal of children linked to disappearances, and the issuance of declarations recognizing the UN Committee's competence to receive individual and inter-State communications (The Morning, 2025).

Meanwhile, a signature campaign organized by the Movement for Equal Rights in Vavuniya demanded the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), justice for forcibly disappeared persons, and a new political framework ensuring equal rights for all (The Island, 2025).

## 5.5. Mass Graves



Figure 5: Chemmani massgrave forensic excavation site in July 2025. Courtesy: [Tamil Guardian](#).

The Chemmani mass grave in Jaffna, has re-emerged at the center of international attention following the discovery of over 101 skeletal remains, including those of infants and children, during renewed excavation efforts at the Sindhubaththi Hindu Cemetery. Alongside the remains, personal belongings including a UNICEF school bag, toys for kids, a feeding bottle, glass bangles, and pieces of clothing were discovered, raising suspicions that many of the victims were civilians who had been the targets of extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances during the 1990s Sri Lankan civil war (Daily Mirror, 2025; Tamil Guardian, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025; The Island, 2025).

Chemmani first became globally known in 1998 when Sri Lankan soldier Somaratne Rajapakse, then convicted of the rape and murder of Tamil schoolgirl Krishanthi Kumaraswamy, testified that the military had secretly buried 300 to 400 Tamil civilians in the area. A partial excavation in 1999 revealed 15 skeletons, two of which were linked to known victims, but no further investigations were pursued and no prosecutions followed (Daily Mirror, 2025; Tamil Guardian, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025; The Island, 2025).

The current excavation began in mid-May 2025, following the accidental discovery of bone fragments during roadworks in February. Overseen by Jaffna Magistrate A.A. Anandarajah, Judicial Medical Officer Dr. Pranavan Selliah, and archaeologist Professor Raj Somadeva, the forensic operation has progressed in multiple 15-day phases. As of 26 July, a total of 101 skeletal remains had been recovered from two forensic excavation zones, with some bodies found in tightly interwoven clusters, complicating identification and recovery (Tamil Guardian, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025; The Morning, 2025).

The Industrial Technology Institute (ITI) has been conducting soil analysis, while satellite imagery has been used to identify additional burial sites. The *Office on Missing Persons* (OMP) stated that carbon dating, critical for establishing the burial timeline, will require court approval



and international assistance, as Sri Lanka lacks the necessary forensic facilities. Samples may need to be sent to laboratories in the United States or Australia for testing (Tamil Guardian, 2025; The Island, 2025; The Sunday Morning, 2025).

The excavation has also revealed serious procedural and infrastructural deficiencies. Tamil political leaders, especially Batticaloa MP R. Shanakiyan (ITAK), criticized the government for failing to provide basic protective infrastructure, such as tents or evidence preservation facilities. He also condemned the restricted media access, which limits journalists to just five minutes on site, contrasting the treatment at Chemmani with that of Kokkuthoduvai, where better protective measures were implemented (Tamil Guardian, 2025).



**இலங்கைத் தமிழ் அரசுக் கட்சி**  
**உலகென விரிவு அரங்கம்**  
**ILANKAI TAMIL ARASU KADCHI**

தலைமை அலுவலகம்,  
இல 30, மார்டின் வீதி,  
யாழ்ப்பாணம், இலங்கை

காபி அலுவலகம்  
எண் 30 மார்டின் வீதி,  
யாழ்ப்பாணம், இலங்கை.

**HEAD OFFICE**  
**No 30, Martyn Road,**  
**Jaffna, Sri Lanka**

**We therefore respectfully but firmly urge Your Excellency to implement the following without delay:**

1. Consolidate the legal cases related to the 1999 and 2025 exhumations into a single judicial and forensic inquiry under the Colombo and Jaffna Magistrate's Courts.
2. Engage independent, internationally respected forensic experts to oversee all stages of the investigation, ensuring forensic integrity and public trust.
3. Publicize all interim and final forensic reports, DNA profiles and identification results, and facilitate access for victims' families, civil society and international observers.
4. Repatriate the remains excavated in 1999, currently believed to be held in Glasgow, so they may be examined under the same protocols and returned to their families with dignity.
5. Allocate significantly enhanced financial and logistical resources to ensure that the current excavation is completed under international standards; hundreds of families continue searching for missing loved ones, and without truth and accountability, reconciliation remains a facade. Concurrently, take steps to prosecute those responsible for these heinous crimes, which is **தமிழ்நீதி** essential for national healing.

These actions are essential to uphold Sri Lanka's moral and legal obligations and to chart a credible path toward truth and justice.

