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Political thugs unleashed by PM Rajapaksa on 9th May 2022 from his residence to attack peaceful #GoHomeGota protestors.

VIOLENT ASSAULT ON PEACEFUL PROTEST SITE “GOTAGOGAMA” & ACCOUNTABILITY OF RULING RAJAPAKSA FAMILY



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ABBREVIATIONS

BASL	Bar Association of Sri Lanka
CIB	Crime Investigation Bureau
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CJ	Chief Justice
DIG	Deputy Inspector General of Police
GGG	GOTA GO GAMA
GOSL	Government of Sri Lanka
Gota	Gotabaya Rajapaksa
HRC	Human Rights Commission
HRD	Human Rights Defender
IGP	Inspector General of Police
IUSF	Inter University Student Federation
JVP	<i>Janatha Veemuthi Peramuna</i> (People’s Liberation Front)
MP	Member of Parliament
OIC	Officer-in-Charge
PM	Prime Minister
SDIG	Senior Deputy Inspector General of Police
SL	Sri Lanka
SLPP	<i>Sri Lanka Podu Jana Peramuna</i> (Sri Lanka People’s Front)
UNP	United National Party
YJA	Young Journalists’ Association

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INTRODUCTION TO ARAGALAYA – THE STRUGGLE OF LOVE

The Sri Lankan youth-led peaceful #GoHomeGota protest, occupying Galle Face Green in Colombo, calling for the resignation of the President passed the 50th day on 28th May 2022. The protest site is named “GotaGoGama”, i.e. “GotaGoVillage”. In June 2022, the protest is still ongoing.

The early and localized protests calling for economic justice in the face of a deepening crisis begun in the suburbs of Colombo in mid-March and evolved into a country-wide movement.

The public demand of #GOHOMEGOTA continues to be echoed by tens of thousands of people who flock together at Galle Face Green and the hundreds of thousands who protest all over the country. The *Aragalaya* has already won many victories for the people. Most importantly, the people of Sri Lanka have learnt how to agitate for change without resorting to ethnic or religious divisions.¹

The protesters demand a new Sri Lanka and call for economic justice and strong social protection, especially for the working people in the country. This political awakening is redefining the role of the citizens and the relationship between the citizen and the state with a clear message: change can only begin with #GoHomeGota. This must be followed by other steps including constitutional, legal, and economic reforms that are essential to address the growing humanitarian, economic, and political crisis and ensure stability in Sri Lanka.²

This report outlines the repressive measures taken by the ruling Rajapaksa family to suppress people’s right to protest peacefully. The incidents, however, show the determination of the protestors to be peaceful and non-violent.

The mass-scale violent assault on the protest site “GotaGoGama” was planned and launched under the leadership of the then Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa from his own residence. His culpability for the violent assaults that prompted a chain reaction of counter violence is clear. This report provides evidence of this heinous crime pre-planned and led by the ruling Rajapaksa family in Sri Lanka.





“GotaGoGama” sites around the country (as of 20 June 2022):

1. Galle Face Green, Colombo (Day 73)
2. Opposite Temple Trees, Colombo (Day 39)
3. New Bus Stand, Anuradhapura (Day 69)
4. Near Railway station, Galle (Day 66)
5. Torrington Park, Kandy (Day 65)
6. Bus Stand, Badulla (Day 63)
7. Near the Police Station, Kurunegala (Day 48)
8. Near Fort, Matara (Day 66)
9. Nuwara Eliya (Day 48)
10. Minuwangoda, Gampaha (Day 56)
11. Ja Ela, Gampaha (Day 17)
12. Negombo, Gampaha (Day 60)
13. Rathnapura (Day 18)
14. Monaragala (Day 43)



“Make politicians’ assets public”
@ GGG



#GOHOMEGOTA PROTEST, HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATIONS AND STATE REPRESSION

31st March 2022 - Mirihana protest:

People living in Mirihana, the neighbourhood of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's residence, launched a peaceful evening protest campaign & marched towards his residence. The protest continued. For unknown reasons a small-scale clash with police and army erupted. A military bus was set on fire by an unknown person.



A young mother with her toddler, who joined the protest at Mirihana, became a symbol of resistance.

The police and military used tear gas, water cannons and live bullets against the protestors. Dozens were injured, 53 persons were arrested, including 8 journalists. Some detainees were assaulted by the police. All were given a bail later. So far, no cases are filed.

Please read the watchdog protest tracker on the Mirihana protest. ³

1st April 2022 - State of Emergency:

President Rajapaksa, without giving any reasons, declared a state of emergency on 2nd April 2022 ahead of the planned protests. He imposed 36 hours of a countrywide curfew from 2nd April midnight until 4th April 2022, 6 am.

3rd April 2022 - Abduction & social media ban:

The crackdown of the Mirihana protest became a rallying point and a call for countrywide peaceful protests was made on Sunday, 3rd April 2022. People came to the streets to protest despite the curfew. At midnight on 2nd April 2022, the administrator of the #GoHomeGota facebook page, Anuruddha Bandara, was abducted



by the police and the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission (HRC) intervened to locate him. On the same day, social media platforms were blocked, starting from midnight. As pressure mounted, the next day social media were unblocked again.

