

# Human Rights Situation in Sri Lanka

## October 2025



Farmers from Muthunagar and Kinniya in Trincomalee staged a protest march coinciding with Sri Lankan president Anura Kumara Dissanayake's visit to the district for an event at the occupying air force base. Courtesy: Tamil Guardian

Human Rights Situation in Sri Lanka in October 2025.

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## 1. Executive Summary

**Freedom of the Press:** A coalition of 141 civil society organisations and activists condemned the ongoing surveillance, harassment, and intimidation of Mullaitivu-based journalist Kumanan Kanapathipillai. Célia Mercier, Head of the RSF South Asia Desk, emphasized: “This is an extremely serious attack on a reporter who has already been targeted on many occasions for his work. The new baseless accusations illustrate the authorities’ repeated attempts to silence critical voices and criminalise independent journalism in Sri Lanka’s Tamil regions. There is an urgent need to end these repeated attacks on press freedom.”

**Freedom of Assembly and Association:** The former president and secretary of the Vedukkunaari Malai Aathi Shivan Temple in Vavuniya, Sasikumar and Tamilchelvan, were summoned by the Police to provide statements. Both men were previously arrested and remanded on the day of Maha Shivaratri last year.

The Anti-Terrorism Squad has launched an investigation into Dharmalingam Suresh, the national organiser of the Tamil National People’s Front, who was summoned to the Counter Terrorism Division in Colombo and questioned for more than five hours.

**Accountability:** At the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) Sixtieth Session, Resolution A/HRC/60/L.1/Rev.1, titled *“Promoting Reconciliation, Accountability and Human Rights in Sri Lanka,”* was adopted without a vote, extending the mandate of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for two more years.

Against this background, the *Association of Relatives of Enforced Disappeared Persons* in the North and East organised a rotating hunger strike in Jaffna, Semmani, and the Eastern Province.

The Chemmani mass grave case was recently taken up before the Jaffna Magistrate’s Court and adjourned due to a lack of funds required for the next phase of excavation. The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) stressed that investigative agencies should not wait for courts to initiate excavation orders but must instead conduct preliminary investigations and seek court approval based on established facts, noting that courts act only upon formal requests and do not initiate such actions themselves.

Meanwhile, the Eastern Province Association for the Relatives of the Forced Disappeared criticized the international community and the United Nations for failing to pursue an international investigation.

**Police Misconduct:** Homagama High Court Judge Navaratna Marasinghe sentenced a former Borella police officer to fourteen years of rigorous imprisonment for sexually abusing an eight-year-old girl. The court ruled that the officer had gravely violated the trust placed in him by both the Police Department and society.

In the North, tensions between the legal community and police intensified after officers allegedly entered and searched the home of a female lawyer in Jaffna without a court warrant.

Public outrage also grew following the circulation of a video showing a doctor and an engineer being questioned at the Panadura Police Station, reportedly recorded without their consent. Senior lawyer Thishya Weragoda condemned the act as a ‘ghost-like interrogation’ and a serious violation of privacy, asserting that it contradicted earlier commitments by senior police officials to uphold the Personal Data Protection Act during investigations.

Legal experts have criticized the growing trend of police sharing videos of suspects with the media and on social platforms. Former Bar Association President Saliya Pieris PC described such practices as 'childish acts' that undermine investigations and compromise identification parades under Section 124 of the Code of Criminal Procedure Act.

In Vithanage Sunil v. Police Officers (SC FR No. 259/2016), six officers, including the former Officer-in-Charge of the Kottawa Police Station, were found guilty of violating Articles 11, 12(1), and 13(1) of the Constitution by unlawfully arresting, assaulting, and humiliating a bus operator in July 2016. Similarly, in Thilina Rajapaksha v. Police Officers (SC FR No. 90/2021), the Supreme Court ruled that three officers from the Alawwa Police Station had violated the fundamental rights of journalist Thilina Rajapaksha, who was assaulted and unlawfully detained in 2021. The court ordered the officers to personally pay Rs. 75,000 in compensation and directed the Attorney General to initiate a criminal investigation into their conduct.

**Prisoners' Rights:** Commissioner of Prisons and Media Spokesman Jagath Weerasinghe revealed that Sri Lanka's 36 prisons, built for 10,500 inmates, currently house over 36,000. The overcrowding, he said, could soon exceed 40,000 prisoners, including children living with their mothers, and highlighted the alarming spread of toxic drug combinations. He urged political authorities to sentence major drug offenders to death.

The Judicial Service Commission (JSC) has issued a circular instructing Magistrates to refrain from issuing orders that grant special detention arrangements or special protection to suspects or prisoners. The circular specifies that Magistrates should not order suspects or prisoners to be detained in special prisons or to be given any special protection. Requests made in open court for such protection should be referred to the relevant prison superintendent.

**Malayaga Community:** Residents of the Malayaga community from a southern small-holder plantation in the Galle District are facing the threat of eviction as landowners intend to sell the land, even as authorities claim no legal intervention can be made due to the land's private ownership. With nowhere else to go, these Malayaga people continue to live without legal claim to the land they have occupied for generations.

**LGBTQI+ Community:** In the wake of controversy surrounding the alleged promotion of LGBTQI+ tourism in Sri Lanka, Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya told Parliament that the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) Chairman had issued a letter on the subject without consulting the political authority. She clarified that the government's policy was not to promote or grant special privileges to any particular group, and emphasized that sensitive issues should not be used for political mileage.

**Legal Reforms:** President Anura Kumara Dissanayake emphasized the need to ensure their safety, access to education, proper nutrition, healthcare, and protection from abuse, discrimination, and all forms of violence, including special attention to children with developmental challenges such as autism. Yet, in discussions around the Penal Code (Amendment) Bill banning corporal punishment, he stated that laws should not be enacted if the public does not agree, implying that the government may not push forward a law even if it strengthens children's rights.

The government is pressing ahead with its presidential election promise to establish an Independent Prosecutor Office (IPO), despite protests from the opposition and certain civil society organizations.

The Cabinet of Ministers granted approval to sign the United Nations Convention against Cybercrimes (UNCC). The convention aims to enhance Sri Lanka's ability to prevent and respond to cybercrimes, strengthen cooperation, recover assets, protect witnesses and victims, and improve technological capacity.

**Land Rights:** More than 352 farming families from the Trincomalee Pattinamuk Kukulum area remain in distress after losing their agricultural lands, which they had cultivated since 1972. The Ports Authority had claimed ownership of the lands and ordered the farmers to vacate by 2023. Despite over five decades of agricultural activity, approximately 800 acres of farmland have been confiscated, with more than 200 acres allocated to private companies for solar power projects.