We remain ready to support constructively in facilitating these measures and ensuring their timely implementation.

Yours Sincerely



C.V.K. Sivagnanam

M. A. Sumanthiran

Figure 6: Part of the letter submitted by ITAK on Chemmani massgraves. Courtesy: Tamil Guardian

On 11 July, the *Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi* (ITAK) submitted a formal letter to President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, calling for: a consolidated inquiry combining the 1999 and 2025 findings; engagement of international forensic experts; public release of all forensic and DNA data; repatriation of the 1999-exhumed remains (allegedly held at the University of Glasgow); and significantly enhanced funding and technical support. The *Eelam People's Democratic Party* (EPDP), led by Douglas Devananda, also wrote to the president supporting continued investigations—not just in Chemmani but in Mannar, Kokkulai, Thunukkai, and Mandaithivu, where similar grave sites are suspected. While endorsing evidence-based inquiries, the EPDP strongly refuted allegations of its own involvement in wartime atrocities, challenging critics to provide concrete evidence if credible accusations exist (Tamilwin, 2025).

The gravity of the findings has led to the transfer of the investigation from the Jaffna Police to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), ordered by the Inspector General of Police in late July. The shift has caused some friction on-site and raised concerns over transparency and state interference. Simultaneously, reports of witness intimidation have surfaced. Kirubakaran, a cemetery official and key petitioner, revealed that he has been stalked by unidentified vehicles near his home. Despite these risks, residents have started to share their testimonies (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

As of now, Chemmani ranks as the second-largest known mass grave in Sri Lanka's Northern Province—second only to the 2018 Mannar grave, where 342 skeletons were unearthed (Rathugamage, 2025; The Morning, 2025). Other sites, such as Gurukkalmadam, are under renewed scrutiny, with a Kaluwanchikudi Magistrate's Court order calling for action from the OMP, Attorney General, and police in connection with the alleged abduction and killing of Muslim pilgrims returning from Hajj in 1990 (Tamilwin, 2025).

Although the government allocated Rs. 12 million for the Chemmani excavation, officials state that only partial funding has been received, slowing down operations and risking the forensic integrity of the site (Daily Mirror, 2025; Tamil Guardian, 2025).

The presence of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, at the site has underscored the growing international demand for justice, transparency, and accountability. As Tamil families of the disappeared, civil society groups, and human rights advocates persist in their calls for an internationally monitored investigation, Chemmani has come to symbolize the delayed justice in post-war Sri Lanka.

## **5.6. Land Encroachment and Occupation in the North and East**

Northern and Eastern provinces continue to face persistent land ownership and usage challenges, with tensions intensifying over military occupation, state-led resettlement initiatives, environmental exploitation, and allegations of demographic engineering. Tamil communities have reported increasing encroachments on historically Tamil-owned lands and cultural sites (Tamilwin, 2025).

Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Land and Irrigation Susil Ranasinghe acknowledged the deep-rooted complications surrounding land ownership in the North-East, particularly in Vavuniya. He noted that a gazette notification on land titles was recently suspended due to a legal

challenge by MP Sumanthiran of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), though the government remains committed to resolving disputes via local officials and public awareness campaigns. Many residents, he explained, are unable to access or reclaim their lands due to overlapping claims, particularly from the security forces, and the Forest Department. He stated that the government plans to negotiate the return of these lands, especially agricultural lands acquired by the Forest Department. A target of 24,000 acres in Vavuniya and 50,000 acres across the Vanni has been set for release, with coordination between the Forest Department, Divisional Secretariats, and the Ministry of Lands. Deputy Minister of Cooperative Development, Upali Samarasinghe emphasized that the Northern Province faces the highest incidence of unresolved land disputes, with less than 25% addressed to date. He added that a special initiative is aiming to resolve 80% of cases by next year (Tamilwin).

People in the North and politicians have repeatedly raised concerns over what they view as state-facilitated Sinhalsation, particularly through projects under the Mahaweli Resettlement Program. The *Tamil National People's Front* (TNPF) reported that over 600 acres of land in Vavuniya North are being occupied by Sinhalese settlers. These lands, once declared forest reserves after the civil war, were later handed over to the Mahaweli Authority, allegedly without proper community consultation. Tamil landowners attempting to cultivate these lands have faced arrests despite court acquittals (Tamil Guardian, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025).