3rd April 2022 - Cabinet resigned:

To appease the protestors, all cabinet of ministers resigned around midnight on 3rd April 2022. Prime Minister (PM) Mahinda Rajapaksa and President Gotabaya Rajapaksa remained in their respective posts.

3rd April 2022 - Extraordinary gazette notification:

An extraordinary gazette notification was issued at midnight on 3rd April 2022 against the planned protests on 4th April 2022, prohibiting anyone from being on a public road, railway tracks, public park, public recreation or other public ground, or the seashore during the curfew hours. The notification said that a written permit granted by the Defence Secretary, the Public Security Ministry Secretary, the Inspector General of Police, or any officer authorised by them would be required to remain in these locations during curfew hours effective until 5th April 2022, 6 am.

4th April 2022 - Countrywide protests:

Countrywide, spontaneous, and large-scale protests erupted as never seen in the country before, demanding the Rajapaksa government to resign. Protestors gathered outside almost all government MPs' houses as the public anger rises calling on the government to go home. In Colombo, protestors marched towards the Presidential Secretariat and the PM's official residence Temple Trees. All protests remained peaceful in the face of police crackdown. When around 2'000 protesters marched towards the Prime Minister's ancestral home in their stronghold Tangalle, police used tear gas and water cannons against the protesters. The President evoked an Emergency Law from 5th April, midnight, as 42 MPs from the ruling party withdraw their support.

9th April 2022 - "GOTAGOGAMA" launched:

Protests culminated on 9th April 2022 with 10'000s of young people converging at Galle Face Green near the Presidential Secretariat and the President's Office in Colombo. Thousands of young people camped there, launching the "Occupy Galle Face" sit-in protest until the President resigns. Other civil groups continue to hold daily protests mainly in and around Colombo. The protest site is called "GOTAGOGAMA". The government appointed four ministers from the same old guard.

12th April 2022 - Threat to kill protestors:

Dan Priyasad, Head of an ultra-Sinhala Nationalist outfit and pro-Rajapaksa trouble rouser, led a pro-government march of Buddhist monks against the #GoHomeGota protests. While speaking to media he made open death threats to popular youtubers and leading figures of the #GoHomeGota protest campaign. Threatening #GoHomeGota protestors, Dan Priyasad said that "[o]nce the [protest] wave is over, wait and see what will happened to you! We have already collected your names".⁴ Although complaints were made against the threats, no action was taken. Later, Dan Priyasad was seen leading the assault on the GotaGoGama protest site on 9th May 2022.

16th April 2022 - Police deployment in front of "GotaGoGama":

A large number of police trucks and police force were deployed in front of the peaceful protest site. Issuing a statement, the Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL) said that it views "with great concern any attempts to



Police trucks came to the protest site.

disrupt in whatever manner a peaceful protest by the people of this country. Any such attempt will have grave repercussions for the country, its democracy, its economy, and the rule of law”.⁵

19th April 2022 - Protestor shot dead:

The police in riot gear stormed a protest rally in Rambukkana, killing a peaceful unarmed bystander and attempting to assassinate another. Police in civics set fire to a three-wheeler taxi to falsify evidence.

23rd April 2022 - Protest march banned:

The police obtained a court order preventing a protest march entry to several roads in Colombo violating right to peaceful protest. The protest march was organised by the Inter University Student Federation (IUSF).

24th April 2022- Illegal and dangerous roadblocks erected:

The police closed roads and used roadblocks with hidden iron thrones that could have been fatal for demonstrators and journalists covering the protests. The Young Journalists' Association (YJA) filed a complaint (No. CIB 1 15/159) at Fort Police Station, but no action was taken.



One of the dangerous roadblocks

26th April 2022- Attempt to kill a protester:

Attempts were made to runover protestors in front of Temple Trees by police vehicles. A complaint (CIB i 333/116) was made against this attempt at the Kollupitiya Police Station on the same day.

28th April 2022 – Countrywide strike:

A mass strike action of 24 hours calling for the resignation of the President received the support of many sectors in the country, including plantation, agriculture, electricity, fisheries, banks, health, ports, economic centres, teachers, and principals. Approximately 1'000 trade unions had pledged support for the one-day strike.

2nd May 2022 – Protestor arrested and assaulted:

The Yakkala Police in Gampaha district arrested and assaulted Saman Kumara who was engaged in a protest at Galle Face. Then Minister for Law and Order, Prasanna Ranatunga, being also the Minister in charge of the police, stated in the Parliament that he was a former member of the JVP. A complaint was lodged with the Yakkala Police regarding the assault with the intervention of lawyers (Complaint No.- CIB ii 64/167).

2nd May 2022 – Order to close down a protest site:

The police obtained a court order to close down a protest site in front of the Temple Trees unilaterally.



5th May 2022 – 13 protesters arrested:

Thirteen protesters who went to deliver a letter to the Speaker of Parliament were arrested near the Parliament and were produced before the court.