Minister of Environment, Dammika Patabendi, announced that 101,762.75 acres of land across the Vanni region will be released from state control. He claimed that past governments had mistakenly absorbed villages, farms, schools, and hospitals into forest reserves due to GPS mapping errors. The lands—22,804.40 acres in Vavuniya, 17,782.8 acres in Mannar, and 48,532.6 acres in Mullaitivu—are to be released as part of a cabinet decision.

**Environmental Rights:** The Mannar Wind Power Project, promoted by the government as a cornerstone of its renewable energy transition, has become the centre of an environmental, social, and political conflict, exposing tensions between development goals and the rights of marginalised communities. For over 60–70 days, residents of Mannar Island have sustained peaceful protests against the project, alleging that it has proceeded without transparency, adequate consultation, or community consent, and that police have used force to suppress dissent, injuring activists and criminalising democratic protests. Despite mounting opposition, the government maintains that the project is essential for energy security, climate commitments, and economic stability.

**Other:** HRCSL has directed the Sri Lanka Customs to submit its report on a complaint of 'unlawful and illegal detention of a consignment of Holy Quran (Tamil) in violation of fundamental rights' received by the HRCSL. The complaint filed with HRCSL by an Attorney-at-Law, on behalf of the Sri Lankan Muslims, alleges that the rights guaranteed under Chapter III of the Constitution have been violated by the Sri Lanka Customs, allegedly acting on the 'interference of a former secretary of the Defence Ministry, purporting to act on behalf of the then government'. The complaint alleges that the illegal detention of the Holy Quran "unfairly targets the Muslim minority and sets a dangerous precedent of state interference in religious texts".

## 2. Freedom of the Press

On 3rd October 2025, a coalition of 141 civil society organisations and activists condemned the ongoing surveillance, harassment, and intimidation of Mullaitivu-based journalist Kumanan Kanapathipillai. For over a decade, Kumanan has documented human rights violations in Sri Lanka's Northern and Eastern Provinces, including militarization, crackdowns on protests and memorialisations, repression of civil society, land appropriation, and the struggles of families of the disappeared, highlighting the Tamil community's demands for justice for atrocities, and crimes committed during the armed conflict (The Island, 2025). As a result of his work, he has been repeatedly targeted, earning the classification of "journalist-at-risk" by international human rights organisations (The Island, 2025).



*In June 2022, Journalist Kumanan Kanapathipillai was interrupted by the Navy officials while covering a protest against military occupying civilian lands in Mullaitivu. Courtesy: Tamil Guardian*

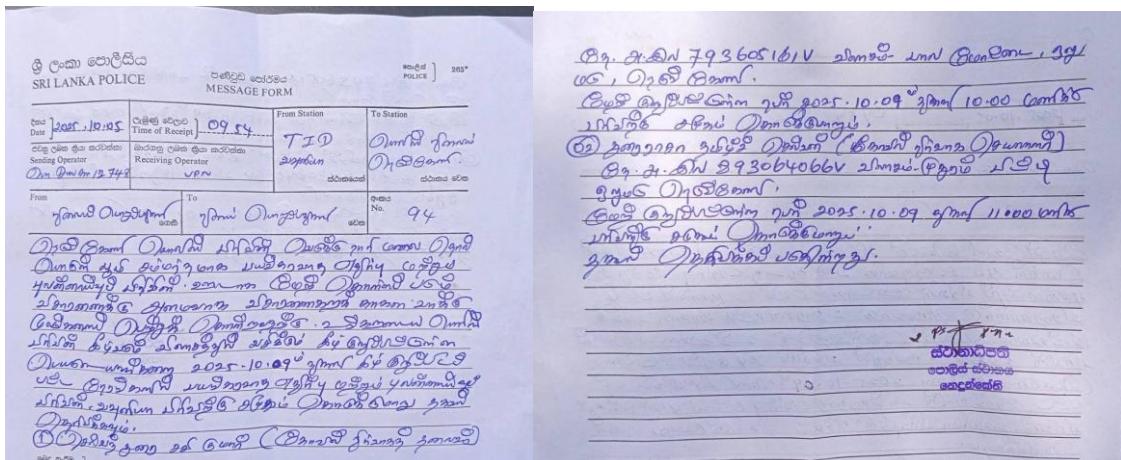
On 24th October 2025, *Reporters without Borders* (RSF) and Civil society groups issued another statement calling upon the government to immediately cease harassment, stop labelling journalists as terrorists for performing their work, respect constitutionally protected rights, and ensure the safety of journalists in the North-East, while urging the international community to pay greater attention to the human rights situation and treatment of Tamil-speaking journalists (RSF, 2025; The Island, 2025). Célia Mercier, Head of the RSF South Asia Desk, emphasized: "This is an extremely serious attack on a reporter who has already been targeted on many occasions for his work. The new baseless accusations illustrate the authorities' repeated attempts to silence critical voices and criminalise independent journalism in Sri Lanka's Tamil regions. There is an urgent need to end these repeated attacks on press freedom" (RSF, 2025).

In 2020, he and another journalist were attacked while covering illegal logging. In 2024, the Counter-Terrorism Investigation Division (CTID) visited his parents and interrogated his

associates, and on 17 August 2025, Kumanan himself was interrogated for seven hours, with his photojournalism framed as work ‘against the government’ and ‘terrorist activity’ (RSF, 2025; The Island, 2025).

During the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances’ review of Sri Lanka in Geneva on 26 September 2025, a government representative publicly accused him of involvement in financial crimes, terrorism, and provoking protests, claims intended to discredit him (RSF, 2025; The Island, 2025). He has endured multiple forms of harassment, including physical assaults by law enforcement in 2019 and 2022, attacks by illegal loggers in 2020, threats from Forest Department officials in 2021, and intimidation of his family in 2024 (RSF, 2025).

### 3. Freedom of Assembly and Association



Summons issued to the organizers of the Vedukkunaari Malai Aathi Shivan Temple by the Terrorist Investigation Division of the Nedunkerni Police Station in Vavuniya. Photo Courtesy: Tamil Guardian

The summoning of Tamil political activists and religious leaders by the Counter-Terrorism Investigation Division (CTID) has once again raised concerns over the use of security laws to intimidate Tamil religious and political life. The former president and secretary of the Vedukkunaari Malai Aathi Shivan Temple in Vavuniya, Sasikumar and Tamilchelvan, were summoned by the Police to provide statements. Both men were previously arrested and remanded on the day of Maha Shivaratri last year while hundreds of devotees were gathered at the Vedukkunaari Malai Aathilingeshwarar Temple, an incident that drew strong condemnation from Tamil politicians and human rights groups. They were later released by court order, and a new administrative body was appointed to manage the temple, which continues to function under new leadership. The Vedukkunaari hill temple in Nedunkerni, Vavuniya, has long been a sacred Saiva Hindu site, but in recent years authorities, the military, and Sinhalese Buddhist monks have attempted to assert control over it, including the placement of a Buddha statue in 2021 and the Archaeological Department's 2023 claim that the site forms part of Sri Lanka's 'ancient Buddhist heritage', actions that have restricted Tamil Hindu worship (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

In a separate but related development, the Anti-Terrorism Squad has launched an investigation into Dharmalingam Suresh, the national organiser of the Tamil National People's Front, who was summoned to the Counter Terrorism Division in Colombo and questioned for more than five hours before being released on the 22nd. Officers from the Terrorism Crimes Prevention Division had earlier visited his home in Batticaloa on the 18th, informing him that the inquiry related to a Facebook post in which he shared a photograph of the party leader alongside the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Suresh stated that he complied with the summons, gave a lengthy statement at the Colombo office, and was allowed to leave, underscoring ongoing concerns about the targeting of Tamil political activity under counter-terrorism investigations (Tamilwin, 2025).