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| <b>எனது என்</b><br><b>என் எண்</b><br><b>My No</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>DSV/LB/EN/2025</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <b>உமது என்</b><br><b>உமது எண்</b><br><b>Your No</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>திகதி</b><br><b>திகதி</b><br><b>Date</b> |
| <b>07.07.2025</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                             |
| <p>பொலீஸ் நிலைய பொறுப்பாளர்,<br/>பொலீஸ் நிலையம்,<br/>ஓமந்தை.</p> <p>அரசு காரணியை அபிவிருத்தி செய்வதை உடனடியாக நிறுத்தி வைத்தல் தொடர்பானது</p> <p>உங்களது பொலீஸ் நிலையம் அமைந்துள்ள கான்கு அருகாமையில் காணப்படும் அரசு காரணியை கையகப்படுத்தி அபிவிருத்தி செய்வதனை உடனடியாக நிறுத்துமாறு அறிவுத் திருக்கிறேன்.</p> <p>மேலும் குறித்த கான்கு விடயம் தொடர்பில் 06.07.2025 திகதி பிரதேச செயலகத்தில் இடம்பெற்ற பிரதேச ஒத்திசைப்பக்குழு கூட்டத்தில் கான்கு கையகப்படுத்துவதை நிறுத்துமாறும் தீர்மானம் மேற்கொள்ளப்பட்டதையும் குறிப்பிடுகின்றேன்.</p> <p>எனவே உடனடியாக அபிவிருத்தி வேலைகளை நிறுத்தி ஒத்துழைப்பு வழங்குமாறு கேட்டுக்கொள்கிறேன்.</p> <p><br/>பிரதேச செயலகம்,<br/>வவுனியா.</p> <p>பிரதேச செயலகம்<br/>வவுனியா</p> <p>பிரதேச செயலகம், மாபிட்ட செயலகம் - துவவுடன் தகவலுக்காக<br/>உச்சேல்ட பொலீஸ் அத்திபட்சகர் - உச்சேல்ட தகவலுக்காக</p> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                             |

Figure 7: The letter issued by the Vavuniya Divisional Secretary preventing the police from entering the land in question, following allegations that the Omanthai attempted to seize a private land. Courtesy: Tamilwin

Tensions peaked in Omanthai, Vavuniya District, where the police attempted to seize land near the police station—allegedly to construct a Buddhist vihara—despite the land being under the long-term care of a local Tamil resident. Community objections and intervention by local leaders led to a temporary halt. Police denied the claims, calling it routine activity, though skepticism remains high (Tamil Guardian, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025).

In Chundikulam, Jaffna, the Navy, with personnel from Trincomalee, reportedly conducted unauthorized land surveys on fishing and residential lands without notifying local authorities. Many Tamil residents, displaced during the war, lack formal title deeds but possess longstanding usage evidence. Locals fear further militarisation and displacement of coastal communities (Tamil Guardian, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025).

Tensions also continue in Oddusuddan, Mullaitivu, where the military occupies 25 acres of Irrigation Department land and a public cemetery, denying locals access to basic infrastructure (Tamil Guardian, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025).

Religious encroachment has become another flashpoint. In Trincomalee, Tamil communities protested against unauthorized construction near the Kanniya Hot Springs on temple-donated land. Despite a ban by the local council, building continues, raising fears of cultural erasure. On July 11, residents staged a protest demanding that leased lands be returned to locals facing housing crises (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

In Valikamam North, a Buddhist monk was issued a legal notice to vacate illegally occupied land near the Thaiyiddy Buddhist vihara, amid reports of unauthorized temple expansion and lack of local Buddhist residents. Tamil residents have long viewed these constructions as part of a broader strategy to alter demographic and cultural landscapes (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

Military land holdings remain a major obstacle to resettlement. Although the military claims to have released over 91% of occupied lands since 2009, with only 2,500 acres remaining in Jaffna and Kilinochchi, critics argue the pace is too slow and lacks transparency. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk called for the release of all military-held lands, both public and private, highlighting their economic and social impact on displaced Tamil families (Ferdinando, 2025; OHCHR, 2025).

Senior retired officers defended the military's presence, citing national security concerns. They noted the military-held land in Jaffna has been reduced from 25,000 acres in 2009 to under 2,500 acres by 2025. However, Tamil politicians, including MP Selvam Adaikalanathan, have accused the military and police of engaging in land grabs in defiance of government policy, especially in the Mahaweli resettlement zones (Tamilwin, 2025).

