

# Briefing Notes

Sri Lanka Briefing Notes | Issue No 28 – June 2023



**BANNED**

**ASSAULTED**

**ARRESTED**

**REPORT CARD: SUPPRESSION  
OF DISSENT SRI LANKA.  
JANUARY – MARCH 2023**

CONTENTS

Introduction ..... 3

    Bureau of Rehabilitation Act ..... 3

    The Draft ‘Anti-terrorism Act’ ..... 4

    The draft ‘Anti-corruption Bill’ ..... 5

    Calling out the Armed forces for the maintenance of public order ..... 6

Suppression of Right to Franchise ..... 6

Suppression of Right to Peaceful Assembly & Free Expression ..... 8

    List of incidents reported: January to March 2023. .... 9

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All photos in this Briefing Note are from social media by unknown authors if not otherwise mentioned.

Sri Lanka Brief thanks the “Sri Lanka Advocacy Group” Germany for their continued support to Sri Lanka Briefing Notes.

Editor: Sunanda Deshapriya [sunandadeshapriya@gmail.com](mailto:sunandadeshapriya@gmail.com) / <https://srilankabrief.org/>



No Comment: 09 February 2023, Colombo, Sri Lanka. (Photo credit Shehan Gunasekara)



## INTRODUCTION

First quarter of the 2023 was marked by continuous mass protests against the high cost of living and suppression of democratic rights in Sri Lanka.

Instead of allowing people to express their dissent Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) headed by Ranil Wickremesinghe used intimidations, threats, assaults and outright ban of peaceful protests of the people.

The quarter also saw violation of people's fundamental right to franchise, on various pretexts. Local government elections which was due in early 2022 has now being postponed indefinitely.

During the period covered by this Briefing Note GoSL passed the 'The Bureau of Rehabilitation Act' and gazetted 'The Anti- Terrorism Bill' and 'Anti-Corruption Bill' among others.

## BUREAU OF REHABILITATION ACT

The parliament passed the amended 'Bureau of Rehabilitation Act', with 23 votes in favour and 6 votes against on 18th January. The original version of the bill<sup>1</sup> was presented to parliament on September 23 but challenged by petitions filed by civil society activists and opposition MPs in the Supreme Court. The court ruled the bill to be "unconstitutional in its entirety," an unprecedented finding in the judicial body's recent history. The court's main concern was with provisions allowing the government to send "ex-combatants," "violent and extremist groups," and "any other groups of persons" to the military-run rehabilitation centres.<sup>2</sup>

This is a clear indication that initial intention of the GoSL was to use the Bureau of Rehabilitation Act' as a tool of suppression.

In the amended act a phrase "other persons identified by law" was introduced which is vague and unidentified category. No clear answer was given in the parliament to a question about whether "identified by law" meant a "judicial determination" or not. This leaves wide open the possibility of subsequent amendments to broaden the scope and application of this repressive law.<sup>3</sup>

*Harm Reduction International, the International Drug Policy Consortium, and Amnesty International urge Members of Parliament in Sri Lanka to take a strong stance against the Bureau of Rehabilitation Bill, which the government is scheduled to present again with amendments in Parliament this Wednesday 18th January.*

Most troubling is the fact the proposed law would facilitate acts of torture and other ill-treatment treatment in rehabilitation centres by permitting the use of force beyond what is legitimate under international standards and by formally allowing military involvement in running of such centres.

In a country where even ICCPR act has become a suppressive tool in the hands of the state of for detaining political opponents and dissenters the phrase that "any other person as may be identified by law as a person who requires rehabilitation" could be another tool of suppressing dissent.

## THE DRAFT ‘ANTI-TERRORISM ACT’

The Draft ‘Anti-terrorism Act’<sup>4</sup> (ATA) is the most dangerous piece of legislation any Sri Lankan government has proposed. This draft ATA has come under strong criticism from political and civil society within the country.

Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) 2023 to United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Sri Lankan civil and political society stated that “the ATA, which is intended to replace the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), is an even more serious threat to democracy in Sri Lanka. We are demanding that the Government withdraw this atrocious proposed law with immediate effect and repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act.”<sup>5</sup> The appeal urges him to use his good offices to stop enacting the bill in current format.