## 4. Accountability

### 4.1. Sri Lanka Accountability Project's mandate extended despite government opposition

... Sri Lanka does not accept the external evidence gathering mechanism set up by the OHCHR, which it has labelled as the 'Sri Lanka Accountability Project', at a time when the Government is continuing to strengthen the domestic institutions based on its genuine commitment to reconciliation and human rights in the interests of our own people. The ongoing domestic processes include strengthening the independent Offices on Missing Persons and Reparations, and the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation, as well as the operationalization of a truth and reconciliation commission, and an independent Public Prosecutor's Office. ...within a very short time, the Government has taken a series of tangible and decisive steps on reconciliation and human rights. Therefore, it is only fair that Sri Lanka be allowed to seize this opportunity to advance the rights of its own people through domestic processes. For these reasons, we do not agree with coercive international action, and we reject resolution 60/L.1/Rev.1 presented to this

At the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) Sixtieth Session, Resolution A/HRC/60/L.1/Rev.1, titled "*Promoting Reconciliation, Accountability and Human Rights in Sri Lanka*," was adopted without a vote, extending the mandate of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for two more years (UNHRC, 2025). Sponsored by the United Kingdom, Canada, Malawi, Montenegro, and North Macedonia, and co-sponsored by 22 other countries including Germany, Switzerland, and Ireland, the resolution welcomed the Government's stated commitments to reconciliation, devolution, anti-corruption reforms, the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), amendment of the Online Safety Act, and independent investigations into major human rights cases. It also emphasized resourcing exhumations at mass grave sites and strengthening the Office on Missing Persons (OMP).

The resolution reaffirmed the UNHRC's commitment to human rights principles, recalling previous resolutions, including 57/1 (2024), and emphasized that all individuals in Sri Lanka are entitled to the full enjoyment of their human rights without distinction of ethnicity, religion, or belief. It called for accountability for violations committed by all parties, including the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), recognized steps taken to address corruption and economic mismanagement, and welcomed the Government's acknowledgment of suffering caused by ethnic conflict and its commitment to democracy, rule of law, and non-discrimination (UNHRC, 2025).

### 4.2. Victim families in North and East demand international investigations

Against this background, the *Association of Relatives of Enforced Disappeared Persons* in the North and East organized a rotating hunger strike in Jaffna, Semmani, and the Eastern Province. The protests, attended by relatives of forcibly disappeared individuals from multiple districts, activists, and the public, sought justice for war-era human rights violations, demanded an international independent investigation, and rejected the domestic mechanisms entirely (Tamilwin, 2025).



*The rotating hunger strike organized by the Association of Relatives of Enforced Disappeared Persons in the North and East. Jaffna, Northern Province. 1st October 2025. Photo Courtesy: Tamil Guardian*

The UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED) also highlighted ongoing concerns, noting reports of arbitrary detention, 'short-term' disappearances, intimidation of families, and persistent impunity, despite Sri Lanka's ratification of the International Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the establishment of the OMP and related legislation. Committee members raised questions on the independence of investigations, access to archives, mass grave exhumations—including Chemmani—and accountability for perpetrators (Tamil Guardian, 2025; The Island, 2025).

#### **4.3. Government formally rejected the Resolution**

The Government formally rejected Resolution A/HRC/60/L.1/Rev.1, citing sovereignty concerns and opposition to external evidence-gathering mechanisms, referring to the OHCHR Sri Lanka Accountability Project as an unprecedented ad hoc expansion of the Council's mandate. Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath emphasised that the government intends to strengthen domestic institutions, including the Offices on Missing Persons and Reparations, the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and an independent Public Prosecutor's Office. The government refrained from calling a vote on the resolution to avoid wasting public funds and announced plans for provincial council elections following delimitation, along with legislation to replace the PTA ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), 2025; The Island, 2025).

Despite political promises and international engagement, the ongoing protests, reports of missing persons, mass grave exhumations, and Tamil demands for justice underscore a persistent gap between domestic initiatives and the expectations of affected communities (UNHRC, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025; The Island, 2025).

#### **4.4. Government highlights increased resources for OMP**

The government has recently allocated an additional Rs. 375 million to the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) to expedite investigations into complaints of involuntary disappearances, a move announced by Minister of Justice and National Integration Harshana Nanayakkara during the consideration of Sri Lanka's Initial Report under the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance in Geneva. Minister Nanayakkara, who led the Sri Lankan delegation, highlighted the OMP's victim-centred approach and technical support from academia, the ICRC, and other partners, noting that it has received positive public feedback and serves as a trusted mechanism. He reiterated the government's commitment to protecting human rights and emphasized the ongoing work of the OMP, Office for Reparations (OR), and Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR). Sri Lanka signed the Convention on 10 December 2015 and ratified it on 25 May 2016, and the Minister stated that no cases of enforced disappearances were reported from 2017 to 2023. He also announced that the government is in the advanced stages of drafting new counter-terrorism legislation to repeal the existing Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), aligning the law with international standards.

However, these claims were met with serious concerns from the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances (UNCED) and UN Special Rapporteurs, who noted ongoing allegations of forced detention, intimidation, and repression of families of disappeared persons. The UNCED released a report on 7 October 2025, highlighting the lack of progress

in addressing enforced disappearances, noting that of the 16,966 cases received by the OMP, only 23 have been traced, reflecting a 'high level of impunity.' The Committee urged the OMP to maintain a comprehensive and updated register, actively search for missing persons, and ensure accountability through investigations and prosecutions. The report also drew attention to the accidental discovery of at least 17 mass graves, criticized the limited forensic capacity of Sri Lankan authorities, and called for the creation of centralized ante-mortem and post-mortem databases, including a national genetic registry. It urged the government to strengthen the capacity of national institutions to locate, identify, and exhume mass graves, and to develop a comprehensive strategy for such investigations. The report was issued a day after the UN Human Rights Council extended the mandate of the OHCHR on Sri Lanka for two more years.