5th May 2022 – Excessive use of teargas:

A large amount of teargas and pressurised water were fired at the Inter University Students Federation (IUSF) march.

5th / 6th May 2022 – “HoruGoGama” crushed:

Thousands of students belonging to the IUSF launched a “HoruGoGama” (“ThiefsGoVillage”) protest, blocking off the roads leading to the Parliament. On 5th May 2022 morning protesters tried to remove the police barricades. By this time, hundreds of citizens joined the protest. Police used excessive force of water cannons and teargas to disperse the protestors. The teargas canisters were aimed directly at the protestors making some of them injured. Video evidence shows that the police was assaulting some protestors severely. The police used water cannons to destroy the food tent set up by the protestors with the donations of the people.



Food tent of the protestors were directly aimed at and destroyed by the water cannons of the police.

6th May 2022 – Countrywide hartal:

A massive 24-hour hartal campaign brought the country to a standstill as workers across several sectors, including transport, health, education, and banking, went on strike and private businesses and government



offices shut down demanding the government's resignation. The main demand and slogan were #GoHomeGota.



Hartal was a total success as never seen before. Photo courtesy : Thilina Kaluthotage.

6th May 2022 – State of Emergency:

The President declared a State of emergency for the second time in five weeks, giving security forces sweeping powers as a nationwide strike demanding the President's resignation brought the country to a standstill. This is the second time in a span of five weeks that the President, in a context when Sri Lanka has witnessed weeks-long peaceful protests across the Island, declared a State of Emergency with no credible justification. Despite the peaceful citizen mobilisation, the authorities used violent and intimidatory tactics, with the declaration of the State of Emergency being the latest move, to crush dissent and other democratic rights.⁶ Colombo looked like a war zone with the presence of large military personal carriers patrolling in the streets.



PRE-PLANNED ASSAULT FROM RAJAPAKSA RESIDENCE ON PEACEFUL PROTESTORS



Thugs let loose from PM Rajapaksa's residence destroyed the protest site. Photo courtesy: Thilina Kaluthotage.

The organised assault on the peaceful protestors at “GotaGoGama” took place on 9th May 2022.

9th May 2022 itself marked one month of the peaceful occupy protest at Galle Face Green in Colombo. On that day, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa has organised a few thousands strong gathering at his official residence Temple Trees. They were brought there in buses, led by local, provincial, and national level leaders of his party, the Sri Lanka People's Front (SLPP). They were fed, intoxicated, and armed at the PM's official residence before made to march to the assault.

Already on 8th May 2022, the news was out that this gathering aimed unleashing a violent attack on two protest sites: one in front of PM's residence and the other at the “GotaGoGama” Galle Face Green. Mahinda Rajapaksa organised the event knowing that participants will be incited to assault the peaceful protestors. There is video evidence that his son and former Minister, Namal Rajapaksa, took selfies with thugs shouting “It is time to attack!”.

Live streaming by the News First channel on 9th May 2022 showed Rajapaksa supporters shouting at 12.40pm: “ගෝඨාභය ඕනේ! මහින්ද ඕනේ! Barriers කඩාගෙන යමු! ඉල්ල ගනිල්ලා rifle! මරල දාපල්ලා! මුං මරපියවු! ගෝටභම එකෙක් නියන්න! ඉවසුව ඇති! ගනපල්ලා petrol!” (“We want Gotabhaya! We want Mahinda! Break the

barriers! Ask for their rifles! Kill them! Kill! We won't leave anyone at "GotaGama" [alive]! We've waited long enough! Throw petrol on them!")

The case of Anuranga, a peaceful protestor

On 9th May 2022, Anuranga suffered a heavy blow to his head at the "GotaGoGama" protest site. A video footage shows one individual, later identified as 'Arabi Wasantha', beating Anuranga on his head. Anuranga fell at the very instant he was beaten and was carried away by two police officers. The impact of the blow was such that Anuranga's left hand is now paralysed. "Two police officers held me, and it was then that somebody came from behind and beat me". Anuranga still cannot move his fingers and is receiving physiotherapy treatment. "The CID officials obtained a statement around 12 days after I was attacked. But this wouldn't have been the case if a politician or a prominent person was attacked".



The role of Minister Johnston Fernando:

The video evidence shows that a Rajapaksa strong man, a then Minister Johnston Fernando, made an inciting remark to the gathering saying that he only needs 30 minutes to clean up the Galle Face of protestors. He very clearly incited the supporters, mentioning "MynaGoGama" by name. "සටන ආරම්භ කරමු!" ("Let's begin the battle!") he roared. "If the President can't do it... we'll clear out everything!"⁷ Then the crowd shouted: "මේක නමයි වෙලාව, තෝල් ජේස් බනින්න" ("This is the time to jump on to Galle Face.")

Pictorial evidence showed that Rajapaksa supporters who went in Temple Trees bare hand came out armed with wooden polls and iron rods (see also the photos at the front and back cover). Mahinda Rajapaksa is known for leading violence himself during the infamous 1996 North Western Provincial Council election. The President has to still answer the question who provided the wooden polls and iron rods to his supporters within his residence.