*Protest against proposed Anti-Terrorism Act was widespread*

In a joint communication to Sri Lanka president on 27 April 2023, Special Procedures experts identified that key amendments to counter-terrorism legislation in Sri Lanka require addressing these key benchmarks, including to:

1. Employ definitions of terrorism that comply with international norms.
2. Ensure precision and legal certainty, especially when this legislation may impact the rights of freedom of expression, opinion, association, and religion or belief.
3. Institute provisions and measures to prevent and prohibit arbitrary deprivation of liberty.
4. Ensure the enforcement of measures to prevent torture and enforced disappearance and adhere to their non-derogable prohibition, which has attained the status of jus cogens; and
5. Enable overarching due process and fair trial guarantees, including judicial oversight and access to legal counsel.<sup>6</sup>

Although at the beginning Sri Lanka Justice Minister justified the draft Act and stated that it will not be changed<sup>7</sup> under pressure Sri Lanka government has postpone the date for tabling the Act in the parliament.



## THE DRAFT ‘ANTI-CORRUPTION BILL’

The draft ‘Anti-corruption Bill’<sup>8</sup> of 31 March too has come under criticism from civil society actors. The draft law has been introduced as a continuation of the IMF bail out programme will override the Right to Information act and deter anti-corruption whistle blowers.

The bill seeks to override all other written law, which includes the Right to Information Act. The proposed law contains sections that require officials of the CIABOC to sign oaths of secrecy and therefore, the disclosure of information by CIABOC under the new law will only be possible with special permission from the Commission. As such, the proposed law promotes a culture of secrecy by making access to information from the CIABOC more difficult and thereby negates the objective to “enhance transparency in governance,” as stated in the Bill.

TISL also notes that Section 119 of the Bill, which refers to false allegations, appears to send a negative signal to citizens willing to come forward as informants and whistle blowers to report corruption. While the similar provision in the current law has not been misused targeting corruption fighters, this particular provision could become seriously counterproductive and dangerous in a context of a politically influenced public service, or in an adverse environment of stifled civic space, democratic deficits, weak governance or kleptocracy. As an organization that advocates for citizens’ freedom of expression, TISL believes that the proposed Bill should be more robust and progressive enough to encourage whistle-blowers and citizens to come forward and report corruption without fear of repercussions, while discouraging the corrupt.



*From day one Ranil Wickremesinghe has been relying on military power to rule the nation*

## CALLING OUT THE ARMED FORCES FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC ORDER

During the period covered by this report, a President issued gazette notifications calling out the Armed forces for the maintenance of public order under the powers granted in the public Security Ordinance (Chapter 40). The gazette notification provides the powers for the armed forces to intervene in civilian affairs. The Sri Lanka government has been issuing similar monthly gazettes for several years now, indicating the continuing trend of militarization and shrinking civil space.



*Without regular, free and fair election no democracy can survive*

## SUPPRESSION OF RIGHT TO FRANCHISE

In a democratic society, the political franchise or exercising right to vote is seen as a right and a privilege. For many, it is a way to express their dissatisfaction with the government and its policies. In some cases, it is also a way to voice their support for a particular candidate or party. However, the political franchise can also be used as a form of dissent.

Sri Lankan Supreme Court has expressed that the casting of votes and expressing opinions on political platforms are identified within the freedom of expression in the Constitution.<sup>9</sup>

Further Sri Lanka Supreme Court has expressed that people's sovereignty is implemented by the people through franchise at every election and therefore it is a part of the freedom of expression of citizens exercised at all elections conducted to elect people's representatives.<sup>10</sup>

Election Commission of Sri Lanka had declared that the Local government Elections will be held on 09th March 2023.

on 23rd January Speaking at the parliament of Sri Lanka president Ranil Wickremasinghe said that "there is no money for the [Local Government] election and even there is money there will be no election." Although the Local Government election had been declared<sup>11</sup> by the Election Commission of Sri Lanka president fur-



ther said that “no election is declared in the country to postpone it and only two [out of five] members of the commission has agreed to hold the election on 09th March 2023”<sup>12</sup>

Election Commission responded to these allegations in press release signed by its chairperson Nimal Punihihewa. The press release cited 13 gazettes related to the Local Government election issued with the agreement of all 5 Commission Members.<sup>13</sup>

The local government elections had to be concealed as cabinet circular prohibited providing funds for the election though 2023 budget passed by the parliament had allocated one billion Sri Lanka rupees for the local government election.