#### **4.5. Families of the Disappeared disappointed by President's silence ahead of 35th disappeared commemoration**

Comrade President

".....It is also deeply regrettable that your staff has so far failed to provide a written response to the invitation sent via email, or at least acknowledge receipt of the letter....."

"....You, who promised before the election to wipe away the tears of these family members, have continued to ignore the request to meet with you and what we face is frustration and pain mixed with anger.

You who claim to have barely survived the 1989 uprising, by not replying to us and showing no interest in giving us an opportunity to meet you, are trying to forget our daughters, sons, and relatives who were not as fortunate as you, but have lost their lives...."

Selected quotes from [letter](#) addressed to President Dissanayake by families of the disappeared, October 21, 2025

Families of the Disappeared (FoD), a civil society group based in Sri Lanka's Western Province that has advocated for justice for forcibly disappeared persons for more than three decades, has expressed frustration over the government's inaction. The group primarily works with families of the disappeared in Southern Sri Lanka, focusing particularly on the large number of enforced disappearances and killings of youth allegedly committed by the government, and other parties during the 1988-1989 insurgency led by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP).

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has not responded to invitations to participate in the 35th Anniversary Commemoration of Disappeared Persons, held on 27 October 2025 at the Memorial for the Disappeared in Raddoluwa, Seeduwa. The *Union of Families of the Disappeared*, led by Brito Fernando, criticized the President's continued silence, noting that written invitations sent on 13 and 21 October went unanswered. Fernando stated that the lack of engagement had caused pain and frustration for families who lost loved ones during the 1989 southern violence and civil war, and announced a peaceful protest outside the Ministry of Justice and Presidential Secretariat following the commemoration.



*Family members of the disappeared lay flowers at the Monument for the Disappeared during the 35th annual commemoration, Raddoluwa, Seeduwa, Western Province, Sri Lanka, October 27, 2025. Courtesy: Families of the Disappeared/ Chanaka Subodha*

#### **4.6. Mass Graves**

The Chemmani mass grave case in Jaffna remains a powerful symbol of unresolved justice, as legal delays, excavation challenges, and growing public protests continue to unfold. The Chemmani mass grave case was recently taken up before Judge S. Leninkumar at the Jaffna Magistrate's Court and adjourned due to a lack of funds required for the next phase of excavation. At the completion of the second phase of excavations at the Chemmani burial site, 240 human skeletons have been identified, with 239 fully excavated, including the remains of children (Tamilwin, 2025). The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) stressed that investigative agencies should not wait for courts to initiate excavation orders but must instead conduct preliminary investigations and seek court approval based on established facts, noting that courts act only upon formal requests and do not initiate such actions themselves (Samaraweera, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025). This stance contrasts with earlier remarks by Public Security Minister Ananda Wijepala, who stated that the police's role is limited to providing security and assisting with excavations once instructed by court orders, asserting that initiation lies with the Justice Ministry (Tamilwin, 2025).

Meanwhile, the Eastern Province Association for the Relatives of the Forced Disappeared criticized the international community and the United Nations for failing to pursue an international investigation, with its Batticaloa District President A. Amalanayaki describing the

Chemmani mass grave as a symbol of genocide and condemning repeated time extensions that, she said, shield governments from accountability (Tamilwin, 2025). Excavation work has also faced environmental delays, as continuous rainfall and clay-heavy soil at the site have hindered progress, despite funds approved and released by the Ministry of Justice following a request by Legislative Officer Pranavan Selliah, leading the Jaffna Magistrate's Court to postpone proceedings to November 3rd after a site inspection (Tamilwin, 2025).

#### **4.7. Memorial for Chemmani mass graves vandalised**



*Damaged memorial lamp (left); UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk offering flowers at the memorial (right). Photo Courtesy: Tamil Guardian*

A memorial lamp honoring victims of the Chemmani mass graves was vandalized in Jaffna on October 9th, months after protesters established it in June. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk had visited the site in June. Originally a temporary structure, the lamp was later made permanent and named the "Unquenchable Lamp." Local residents regard the overnight vandalism by unidentified individuals as an attempt to silence demands for justice and accountability (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

#### **4.8. Easter Attack**

The investigation into the 2019 Easter Sunday bomb attacks in Sri Lanka remains mired in controversy, conflicting statements, and political disputes. Justice Minister Harshana Nanayakkara recently told Parliament that information regarding the investigations should not be disclosed, stressing that even Parliament itself cannot order such disclosure as lawmakers are considered part of the investigative process. He further warned that attempts to disrupt the investigations indirectly should not be tolerated (Perera & Siriwardana, 2025).

The controversy emerged after SLMC MP Nizam Kariapper claimed that Secretary to the Ministry of Public Security, retired Senior Deputy Inspector General (SDIG) Ravi Seneviratne, had revealed before the Parliamentary High Posts Committee that the main mastermind behind the Easter Sunday attacks had been identified (Tamilwin, 2025). However, the Police Media Division rejected reports circulating on social media suggesting that Seneviratne had implicated India in the attacks. They clarified that while Seneviratne did appear before the Parliamentary Committee on October 8, he made no such statement. The Inspector General of Police has been instructed to investigate the spread of false information, and Seneviratne has sought legal action against the claims (The Island, 2025).

Victims of the attacks have expressed frustration and disillusionment over the handling of the investigation. President Anura Kumara Dissanayake had pledged during his 2024 election campaign that the masterminds of the attacks would be brought to justice, describing the bombings as a conspiracy to incite communal discord and political instability (Fernandopulle, 2025).

Legal proceedings have further complicated the matter. President's Counsel Ali Sabry informed the Court of Appeal that Seneviratne and retired CID Director Shani Abeysekara had previously filed fundamental rights petitions in the Supreme Court to prevent their own arrests in connection with the attacks. Sabry argued that politically motivated interference has turned the investigation into a process of scapegoating rather than one aimed at uncovering the truth. The Deputy Solicitor General noted that the CID had submitted a 68-page "B report" to the Fort Magistrate's Court detailing evidence against Col. Kelum S. Maddumage and others. (Ferdinando, 2025).

Despite more than six years passing since the attacks, victims remain dissatisfied with the pace and transparency of the investigation. Conflicting statements from officials, politicians, and social media posts have eroded public trust. Families affected by the attacks continue to demand tangible legal action rather than political statements, emphasizing the urgent need for justice and closure (Ferdinando, 2025; Fernandopulle, 2025; Perera & Siriwardana, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025).

## 5. Police Misconduct

In one significant case, Homagama High Court Judge Navaratna Marasinghe sentenced a former Borella police officer to fourteen years of rigorous imprisonment for sexually abusing an eight-year-old girl, an offence under Section 365B(2)(b) of the Penal Code, as amended by Acts No. 22 of 1995 and No. 29 of 1998. The court ruled that the officer had gravely violated the trust placed in him by both the Police Department and society. Judge Marasinghe noted that the crime was of an extremely grave nature, as it was committed by an officer entrusted with safeguarding justice. The Court also imposed a fine of Rs. 25,000 and ordered the payment of Rs. 400,000 as compensation to the victim (Silva, 2025).