PM Rajapaksa's thugs attacked lone peaceful protestor Vishwa mercilessly while police watching.

9th May 2022- Prior warning, BASL letter to IGP:

Before the assault took place, the BASL warned of an imminent attack of the Inspector General of Police (IGP) on the protest site of “GotaGoGama”. No action was taken.

Media Statement by the BASL on 9th May 2022

BASL has received reports of a gang of persons armed with poles and clubs marching from Temple Trees towards Galle Face. They have attacked antigovernment protesters opposite Temple Trees. The BASL calls upon the IGP and the Police to take immediate action, to prevent antigovernment protesters from being attacked. There will be grave repercussions to the Government, and the police, if they fail to take action, to deal with this situation

9th May 2022 - Lawyer Senaka Perera's complaint:

Few hours before the assault on the “GotaGoGama” protest site, human rights lawyer Senaka Perera logged a complaint at the area police station in Kollupitiya, requesting to act against the mobsters (Reference - C2B I 03/49). No action was taken.



9th May 2022 – The role of Deshabandu Thennakoon, SDIG Western Province:

The Senior Deputy Inspector General of Policy (SDIG) in charge of the Western Province, Deshabandu Thennakoon, was at the protest site of “GotaGoGama”. By the time, a mob of hundreds of people led by SLPP politicians surrounded around 50 protestors. SDIG Thennakoon ignored pleas of the protestors to stop the mob and allowed them to roam free, attacking the protestors and setting fire on the tents. Here too video evidence is available to prove his failure of duty to protect the peaceful protestors. A case has been filed by an injured protester, Nizar Maulana, requesting to file charges against SDIG Thennakoon for failing in his duty to protect peaceful citizens from mobsters.

Later SDIG Thennakoon told the National Human Rights Commission that although the President had ordered him not to allow the mob to attack the protestors, two senior officials advised him not to take any action. This proves the President’s prior knowledge of the planned attack on the peaceful protestors.

The leader of the JVP, Anura Kumara Disanayake, told Parliament that “SDIG Thennakoon had given a statement to the Human Rights Commission that the IGP and the Secretary to the Public Security Ministry had instructed not to prevent the attackers on the “GotaGoGama” protest site”.⁸

Former Minister Ramesh Pathirana told media that on that day “the President phoned SDIG Thennakoon, who said that he was instructed by the IGP not to use teargas or water cannons to disperse the attackers”.⁹

In the same speech Ramesh Pathirana provided eyewitness evidence that the assault was planned within PM Rajapaksa’s residence: “I was at Temple Trees when the incident happened. I phoned SDIG Thennakoon soon after I got to know that the protestors are going to be attacked. He told me that all roadblocks had been set up and steps would be taken to prevent it”.¹⁰

This clearly implicated former PM Mahinda Rajapaksa in planning and carrying out the attack, because all this happened in his official residence. If former Minister Ramesh Pathirana could see that the attack being planned, Mahinda Rajapaksa too must have seen it.

Instead preventing a criminal act, SDIG Thennakoon allowed the assault to proceed. This is a criminal negligence, a crime that has to be punished. So far, no action has been taken against neither IGP C. D. Wickramaratne nor SDIG Deshabandu Thennakoon. Even the Attorney General’s request to transfer SDIG Thennakoon out of Western province has not been implemented.¹¹

The police has only named 28 suspects for the organised assault although pictorial and video evidence showed much larger number of assailants.

As the word spread on the assault on the “GotaGoGama” protest site spontaneous counter violence sprang up in many places. Roads were blocked, busses carrying SLPP supporters were taken out, and dozens of busses were set on fire.



A local political leader of SLPP chasing and attacking Father Jeewantha Peiris, who had been a leading figure of the #GoHomeGota protest.

Read the full report on [“The SLPP Attack on ‘GotaGoGama’: A Timeline”](#) ¹³ with maps, photographs and videos and the [detailed report on “The Attack on ‘GotaGoGama’: The Aftermath”](#) ¹⁴, both written by @TeamWatchDog.

9th May 2022 - Counter violence:

PM Rajapaksa by unleashing violence against the peaceful protestors achieved what he probably wanted: A peaceful protest turning into violence. The strongest character of the #GoHomeGota protest was its peaceful nature in the face of state violence. It was a struggle of love and hatred.

The night of 9th May 2022 saw counter violence taking its worst turn by burning more than 50 houses of the ruling party MPs. One MP was brutally killed. Nine people were killed altogether and over 200 injured in clashes. The next day leading groups of the “GotaGoGama” protest called for non-violence. Religious and civil leaders joined these groups, condemning the violence against protestors as well as politicians.

9th May 2022 - Siege of the Rajapaksa residence:

A group of protestors laid siege to PM Rajapaksa’s official residence in the evening of the day when thugs assaulted the peaceful protestors. He and his family were rescued by a special military operation in the early hours of the next day and taken to the navy camp in Trincomalee.