In a democracy, elections are a vital part of the process by which the people can express their will and hold their government to account. When an election is called, it is an opportunity for the people to have their say on the issues that matter to them and to choose the representatives that they want to govern them.



Expressing his views on the elections President Wickremasinghe said that elections will only be possible in the next year following the country's economic recovery.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, Sri Lanka government was hellbent of taking away the right to vote as a dissent fearing the result will be disadvantageous.

On 3rd March Supreme Court overturned the government decision to block the funds for Local Government Elections and ordered Secretary to the Finance Ministry to make available one Billion rupees earmarked for the election.<sup>15</sup>

Notwithstanding SC ruling Secretary to the Finance Ministry refused to release required amount. Government printer refused to hand over the printed ballot papers to the Election Commission on various pretexts.

Local and International human rights organisations well as the Buddhist Mahanayake Thera of the Malwattu and Asgiri Chapters and Archbishop of Colombo called on the government to implement the SC order and allow EC to conduct the LG election as scheduled.

Issuing a statement, the Commonwealth Lawyers Association (CLA), the Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association (CMJA) and the Commonwealth Legal Education Association (CLEA) are very concerned about the Government of Sri Lanka's refusal to comply with the court order to release the funds allocated for local elections which had been approved by Parliament.<sup>16</sup>

Instead of adhering to the SC ruling the government MPs warned that action against the SC judges who made the ruling will be investigated for violation parliamentary privileges. Sri Lanka Bar Association issuing a statement emphasised that statement made by those MPS constitutive an interference with the judicial process and undermine the independence of judiciary in Sri Lanka.<sup>17</sup>

The EC postponed the LG election to 25 April<sup>18</sup> on the hope that money will be released. But president was adamant on not allowing people to express their dissent by voting finally LG elections was postponed indefinitely on 11th April 2023.<sup>19</sup>

Number of opinion polls had indicated that government is hugely unpopular, only less that 10% of the voters had said they would vote for the ruling party. In this context postponing LG elections in Sri Lanka is a suppression of peoples right to free expression and right to dissent.

## SUPPRESSION OF RIGHT TO PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY & FREE EXPRESSION

*The right to assembly is a cornerstone of a democratic society. It is the right of people to come together to protest, to voice their opinions, and to demand change. This right is essential to the functioning of a democracy, and it is something that must be protected. Without the right to assembly a democratic society cannot survive.*

*Right to assembly is an inalienable right of the people of Sri Lanka enshrined in the constitution. Sri Lanka government routinely use national security concerns, emergency regulations and police ordinance to suppress peoples right to assembly.*

*‘To dissent’ means to disagree, or to have a different opinion. ‘Freedom of expression’ is the right to express your own opinions freely, without interference or punishment from anyone.*

*When we talk about ‘freedom of expression as a dissent’, we mean that everyone has the right to express their own opinions, even if those opinions are different from the majority. This right is important because it allows minority groups to share their views, and it allows for public debate and discussion on controversial topics. Without the right to dissent, people would be unable to speak out against the government or challenge the status quo. This could lead to a society where people are not able to freely express their opinions, and where there is no room for debate or discussion.*

*The right to dissent is essential for a healthy democracy, and it is one of the most important rights that people have.*



*Right to dissent is trampled under military boots in Sri Lanka, 07 March 2023. (Photo credit Shehan Gunasekara)*



## LIST OF INCIDENTS REPORTED: JANUARY TO MARCH 2023

### 02 January 2023: Two student activists arrested at the police station.

The Chairperson of the Kelaniya University Kelum Mudannayake and student activist Dilshan Harshana were arrested when they visited the Thalangama Police to record a statement on 02nd January for allegedly damaging the gate of the Education Ministry and obstructing duties of police during a protest held on 10th July 2022. They were given bail on 10 March 2023.<sup>20</sup>

### 05 January 2023: Activist Randimal Gamage arrested at the BIA.

Activist Randimal Gamage was arrested by Sri Lanka police upon his arrival at Katunayake Airport from Dubai on 5th January.<sup>111</sup> Police spokesman Nihal Thalduwage said that Randima Gamage was arrested over the forceful entry to the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLRC) on 13th July 2022 during the anti-government protests.<sup>21</sup>