*Silent protest held by lawyers in front of the court complex in Jaffna, 7th October 2025. Photo Courtesy: Tamilwin*

In the North, tensions between the legal community and police intensified after officers allegedly entered and searched the home of a female lawyer in Jaffna without a court warrant. The incident, reportedly connected to ongoing land fraud investigations, led to a large-scale protest and one-day strike by lawyers across Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Mannar, and Vavuniya districts. Senior lawyer Thirukumaran stated that while lawyers do not oppose legitimate investigations, the police must act within the law and obtain proper authorization before conducting searches. The protest was joined in solidarity by lawyers from the Eastern Province, who boycotted court for several hours, denouncing what they described as excessive and unlawful police action (Sukinthan, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025).

Public outrage also grew following the circulation of a video showing a doctor and an engineer being questioned at the Panadura Police Station, reportedly recorded without their consent. Senior lawyer Thishya Weragoda condemned the act as a 'ghost-like interrogation' and a serious violation of privacy, asserting that it contradicted earlier commitments by senior police officials to uphold the Personal Data Protection Act during investigations. Police Spokesperson SSP F.U. Wootler later confirmed that the incident had occurred several

months prior and that no formal complaint had been lodged, but legal experts described the incident as a clear breach of citizens' rights and a lapse in professional standards ( Daily Mirror, 2025; Samaraweera, 2025).

Meanwhile, legal experts have criticized the growing trend of police sharing videos of suspects with the media and on social platforms. Former Bar Association President Saliya Pieris PC described such practices as 'childish acts' that undermine investigations and compromise identification parades under Section 124 of the Code of Criminal Procedure Act. Attorney-at-Law Wasantha Sri Watagoda stressed that suspects' faces must not be revealed before identification procedures are completed, as doing so damages evidentiary integrity (Lakmal Sooriyagoda; Ajith Siriwardana).

The Supreme Court has also delivered a series of landmark rulings holding police officers personally liable for rights violations. In *Vithanage Sunil v. Police Officers* (SC FR No. 259/2016), six officers, including the former Officer-in-Charge of the Kottawa Police Station, were found guilty of violating Articles 11, 12(1), and 13(1) of the Constitution by unlawfully arresting, assaulting, and humiliating a bus operator in July 2016. The court ordered the officers to pay Rs. 1 million in compensation from their personal funds. Similarly, in *Thilina Rajapaksha v. Police Officers* (SC FR No. 90/2021), the Supreme Court ruled that three officers from the Alawwa Police Station had violated the fundamental rights of journalist Thilina Rajapaksha, who was assaulted and unlawfully detained in 2021. The court ordered the officers to personally pay Rs. 75,000 in compensation and directed the Attorney General to initiate a criminal investigation into their conduct (Daily Mirror, 2025; The Morning, 2025).

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake issued a strong warning to police officers allegedly linked to drug trafficking networks. Addressing the launch of the "United as a Nation – National Drive" anti-narcotics initiative, he urged corrupt officers to resign immediately or face disciplinary action, asserting that the nation's drug problem could be mitigated if the Police Department were cleansed of criminal elements. He stated that this administration had already suspended a record number of officers and vowed to continue removing those implicated in illegal activities (Daily Mirror, 2025; Siriwardana & Perera, 2025).

## 6. Rights of Marginalized and At-Risk Groups

### 6.1. Prisoners' Rights

#### **Prisons Commissioner urges capital punishment for major drug offenders on death row**

Commissioner of Prisons and Media Spokesman Jagath Weerasinghe revealed that Sri

“Those who bring drugs into the country on a large scale are destroying the entire nation. They must be hanged. There is nothing sinful about it.”

Commissioner of Prisons and Media Spokesman Jagath Weerasinghe

Lanka's 36 prisons, built for 10,500 inmates, currently house over 36,000, with approximately 65% incarcerated for drug-related offenses. The overcrowding, he said, could soon exceed 40,000 prisoners, including children living with their mothers, and highlighted the alarming spread of toxic drug combinations. He urged political authorities, including President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, to sentence major drug offenders to death, emphasizing that 826 inmates are already on death row (Rajapakse, 2025; Samaraweera, 2025; Silva, 2025; The Daily Morning, 2025; The Island, 2025).

However, Weerasinghe's remarks drew criticism from the *Committee for Protecting the Rights of Prisoners* (CPRP). Attorney-at-law Senaka Perera, CPRP President, argued that a Prisons Commissioner should not advocate executions, as the department's mission is based on custody, care, and rehabilitation, not capital punishment. He noted that executions do not address the root causes of crime, which stem from social inequalities, and warned that officers supporting the death penalty undermine rehabilitation efforts. The CPRP stressed that criminal behavior arises from societal conditions, not inherent moral failings, and criticized the suggestion that executing prisoners could solve overcrowding. The organization also highlighted that Sri Lanka maintains a decades-long de facto moratorium on the death penalty despite it remaining in law, reflecting ongoing tension between deterrence and human rights principles (Pavithrani, 2025; The Daily Morning, 2025).

#### **Circular instructs magistrates not to order detention of prisoners at special prisons, nor to grant special protection**

The Judicial Service Commission (JSC) has issued a circular instructing Magistrates to refrain from issuing orders that grant special detention arrangements or special protection to suspects or prisoners. The directive, signed by JSC Secretary Prasanna Alwis, comes in response to complaints that certain suspects or prisoners have been held in special locations based on orders from some Magistrates. The circular, which updates an earlier directive issued on 11 May 2012, outlines how Magistrates should act when issuing court orders relating to suspects held on remand or prisoners serving sentences, particularly in special circumstances (The Island, 2025; The Morning, 2025).

The circular specifies that Magistrates should not order suspects or prisoners to be detained in special prisons or to be given any special protection. Requests made in open court for such

protection should be referred to the relevant prison superintendent. Magistrates have also been instructed not to order suspects or prisoners to be taken from prison to private residences or other locations for family occasions or any other purpose during incarceration. Even for funerals of close relatives, transport outside the prison must be carried out under the direction of prison authorities and in accordance with the Department of Prisons' regulations. If a person is taken outside the prison for any reason, the prison superintendent must report the details and justification to the Magistrate. Additionally, any requests made by suspects or prisoners for medical treatment should be referred by Magistrates to the prison medical officers, who are responsible for providing appropriate care. These measures are intended to ensure uniformity in judicial procedures, prevent misuse of authority, and uphold the regulations of the prison system (The Island, 2025; The Morning, 2025).