12th May 2022 - Counter political attack:

The physical assault on the peaceful protestors were followed by a political counterattack. Ignoring proposals and demands of *Aragalaya*, civil and political groups for establishing an all-party interim government without the Rakapaksa family, President Rajapaksa and the one single MP of the UNP, Ranil Wickremasinghe, came together to form a new cabinet.

Once a semblance of stability was achieved and in the guise of arresting persons responsible for violence, the Sri Lankan State started to harass and detain human rights defenders who have been involved in the #GoHomeGota protests.

18th May 2022 - General Jagath Alwis's 'threatening' letter to the Chief Justice:

In a letter to the Chief Justice (CJ), the Bar Association of Sri Lanka raised the issue of the Secretary to the Ministry of Public Security, Major General (Rtd) Jagath Alwis's purported letter to the CJ on accusing judges of the Lower Court being responsible for the violence which unfolded in Sri Lanka the week before. The letter mentioned "that it is the considered view of the BASL that if any person attempts to unlawfully interfere with the judiciary such person should be dealt with for contempt of the court".¹² The letter called on the CJ to clarify whether such a letter was received and to inform if any measures were taken in this respect. It is not known whether the CJ has clarified the issue or not.



INDISCRIMINATE ARRESTS AFTER THE ASSAULT ON THE “GOTAGOGAMA” PROTEST SITE

Politicization of the police:

As mentioned earlier, the IGP Wickremarathna was named in media reports as one of the persons who had ordered not to stop attacking the mob. In response to the allegations, he responded saying that out of the 184 officers who were appointed as Officer-in-Charge under the present government only two OICs possessed the required qualifications for the post. The remaining 182 OICs were appointed solely on political power in the absence of recommendations.¹⁵ These unqualified and politically appointed officers are running those police stations still today.

3rd June 2022 - Indiscriminate arrests on political grounds:

The BASL in a letter to the IGP expressed their concerns of the indiscriminate arrests:



ශ්‍රී ලංකා නීතිඥ සංගමය
இலங்கைச் சட்டத்தரணிகள் சங்கம்
BAR ASSOCIATION OF SRI LANKA

ALLEGATIONS OF INDISCRIMINATE ARRESTS BY THE POLICE

Members of the Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL) have drawn our attention to instances of indiscriminate arrests by the police in relation to the violence which occurred in the wake of the incidents of 9th May 2022 and thereafter.

They have raised serious concerns over the partiality of the Police Department, in carrying out investigations and making arrests over incidents of violence across the country. The gravity of these allegations is compounded by the recent revelations attributed to statements made by you of political bias on the part of many Officers-in-Charge of Police Stations and the manner of their selection.

Among the instances of partiality alleged by members are:

- a) Arrests being carried out without verifying claims that the suspects were not at the scene of the crime but were elsewhere at that time.*
- b) Arrests being carried out of suspects without any credible material but solely on the basis of lists provided by interested parties including politicians.*
- c) Arrests being done solely on the basis that persons had participated in peaceful protests against the government between March and May 2022.*



d) Applications for holding identification parades being made without any material against certain individuals merely for the purpose of having them remanded in custody until the conclusion of the parades.

e) Photographing suspects prior to identification parades leading to suspicions of such photographs being shown to witnesses prior to such parades

f) The indiscriminate use of Emergency Regulations which have now lapsed to keep persons in remand custody.

We urge you to take note on the above and take urgent measures to immediately advise your subordinate officers to ensure that all investigations take place within the parameters of the law and are conducted in an independent and impartial manner.”¹⁶

According to the police spokesperson, by 9th June 2022, the police had arrested nearly 2'000 persons for violence incidents on and since 9th May 2022.

- 1,559 had been released on bail;
- 1,052 were remanded;
- Undisclosed number in police custody;
- 29 persons had been arrested for killing MP Amaraakeerthi;
- Only 27 had been arrested for mass-scale assault on “GotaGoGama” peaceful protestors; and
- 586 incidents were investigated.



INDISCRIMINATE USE OF TEARGAS

The Sri Lankan Police was using excessive force and an excessive amount of teargas against the protestors. The use of teargas was indiscriminate.



On 10th June 2022, the police fired teargas canisters aimed at students' protestors disregarding accepted international norms.

Typical teargas guidance includes warnings that projectiles should never be aimed and fired directly at individuals. Teargas canisters are themselves dangerous weapons and can cause serious injury and even death when launched directly at individuals.¹⁷ Prolonged exposure, or exposure to a large dose of the agent, can lead to more severe injuries and even death: the Centre for Disease Control warns of blindness, chemical burns in the throat and lungs, and respiratory failure leading to death. Those persons with a pre-existing respiratory condition or heart problems are at an increased risk of respiratory arrest or heart attack.¹⁸

UN Experts Condemn Crackdown On Protests

“We condemn the excessive use of teargas and water cannon to disperse protesters, as well as the recent block of social media platforms. We urge the Sri Lankan Government to allow students, human rights defenders, and others to protest in a peaceful manner, and to freely share their political views and express their discontent, both online and offline.”¹⁹



On 6th May 2022 close to the Parliament, the police fired a teargas canister aimed at leading activist of the #GoHomeGota protests, Shamalee Pathirage, and injured her badly.