### 05 January 2023: Social media activist Sepal Amarasinghe arrested.

Youtuber Sepal Amarasinghe was arrested by the Criminal Investigation Department for allegedly insulting Temple of Tooth in Kandy and charged under section 3 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Act.<sup>22</sup> It was also reported that Amarasinghe was assaulted while in remand prison on 7th January, with the alleged support. He was released after making an open apology.<sup>23</sup>

*Sepal Amarasinghe escorted by the police on 06 January 2023 (Photo courtesy of Daily News)*

### 06 January 2023: Singapore style bill on social media

Measures are underway to introduce a law similar to the Social Media Regulation Act of Singapore to regulate social media, such as YouTube and Facebook, in Sri Lanka, President Ranil Wickremesinghe said.<sup>24</sup>

### 08 January 2023: State Minister branded student unionists and trade unionists the terrorists

State Minister Anuradha Jayaratne speaking to the media said, even though trade unions and student unions have constitutional right to demand their rights, some of them can be called as terrorists as they are now attempting to destabilise the country's economy. "Now terrorists do not come with firearms, and bombs, but as economic murderers. It is our responsibility to repress those who destroy the country" he added.<sup>25</sup>

### 09 January 2023: Police summoned six men for organising Great Heroes Day.

Mulliyawalai police summoned six Tamil men who organised Maaveerar Naal (Great Heroes Day) remembrance event at Mulliyawalai cemetery in November last year and recorded statements from them. Six men included four local council members of Karaithuraippattu divisional council, namely, Kamalanathan Vijinthan, Chinnarasa Lokeswaran, Thiruchelvam Ravindran, Thavarasa Amalan and two civil society activists, namely, Gnanadas Prashan and Baskaran Vanajan.<sup>26</sup>

### 15 January 2023: Police attacked a peaceful protest.

Police used tear gas and water cannons against the protesting families of the disappeared and the Jaffna university students. A protest march was held from the University of Jaffna to Nallur where president Wickremesinghe was having a public event. When the protesters were marching towards the venue, Police fired tear gas and water cannons at them at the Arasadi junction in Nallur.<sup>27</sup>

**16 January 2023: Court order issued against a peaceful demonstration.**

The Colombo Fort Magistrate issued a restraining order preventing protestors from entering the Galle Face Green in Colombo in relation to a protest march organized by the Inter-University Student Federation. The court order further mentioned that the protestors will be allowed to carry out the protest they have organized peacefully, without entering the Galle Face Green.<sup>28</sup>

**16 January 2023: Student demo blocked and attacked.**

Inter-University Student Federation (IUSF) organized a protest demanding the release of its leader Wasantha Mudalige, repeal Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and reduce the prices of electricity, gas, and fuel. For around half an hour, a demonstration was held in front of the UN office. Later Police attacked peaceful protestors with tear gas and water cannon at the Colpetty junction outside the designated area in the court order and dispersed the protest.<sup>29</sup>

**18 January 2013: Activist Velan Swamigal arrested.**

Civil society leader Velan Swamigal was arrested on 18th of January, for reportedly 'obstructing the duties of police' during the protest held on 15th of January, when President visited Jaffna. Swamigal joined the protest organized by Tamil families of the disappeared and University of Jaffna students on the day. She was granted bail on the same day.<sup>30</sup>

*Velan Swamigal arrested*

**24 January 2023: Two trade unionists arrested.**

The Convenor of the United Trade Union Alliance, Ananda Palitha and the Secretary of the Electricity Consumers' Association, Sanjeewa Dhammika who went to the Public Utilities commission along with other civil society activists to show their objection to some members who changed their stance on increasing electricity charges were later arrested for allegedly threatening the members of the Public Utilities Commission of Sri Lanka (PUCSL).<sup>31</sup> They were granted bail on 26 January 2023.