## 6.2. Malayaga Community



Nine families in Hammeliya Tea Estate, Baddegama in Galle face eviction by October despite some living there over 80 years. Courtesy: Melani Manel, Asia News and [Wedabima](#)

Residents of the Malayaga community from a southern smallholder plantation in the Galle District are facing the threat of eviction as landowners intend to sell the land, even as authorities claim no legal intervention can be made due to the land's private ownership. With nowhere else to go, these Malayaga people continue to live without legal claim to the land they have occupied for generations.

The *Voice of the Plantation People* (VOPP) organization has taken up their case, arranging meetings with the Governor of the Southern Province, the Divisional Secretary, and the Ministry of Plantation and Community Infrastructure. Deputy Minister of Plantation and Community Infrastructure, Sundaralingam Pradeep, admitted that while direct legal intervention was difficult due to the private nature of the estate, discussions could lead to relief (Dewasiri, 2025).

Legal experts argue that complex ownership patterns have made it difficult for long-term residents to claim ownership of estate land. Attorney-at-Law Vidura Munasinghe of the *Law and Society Trust* explained that although Sri Lanka's law of adverse possession allows an individual who has occupied land continuously and openly for 10 years to claim ownership, this principle rarely applies to estate workers. Munasinghe also referred to the Estate Quarters (Special Provisions) Act No. 2 of 1971, which states that when an employee's services are terminated, they retain the right to occupy estate quarters with dependents until a court order mandates eviction. Yet, he said, most estate owners still treat long-term residents as illegal occupants.

Munasinghe argued that plantations cannot be treated as ordinary businesses because of their deep historical and social roots. He suggested that estates could be transformed into cooperatives run by workers themselves and urged the government to take responsibility for regulating transitions when plantations are sold. He also pointed to the political marginalization of low-country plantation workers, who remain scattered and underrepresented compared to their organized up-country counterparts (Dewasiri, 2025).

Amidst these challenges, recently President Anura Kumara Dissanayake presided over a ceremony in Bandarawela, where 2,000 beneficiaries from the Malaiyaha community received letters of home ownership. Barath Arullsamy, Vice President of the *Democratic People's Front* and the *Tamil Progressive Alliance* (TPA), commended the President for inaugurating the second phase of the 10,000-housing project funded by the Government of India. However, he stated candidly that "nothing concrete has been done for the Malayaga community during the past year." In an open letter to the President, Arullsamy praised the continuation of Indian-funded housing projects while emphasizing that the initiative must lead to full ownership and permanent rights. Arullsamy also lauded the President's acknowledgment of the Malaiyaha Tamil community's disadvantaged social position, calling it "a defining moral moment." He reminded the President that despite independence in 1948, the Malaiyaha Tamil community had suffered statelessness, displacement, and decades of systemic neglect. While welcoming the Rs. 1,750 wage increment, he described it as inadequate and reiterated the TPA's call to transform tea estate workers into "tea partners and smallholders" to ensure dignity and ownership. He further urged improvements in healthcare, education, and water access, noting that several previously approved estate hospital and water supply projects remain unimplemented (Daily Mirror, 2025).

At the same time, demonstrations have intensified in the hill country. A large protest was organized in Nuwara Eliya by the *Hill Country Mass Organization for Social Justice*, the *Plantation Workers' Central Center*, and the *People's Struggle Movement*. The event also commemorated the devastating Koslanda–Meeriyapet landslide of October 29, 2014, which buried 39 people. Protesters declared October 29 as *Hill Tamil People's Housing and Land Rights Day*, stating that the tragedy symbolizes the neglect of Hill Country Tamils who continue to live in unsafe, decaying housing (Tamilwin, 2025).

Across the country, from the southern plantations of Galle to the estates of Nuwara Eliya and Hatton, the Malayaga Tamil community continues to assert its right to equality, dignity, and belonging. While government initiatives, legal reforms, and social mobilization have brought renewed hope, activists and residents alike maintain that true progress will only come when

plantation workers — who have contributed to Sri Lanka's economy for generations — are granted secure land ownership, fair wages, safe housing, and full recognition as equal citizens within the nation they have long helped build.

### 6.3. LGBTIQ+ Rights

In the wake of controversy surrounding the promotion of LGBTIQ+ tourism in Sri Lanka, Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya told Parliament that the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) Chairman had issued a letter on the subject without consulting the political authority. She clarified that the government's policy was not to promote or grant special privileges to any particular group, and emphasized that sensitive issues should not be used for political mileage (Daily Mirror, 2025; The Morning, 2025).

The controversy followed a letter from SLTDA Chairman Buddhika Hewawasam endorsing a project by EQUAL GROUND<sup>1</sup> to promote LGBTIQ+ tourism, stating that Sri Lanka Tourism recognises the potential of such initiatives to diversify tourism markets and position the country as an inclusive destination. This letter triggered widespread criticism from religious and nationalist groups, leading Tourism Minister Vijitha Herath to call the Chairman and demand a clarification, though no formal disciplinary action was taken (Daily Mirror, 2025; The Morning, 2025). The Anti-Corruption Force also urged the government to remove the SLTDA Chairperson, arguing that if the government disagreed with his statement, he should be dismissed (Chamara, 2025).

Meanwhile, a writ petition was filed before the Court of Appeal by nationalist leaders including Dr. Gunadasa Amarasekara and Dr. Wasantha Bandara, challenging the legality of the SLTDA's letter. The petition claimed that the endorsement of LGBTIQ+ tourism contravened constitutional principles and the state's duty to protect Buddhism, asserting that recognizing gender identities beyond male and female was inconsistent with the Constitution (Sooriyagoda, 2025). In contrast, the Law and Society Trust (LST) expressed concern over the government's reversal, recalling that the National People's Power (NPP), now in government, had pledged in its election manifesto to end discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. LST highlighted the Supreme Court's Special Determination No. 13/2023, which upheld a private member's bill seeking to decriminalize same-sex relations, and cited a letter from the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRC SL) urging the government to adopt this bill. The organization warned that recent statements from officials undermined commitments to equality and non-discrimination guaranteed by Article 12 of the Constitution (Law and Society Trust, 2025).

The debate over inclusion soon extended beyond politics into the private sector, when *Watawala Tea*, a famous tea brand in Sri Lanka, faced backlash for a short film titled "*Him, Her and Them*." It was said that the advertisement intended to celebrate family and acceptance, but was accused of promoting LGBTQ themes. Following public criticism and boycott calls, the company withdrew the film, stating that it regretted any discomfort caused and that it sought only to portray "the everyday emotions of family life" (Newswire, 2025).