On 9th June 2022, near the Policy Headquarters, a buddhist nun lay unconcious after facing huge dose of teargas. Photo courtesy: Tharaka Basnayaka.



FOUR INVESTIGATIVE COMMITTEES APPOINTED

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has appointed two Committees/Commissions to investigate violence related to the #GoHomeGota Movement:

1. The Board of Inquiry was appointed to ascertain lapses, if any, by the armed forces and State Intelligence Services during the recent incidents of violence in Mirihana on 31st March 2022 and the Island-wide violence since 9th May 2022. The Board of Inquiry consists of a former Navy Commander, Admiral of the Fleet Wasantha Karannagoda, a former Air Force Commander, Marshal of the Air Force Roshan Goonetilleke, and a former Army Commander, Daya Ratnayake.²⁰
2. President Rajapaksa appointed a Commission of Inquiry to investigate and report on all loss of life and property, including arson, robbery, and murder, which took place in several areas of the Island between 31st March and 15th May 2022. The Supreme Court Justice President's Counsel, B. P. Aluvihare, has been appointed as the Chairman of the Commission. Former Senior DIG, S.M. Wickramasinghe, and Additional Chief Valuer, N.A.S. Wasantha Kumara, are other members of this Commission.²¹
3. Army Commander Shavendra Silva, who was made to retire unexpectedly on 31st May 2022, told the media on 29th May 2022 that he had appointed two Boards of Inquiry under the most senior two army officers to report to him any negligence on containing violence on 9th May 2022 and thereafter.²² He further said that the reports are due in 2-3 days' time but no report has been yet published.
4. On 1st June 2022, when the assault on the "GotaGoGama" protest site was taken up at the Court, lawyers appearing for the victims questioned the lethargic face of police investigations and why SDIG Deshabandu Thennakoon has not been arrested. The Court advised the IGP to appoint a senior officer of the police to oversee the investigations and the IGP agreed to appoint SDIG Kamal Silva.

At the time of publication of this *Sri Lanka Briefing Note*, 22nd June 2022, no report has been made public yet.

Excerpt from the Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, Clément Nyaletsossi Vouli

"The Special Rapporteur is seriously concerned with the steps taken from the end of March 2022 on, in response to large-scale protests, including the declaration of a state of emergency and the publication of emergency regulations. The Special Rapporteur has received reports of the use of tear gas, water cannons and live ammunition in response to protests, leading to serious injuries and deaths. The Special Rapporteur and other mandate holders have previously expressed their concern with the approach adopted. The Special Rapporteur has also received reports that an order was issued for armed forces to open fire in response to the looting of public property—a serious violation of international standards on the use of force and the right to life. The Special Rapporteur has also received reports of arbitrary arrests of protesters taking place. In the context of these reports, the Special Rapporteur reiterates his previous statements, including his calls on the authorities to ensure compliance with international standards on the use of force, to ensure that arbitrary detentions do not take place, and to ensure that communities' serious grievances, including grievances impacting rights enjoyment, are addressed."²³



HARASSMENT AND INTIMIDATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

SELECTED CASES ONLY

Travel ban on 14 protesters:

Leading #GoHomeGota activists, who were eyewitnesses to the violent 9th May attack, were banned from travelling abroad and ordered to surrender their passports to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). The ban was imposed by the Court, following a police request. Among them are: Lahiru Weerasekara, Jagath Manuwarana, Fr. Jeewantha Peiris, and Tampitiye Sugathannada Thero.²⁴

Arrests/Interrogations:

Amila Mendis of Wariyapola, a youth that actively took part in the Kurunegala “GotaGoGama” protest campaign was arrested, following a complaint made by the ruling SLPP Mayor of Kurunegala. He was released on bail. *Source: JDSLanka/16 May 2022.*



Roshan Akmeemana

Roshan Akmeemana, the Trincomalee District Secretary of Ceylon Teachers Service Union & youth activist **Rashmitha Eshan**, who were active in the #GoHomeGota protests in Trincomalee were summoned by police in response to a complaint made by a ruling SLPP politician. *Source: JDSLanka/16 May 2022.*

Susantha Rambukwella, the library assistant of Kanthale Mahaweli Pura Vidyālaya in the Eastern Province, who was actively involved in the ongoing #GoHomeGota protest campaign, was arrested by the Kanthale Police. *Source: JDSLanka/16 May 2022.*

Pushpa Weerasekara, a well-known freelance journalist & a prominent activist associated with “GotaGoGama” protest site in Kurunegala & her husband were asked to present themselves at the Wariyapola Police Station for an “arson investigation”. *Source: JDSLanka/16 May 2022.*