In Myiliddy, Jaffna, 234 acres have been released for agriculture, but overnight stays and home construction remain prohibited, forcing farmers to vacate each evening. Authorities are in discussions with the military to remove these restrictions and allow full resettlement (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

In Palaly, residents were briefly allowed to worship at the Rajarajeswari Amman Temple without restriction for the first time in 35 years, only to see access limited again due to 'security concerns.' These religious restrictions, enforced by the military, continue to undermine community religious life and cultural identity (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

Protests have continued across the North-East. In Colombo, displaced Tamil landowners from Valikamam demonstrated outside the Presidential Secretariat, demanding return of their ancestral lands seized during the war under 'high security' designations (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

In Mannar, Fr Marcus Adigalar, head of the *Mannar Citizens' Committee*, threatened large-scale protests if the CEB and private companies do not halt the expansion of wind turbines, citing environmental harm and lack of community consent (Tamil Guardian, 2025). Meanwhile, Vanni District MP T. Ravikaran reaffirmed calls to release lands occupied by the Forest Department in Vavuniya, especially 25,000 acres and 44 of 221 ponds. He announced plans to renovate six large ponds with a budget of Rs. 780 million, supported by a \$1 billion World Bank loan aimed at boosting the North-East's economic recovery (Tamilwin, 2025).

### **5.7. Political Prisoners**

Civil society organisations gathered in Jaffna to demand the immediate release of Tamil political prisoners held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), during a public discussion at Chelva Hall. The meeting was part of preparations for upcoming remembrance and justice campaigns on 24 and 25 July, commemorating Tamil political prisoners who were brutally killed in prisons. Participants condemned the continued incarceration of detainees held for decades under the PTA (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

The discussion also focused on a symbolic act of resistance: the ceremonial collection of "*Liberation Water*" to be used in the "*Trees of Liberation*" campaign, which involves planting symbolic trees across eight districts to highlight the plight of Tamil prisoners still behind bars long after the end of the armed conflict. Organisers explained that the tree-planting will serve both as a tribute to those who perished in custody and as a call for justice demanding the unconditional release of long-term detainees. Despite repeated government pledges to repeal the PTA, it remains in force and continues to facilitate indefinite detention without trial. Civil society groups have vowed to sustain mobilisation ahead of the commemorative events and demand meaningful accountability alongside the PTA's immediate repeal (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

Furthering the campaign, a symbolic protest titled *Viduthalai* (Freedom) was held at Kittu Park, drawing civil society members, former detainees, and local residents united in solidarity with Tamil political prisoners. Organised by *Voice of the Voiceless*, the event featured an exhibition replicating prison life to starkly illustrate the harsh conditions endured under the PTA. The event marked the launch of *Thuruvorum Kaivilangu*, a memoir by former political prisoner Vivekanandanoor Sathees, who spent 15 years incarcerated. His book provides a poignant account of the lived realities of Tamil detainees, many arrested on unsubstantiated grounds and still imprisoned decades after the armed conflict ended (Tamil Guardian, 2025).



## 6. Pushback against LGBTQI+ Rights



*Figure 8: Archbishop Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith during the event held at the St. Mary's Church in Beruwala. [Youtube]*

Archbishop Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, speaking at St. Mary's Church in Beruwala, criticized the growing acceptance of same-sex unions. He said, "These are corrupt practices and corrupt attitudes are flowing into the society. Homosexual marriages are taking place in Sri Lanka too, certain organizations and institutions have come forward to propagate such things. It is called a human right. How can this be a human right? How do two men create a family? How do they have a child? How do two women create a child? Due to the path that human society has taken today, these practices are emerging in the world and in our country that are completely corrupting the institution of marriage. He further added, "Marriage is a sacrament, something created by God. It is considered a part of God's plan. It is truly a very sad situation that this is emerging in Sri Lanka" (BBC, 2025).

The Citizens of the People's Struggle addressed a letter to the Siam Sect's Malwathu Chapter's Mahanayaka Thero, Ven. Thibbatuwawe Sri Siddhartha Sumangala Thero, expressing concerns over recent remarks by United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) Volker Türk. Following his visit to Sri Lanka, Türk welcomed efforts to decriminalize same-sex relationship among adults, referencing legislation tabled before the last Parliament. However, according to recent media reports, Justice Minister Harshana Nanayakkara clarified that the Justice Ministry currently has no active Bill or confirmed timeline related to such decriminalisation (Chamara, 2025).

In their letter, the organisation argued that Türk's statement poses a risk to Sri Lanka's heritage, customs, and culture, which they believe must be protected for future generations.

They further noted that the ruling National People's Power Party had expressed support for similar legal reforms when in opposition, specifically those proposed by former Parliamentarian Premnath C. Dolawatte in 2023. They also highlighted that the current President, Anura Kumara Dissanayake, was the only Presidential candidate promising to end inequalities based on gender identity and sexual orientation. Nonetheless, the organization alleged a connection between the Government's stance on the issue and Türk's statements and urged Buddhist monks to oppose all parties supporting homosexuality (Chamara, 2025).

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