However, an investigative report by the *Daily FT* suggested that the outrage over Watawala's film was not entirely organic. Data patterns showed signs of coordinated online activity, with

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<sup>1</sup> A Colombo based NGO that works for LGBTIQ+ rights.

newly created accounts and politically affiliated pages amplifying identical messages of moral panic. The report described the episode as a case of 'manufactured outrage', executed in four stages — seeding, amplifying, reframing, and echoing — to weaponize emotion and transform a family-oriented commercial into a political controversy. The analysis warned that such tactics represent a growing threat to free expression and social discourse, as digital platforms are increasingly exploited for ideological manipulation.



*The statement in the photo was published by Watawala Tea, after they removed the short commercial published in their social media channels.*

## 7. Legal Reforms

### 7.1. Child Rights and Corporal Punishment

At least one form of corporal punishment was experienced by most of the study population (86.4%). Kneeling (87.8%) and being told to keep standing/ standing on a chair (87%) were the most frequent methods that were experienced/ witnessed. More than half of the study population had experienced non-physical forms of punishment such as neglect and ignoring (59.6%) and name calling or cursing (52.2%). Majority of the students were subjected to corporal punishment due to bad behaviour (91.8%). Majority of the study population had a poor knowledge regarding corporal punishment (60.8%)

Dhammearatchi, K., Fernando, D., Devruwan, C., Sandeepani, A., Ramzani, A., Ariyarathna, D., & Goonewardena, S. (2025). Understanding the dynamics of corporal punishment: Knowledge, consequences and associated factors of corporal punishment among students aged 15-19 years in Colombo and Kegalle Districts, Sri Lanka. *Galle Medical Journal*, 30(3).

In a message marking World Children's Day and Elders' Day, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake emphasized the need to ensure their safety, access to education, proper nutrition, healthcare, and protection from abuse, discrimination, and all forms of violence, including special attention to children with developmental challenges such as autism (The Island, 2025). Yet, in discussions around the Penal Code (Amendment) Bill banning corporal punishment, he stated that laws should not be enacted if the public does not agree, implying that the government may not push forward a law even if it strengthens children's rights (Daily Mirror, 2025).

Amid this backdrop, the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs submitted a Bill to Parliament seeking to amend Chapter 19 of the Penal Code to prohibit corporal punishment against children. The Education Ministry clarified that any instructions for schools would follow only after the Bill is enacted, while trade unions representing school principals and teachers warned of potential disruptions to discipline (The Island, 2025). Prime Minister Dr. Harini Amarasuriya addressed the controversy by stressing that the proposed law is against violence, not against discipline. The Prime Minister also detailed recent measures, including monthly allowances for institutionalised and street children and the establishment of digital testimony rooms to enable victims to provide evidence safely. She underscored that guidance and discipline should be provided compassionately, without resorting to violence (Prime Minister's Media Division, 2025).

Justice Minister Harshana Nanayakkara clarified that the amendment has not yet been enacted, as further changes to the Code of Criminal Procedure are needed, and that further amendments may arise during the parliamentary committee stage (The Island, 2025). In this context, Archbishop of Colombo Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith cautioned that strict legal restrictions on corporal punishment could create rifts between children, parents, and teachers, and warned against adopting Western laws that may not align with Sri Lanka's cultural values.

He cited instances where teachers could face legal action for minor guidance, emphasizing that punishment to guide children should remain allowed (Palihawadane & Perera, 2025).

The Ceylon Teachers' Union (CTU) echoed the same concerns, calling on the government to clarify its stance. CTU President Priyantha Fernando warned that, while teachers do not support corporal punishment, the proposed amendment could expose them to undue legal risks. He also suggested that the government might be pursuing the Bill to secure an international grant for a project titled 'Promotion of Rights' (Samaraweera, 2025). The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCNL) expressed concern over corporal punishment, noting its potential to cause lasting emotional harm and trauma. HRCNL Chairperson Justice L.T.B. Dehideniya emphasised that the Bill aims to eliminate cruel and degrading punishments while promoting positive, respectful discipline that safeguards children's dignity and development (The Island, 2025).

The Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, through Deputy Minister Dr. Namal Sudarshana, confirmed that no final decision on implementing the Bill has been made, as further adjustments can still be considered. President Dissanayake reiterated that the government would not enact legislation opposed by the people, emphasising that laws should serve the public rather than the rulers (The Daily Mirror, 2025; The Island, 2025).

## **7.2. Establishing Independent Prosecutor Office (IPO)**

The NPP government is pressing ahead with its presidential election promise to establish an Independent Prosecutor Office (IPO), despite protests from the opposition and certain civil society organizations (The Island, 2025). According to the NPP manifesto, the IPO is intended to prevent delays in the judicial system by operating independently from the Attorney General's Department, with Provincial Sub-Offices handling cases on behalf of the government.

However, former Justice Minister Dr. Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe criticized the proposal, claiming it could undermine the independence of the Attorney General. He argued that having both the AG and the IPO representing the government could confuse law enforcement and the public, suggesting that forwarding a case to the IPO might imply the AG is biased (The Island, 2025).

Former Human Rights Commissioner Prof. Prathibha Mahanamaheva emphasized that the IPO should be answerable to Parliament rather than the executive, in line with UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolutions 55/1 and 60/L/1. He noted that similar structures exist in countries such as the UK, Kenya, South Africa, and Jamaica. Prof. Mahanamaheva stressed that the IPO could only succeed if accompanied by reforms in the police and court systems and if duplication of work with the Attorney General was avoided. He also cautioned about potential conflicts of interest that could erode public trust. Following these recommendations, Justice Yasantha Kodagoda, PC, Judge of the Supreme Court, was appointed head of a Committee of Technical Experts (CTE) to draft legislation and propose amendments for the IPO. The Cabinet of Ministers had already decided on 7 May to implement the proposal, based on recommendations from Anura Kumara Dissanayake's 2024 presidential election manifesto (The Island, 2025).

### **7.3. Sri Lanka to ratify ILO Convention C190 on protecting workers from violence and harassment**

Worker protection has also received renewed focus as Sri Lanka moves toward ratifying the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 190 (C190), addressing workplace violence and harassment. A national workshop jointly organized by the Ministry of Labour and the ILO brought together officials, employers, and workers' organizations to build consensus on C190 and strategies for its implementation. Dr. Anil Jayantha Fernando emphasized that ratification aligns with Sri Lanka's policy framework "A Thriving Nation, A Beautiful Life," which seeks to revise laws and introduce new protections, particularly in workplaces and public transport. ILO Country Director Joni Simpson noted that ratifying C190 would strengthen social justice, improve enforcement mechanisms, prevent harassment, and support inclusive economic growth (Daily Mirror, 2025).

### **7.4. Cabinet grants approval to sign the UN Convention against Cybercrimes (UNCC)**

In the realm of cybersecurity, the Cabinet of Ministers granted approval to sign the United Nations Convention against Cybercrimes (UNCC), adopted at the 55th session of the UN General Assembly in December 2024. The convention aims to enhance Sri Lanka's ability to prevent and respond to cybercrimes, strengthen cooperation, recover assets, protect witnesses and victims, and improve technological capacity. Approval was granted jointly by the President, who also serves as Minister of Digital Economy, along with the Ministers of Justice and National Integration, and Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment, and Tourism (The Island, 2025).