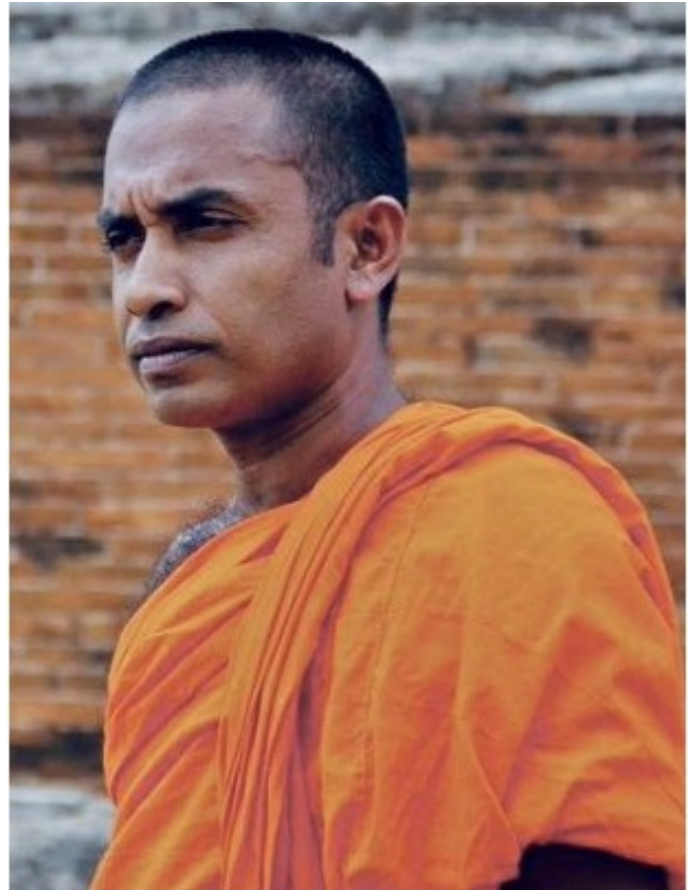
A worker at Lanka Naigai (pvt) Ltd in Katunayaka Export Processing Zone, **Praboda Madushan**, 19, was arrested allegedly for taking part attacking politicians’ property and the Negombo Magistrate ordered to remand him until 19th May 2022. His fellow workers held a demonstration against his arrest. *Source: JDSLanka/15 May 2022.*

CID asked senior journalist and web editor, **Manjula Basnayake**, to make a statement over a photo although the photographer’s name was given as copyright. The photo is about a thug assaulting a disabled veteran on 9th May 2022 at the “GotaGoGama” protest site. *Source: JDSLanka/ 18 May 2022.* Later the attacker in the photo, who attacked the disabled soldier was identified as ruggerrite, Sajith Saranga.



Wekandawala Rahula Thero has been a prominent campaigner for protection of the environment since 2005 and active participant of the #GoHomeGota protests. He was arrested for allegedly attacking Rajapaksa parents' museum on the 9th May 2022. Police had informed that the son of a politician had informed them that Rahula Thero was present at the site of the burning of a house.

Rahula Thero had explained that he was in Matara at that time, and this could be ascertained by the Buddhist Monks at that temple. But without an investigation, Rahula Thero was arrested and detained by the Weeraketiya Police on the night of the 26th May 2022. On 27th May 2022, the police had told that he would be produced before a Judicial Medical Officer but this was not done. He was instead produced before the Walasmulla Magistrate's Court on 27th May 2022. Seven cases have been filed against Ven. Rahula Thero in connection with incidents of assault and arson. The police requested that identification parades be held in relation to five of the seven incidents and based on this, the Magistrate ordered that Ven. Rahula Thero and others be remanded until the 31st May 2022.



Wekandawala Rahula Thero

On 31st May 2022, Ven. Wekandawala Rahula Thero was released on bail by the Walasmulla Magistrate's Court on a surety of LKR 100'000 (equivalent of EUR 260). The human rights defender had been targeted due to his support for peaceful protests in Sri Lanka in light of the ongoing economic crisis. [Read more at Frontline Defenders on Wekandawala Rahula Thero.](#)²⁵

Dharshana Handungoda, a journalist as well as a social activist and a participant of the #GoHomeGota campaign, was summoned to the CID over the phone without any official document claiming that he had been summoned to the CID. *Source: NewsFirst/25 May 2022.*

The President of the Sri Lanka Information Technology Professionals' Association, **Indika Gamage**, was arrested. He was later released on bail. *Source: Welikumbura/27 May 2022.*

Priyantha Fernando, the President of the Ceylon Teachers' Union, was arrested on fabricated charges when he reported to the Anuradhapura Police Station upon their request and was later released on bail after being produced at the Anuradhapura Magistrate Court. *Source: JDSLanka/3 June 2022.*

Adeepa Ekanayaka & Prince Jayasuriya, two prominent #GoHomeGota activists associated with the "GotaGoGama" in Kurunegala were summoned and interrogated at the Police Deputy Inspector General's Office in Kurunegala. Adeepa Ekanayaka was released on bail. *Source: southasiajournal.net/7 June 2022.*

Sampath Edirisinghe of Bathiyagama in the Eastern town of Kanthale, a social media activist and administrator of the "Mother Trinco" Facebook group, was arrested by the Kanthale Police for sharing a video showing an arson attack on the house of the ruling party MP Kapila Athukorala. *Source: JDSLanka/6 June 2022.*

Sr. Mary Sonali of the Congregation of the Apostolic Carmel was summoned by the police 7th June 2022 to record a statement about an arson attack. Sonali, a teacher and principal for 30 years, is a member of the Executive Committee of the Catholic Teachers' Union. She was accused of aiding violence and inciting people to set fire to houses though in fact she was trying to diffuse the tensions. *Source:* [www.globalsistersreport.org/7 June 2022](http://www.globalsistersreport.org/7%20June%202022).



Sister Mary Sonali was trying to diffuse a group of people from violent acts, now she is accused of inciting violence.

Human rights lawyer and convener of the People's Lawyers Association and a regular participant of the #GoHomeGota protest in Colombo, **Senaka Perera**, was summoned to the CID to record a statement over some audio recording. Even before any investigation concluded, the State-controlled TV Channel ITN played the audio implicating Perera. Perera has appeared for a number of cases related to the #GoHomeGota protests and filed Fundamental Rights petitions at the Supreme Court on related issues. *Source:* [www.economynext.com/6 June 2022](http://www.economynext.com/6%20June%202022).



Lawyer Senaka Perera after recording a statement at the CID.

Excerpt from the Center of Policy Alternatives (CPA) Letter to IGP

"Action be taken in regard to the violence against the peaceful protestors at 'GotaGoGama' and 'MynaGoGama' by persons and groups affiliated with Mahinda Rajapakse. Speeches that were tantamount to inciting violence were made by the former PM, former Ministers, and MPs to the gathered at Temple Trees before they were unleashed upon the peaceful protestors.

Further, it is a matter of concern that investigation processes and actions taken have given rise to public concern that while on the one hand little or no meaningful action has been taken in respect of those perpetrating violence against peaceful protestors at the aforementioned protest sites, on the other hand, investigations into the violence unleashed against certain governmental political actors and/or those affiliated to them are being pursued in a manner that reeks more of steps to intimidate and silence those considered politically opposed to the President and his family, than to apprehend and charge actual perpetrators of those crimes."²⁶



CONCLUSION: ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE 9TH MAY ASSAULT

The youth-led #GoHomeGota protest in Sri Lanka has been an exemplary peaceful and non-violent campaign. Since the Mirihana protest on 31st March 2022 until 9th May 2022 no violence was reported on the part of the protestors. The protests were all inclusive and non-discriminatory. All sections of the society embraced the struggle as their own.

The assault on the “GotaGoGama” protest site at Galle Face on 9th May 2022 was pre-planned with the knowledge of the political leadership of the Government. The assault was organised within the then Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa’s residence, Temple Trees. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa also had prior knowledge of the attack.

The assault was the culmination of a series of suppressive measures taken by the Rajapaksa Government against the “struggle of love”, the Aragalaya. Despite all those anti-democratic suppressive measures the #GoHomeGota protests remained peaceful while gathering strength day-by-day. People have started to claim their rights. The Government was under siege by the people’s peaceful protests. The culmination of the protest had made the ruling family isolated.

Then the political establishment, led by Rajapaksa family, decided to unleash violence against the Aragalaya.

There are ample video and photographic evidence to prove that the bussed in supporters of Mahinda Rajapaksa were indoctrinated by the SLPP leading figures, like former Minister Johnston Fernando with vicious hate. Heir apparent of the Rajapaksa family, former Minister Namal Rajapaksa, was mingling with the mob. The mobsters were provided with wooden poles and iron rods inside the PM’s official residence. They were made to consume alcohol and the mobsters were then sent on the destructive violent mission.

On their own admission, the police hierarchy up to the Inspector General of Police had prior knowledge of the planned violent attack. The two most senior persons that had authority over the subordinated police officers ordered not to stop Mahinda Rajapaksa’s mobster army.

Video evidence shows that SDIG Dehabandu Thennakoon, who was at the scene of the attack, colluded with the SLPP MP Sanath Nishantha who was leading the attackers. Thennakoon failed in his duty as a senior police officer to protect the peaceful protesters from Mahinda Rajapaksa’s violent mob.

Counter violence that shook Sri Lanka on the night of the assault was triggered by the then Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa’s planned violence on peaceful protestors. No protestor has condoned the violence.

The Government now uses the unfortunate but spontaneous counter violence to suppress the rights of human rights defenders and the Aragalaya itself.

Given all this evidence, it is clear that former PM Mahinda Rajapaksa, former Minister Namal Rajapaksa, former Minister Johnston Fernando, IGP Wickramaratne, and SIDG Thennakoon, among others, are directly responsible for the unprovoked violent assault on the “GotaGoGama” peaceful protestors on 9th May 2022. This was a planned criminal act.



RECOMMENDATIONS

In this context, the national and international human rights community has a duty to collect all incrimination evidence on the 9th May attack, launched from the Sri Lanka Prime Ministers' residence and make sure that the real culprits are brought to justice.

The accountability for crimes against peaceful protestors should be on the agenda of international human rights mechanisms and organisations on the "Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Sri Lanka".

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Political thugs unleashed by PM Rajapaksa on 9th May 2022 from his residence to attack peaceful #GoHomeGota protestors.

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