## 8. Land Rights



Farmers from Muthunagar and Kinniya in Trincomalee staged a protest march coinciding with Sri Lankan president Anura Kumara Dissanayake's visit to the district for an event at the occupying air force base. Courtesy: Tamil Guardian

More than 352 farming families from the Trincomalee Pattinamukku Kukulum Divisional Secretariat area remain in distress after losing their agricultural lands, which they had cultivated since 1972. The Ports Authority had claimed ownership of the lands and ordered the farmers to vacate by 2023. Despite over five decades of agricultural activity, approximately 800 acres of farmland have been confiscated, with more than 200 acres allocated to private companies for solar power projects.

The affected farmers reported that their access to water resources through—Muthu Nagar Pond and Thakaravettuvan Pond—have also been closed, directly impacting irrigation and livelihoods. Even after multiple protests and petitions to the Presidential Secretariat and the Prime Minister's Office, no resolution has been offered. A restraining order from the Trincomalee Court barred 22 farmers from entering their lands, and following a confrontation with private company machinery operators, several farmers were attacked and arrested. Five were detained for 14 days before being released on bail.

The *Muthu Nagar Farmers' Association*, led by Secretary Saheela Saburdeen, has since organized multiple protests, including sit-ins (Satyagrahas) at the Trincomalee District Secretariat, continuing for over 30 days as of October. On September 24, over 120 protesters gathered at the Prime Minister's Office in Colombo, and on October 1, they marked the 15th day of their Satyagraha (Roshan, 2025; Tamil Guardian, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025).

Minister of Environment, Dammika Patabendi, announced that 101,762.75 acres of land across the Vanni region will be released from state control. He claimed that past governments

had mistakenly absorbed villages, farms, schools, and hospitals into forest reserves due to GPS mapping errors. The lands—22,804.40 acres in Vavuniya, 17,782.8 acres in Mannar, and 48,532.6 acres in Mullaitivu—are to be released as part of a cabinet decision made on August 25 (Roshan, 2025; Tamil Guardian, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025).

However, Tamil civil organizations and human rights groups argue that such releases are insufficient and politically motivated. They accuse the government of using “forest preservation” laws as cover for land grabs in Tamil-majority regions. Activists noted that Patabendi’s insistence on maintaining 32% forest cover by 2030 echoes the same justifications used to deny Tamils access to ancestral land (Tamil Guardian, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025).

Deputy Defence Minister Major General Aruna Jayasekara (Retd) told Parliament that over 700 acres of land held by the military in the North and East have been released, including 86.24 acres of private land and 586 acres of former military zones. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to transparent reconciliation through the return of private property. A high-level meeting with Defence Secretary Air Vice Marshal Sampath Thuyaontha (Retd) reviewed strategies for the Palali area handovers and boundary realignments to minimize civilian impact (Daily Mirror, 2025; The Island, 2025). MP Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam also intervened to stop the allegedly illegal transfer of 900 acres of Land Reforms Commission property in Palai (Kilinochchi) to a private company called *Silo Foundation*, exposing the move during a divisional coordination meeting (Tamilwin, 2025).



*Farmers engaging in the Satyagraha demanding to release their lands. Courtesy: Tamil Guardian*

## 9. Environmental Rights

The Mannar Wind Power Project, promoted by the government as a cornerstone of its renewable energy transition, has become the centre of a profound environmental, social, and political conflict, exposing tensions between development goals and the rights of marginalised communities. For over 60–70 days, residents of Mannar Island have sustained peaceful protests against the project, alleging that it has proceeded without transparency, adequate consultation, or community consent, and that police have used force to suppress dissent, injuring activists and criminalising democratic protests (Tamil Guardian, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025). It was stated by protestors that decisions to establish 14 wind farms were taken unilaterally by Colombo despite strong local opposition (Tamil Guardian, 2025).

Residents report severe environmental and livelihood impacts since Phase I began, including prolonged flooding due to blocked natural drainage channels, contamination of drinking wells, destruction of crops and home gardens, declining fish harvests, and the cutting of more than 9,000 palmyrah trees that sustain nearly 1,000 families (Daily Mirror, 2025; Tamilwin, 2025). Farmers describe paddy yields dropping by more than half, while villagers living within 150–300 metres of turbines report chronic noise, headaches, stress-related illnesses, and displacement of pregnant women, the elderly, and heart patients (Daily Mirror, 2025). Mannar's ecological significance heightens these concerns: the island is a Ramsar-listed wetland and an Important Bird Area along the Central Asian Flyway, where conservationists warn that turbines and high-tension lines threaten migratory birds, fragment habitats, and degrade wetlands that naturally mitigate floods (Daily Mirror, 2025; Tamil Guardian, 2025).

Civil society organisations argue that the project exemplifies a broader pattern of development imposed on the Tamil homeland under the guise of green progress. The Federation of Community-Based Organisations in Mannar condemned the government's unilateral decision to proceed, warning that it violates fundamental rights and democratic principles, while noting that communities see little difference between past administrations and the present one (The Island, 2025). Legal resistance has escalated, with a fundamental rights petition filed in the Supreme Court against alleged illegal mineral mining on Mannar Island, challenging licences issued without proper tenders or environmental assessments and seeking judicial intervention to protect livelihoods and national resources (The Island, 2025).

Despite mounting opposition, the government maintains that the project is essential for energy security, climate commitments, and economic stability. According to the Mannar District Secretary, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake assured that two approved projects—a 20 MW and a 50 MW wind farm—will proceed, while no future wind or mineral projects will be permitted on the island, assurances protesters argue contradict ongoing construction on the ground (Daily Mirror, 2025).

## **10. Other**

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) has directed the Sri Lanka Customs to submit its report on a complaint of ‘unlawful and illegal detention of a consignment of Holy Quran (Tamil) in violation of fundamental rights’ received by the HRCSL. The complaint filed with HRCSL by an Attorney-at-Law, on behalf of the Sri Lankan Muslims, alleges that the rights guaranteed under Chapter III of the Constitution have been violated by the Sri Lanka Customs, allegedly acting on the ‘interference of a former secretary of the Defence Ministry, purporting to act on behalf of the then government’. The complaint alleges that the illegal detention of the Holy Quran “unfairly targets the Muslim minority and sets a dangerous precedent of state interference in religious texts” (The Island, 2025).

“The detention is disrespectful and violates the sanctity of the Holy Quran, a scripture revered by billions of Muslims worldwide. The illegal act of the Customs infringes the protection given in Article 10 of the Constitution of the entitlement of every person to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” (HRCSL, 2025).

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