**26 January 2023: Activists arrested for FB post.**

Activist Wasantha Jayakody was arrested allegedly for uploading threatening posts on Facebook against the attendees of the 75th Independence Day celebration. The officers of the police cybercrimes division arrested the suspect following an investigation into a complaint received in this regard.<sup>32</sup>

**30 January 2023: Two media workers arrested.**

Thalangama Police arrested two young media workers for filming around the Parliament. the videographer is a Tamil from Jaffna, and his assistant is a Muslim from Kandy. They were doing a recoding for a song and had all relevant documents with them. They were remanded for two weeks, and no news has been reported then.<sup>33</sup>

**30 January 2023: Two activists arrested for photographing.**

Two activists were arrested and later released on police bail, claiming that they had taken photographs of the places including the stage being built for the 75th Independence Day. The police said that they were arrested on January 30 at around 8:00 pm while taking photographs of the place without permission.<sup>34</sup>

**31 January 2023: SC granted leave to proceed in case of activist arrest.**

The Supreme Court today granted leave to proceed against Western Province Senior DIG Deshabandu Tennekoon and eleven other police officers over the arrest of social media activist and the admin of 'GoHome-Gota2022' Facebook page Thisara Anurudhdha Bandara.<sup>35</sup>



### **31 January 2023: Activist Selvarani summoned to courts.**

Thambirasa Selvarani, President of Ampara District Organisation of Relatives of the Disappeared, who led a protest in Eastern town of Thirukkivil in Ampara District on 30th January 2023, demanding justice for the disappeared, calling for an international probe into crimes while rejecting Rs. 200,000 (\$550) compensation they were given by the government was summoned to appear before Pottuvil Magistrates' Court at 9am on 31st January 2023.<sup>36</sup>

*Thambirasa Selvarani summoned.*

### **31 January 2023: Student leader released after 5 months under PTA detention.**

Wasantha Mudalige, Convener of Inter University Student Federation, who was held in remand custody for 5 months under draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act after being arrested on 18 August while returning from a student protest was released today by Colombo chief magistrate.

### **03 Feb 2023: Magistrate bans Galle Face for protestors.**

The Fort Magistrate Thilina Gamage issued a court order preventing any demonstration march or any person from entering Galle Face and nearby areas. Also, he specifically forbade 27 activists from obstructing roads towards close to Galle Face green<sup>37</sup>

### **03 Feb 2023: Court order banned protestors marching.**

Maligakanda Magistrate issued a separate order preventing demonstration around the Maradana (Colombo) area. However, the order said that peaceful protests have not been banned. The order said that any attempt to have protest marches will end the status of a peaceful protest.<sup>38</sup>

### **03 Feb 2023: Silent protest attacked.**

On 3rd February, a group of activists organised a Satyagraha, a silent protest in Maradana, in Colombo, under the theme "where is so called independence?" showing their displeasure towards the Independence Day celebrations. An unidentified group arrived while police onlooking and attacked peaceful protestors. After that Police fired tear gas and water cannons towards the peaceful demonstrators.<sup>39</sup>

### **03 Feb 2023: Protestor chased and beaten by the army.**

Jayashan, who participated at Satyagrahaya was chased by armed riot police into a narrow alley, where multiple families reside, & brutally beaten up. He was hospitalised and later discharged today after carrying out multiple x-rays on his spine & was given a clinic date at the eye hospital due to injuring his eye in the assault. (Mari @EmDeeS11)

### **03 Feb 2023: Detained protester denied medical care.**

Arujana Perera was badly assaulted at the peaceful Satyagrahaya protest. He has repeatedly informed the police that he feels sick. Has fainted once. But the Harbour police has refused treatment on the basis that it was the Maradhana police who have arrested them. (@UvinduBro)



### 03 Feb 2023: Road to CTU office blocked.

In the middle of the night Police and Army blocked the road leading to Ceylon Teachers Union office in Colombo to stop peaceful protestors retreating there after police/STF attack on peaceful Sathya-grahaya. (@sunandadesh)

*Vidarshana Kannangara assaulted by Police*

### 03 Feb 2023: Activist & academic Vidarshana Kannangara assaulted by the police.

Activist & academic Vidarshana Kannangara too, was assaulted by the riot police as he was violently dispersed from the Satyagrahaya. He was hit hard on the ear and fell down. He received treatment at the NHSL where he underwent surgery on his finger. (Mari @EmDeeS11)

### 03 Feb 2023: Two female activists intimidated.

“We don’t even have the freedom to protest. This is the level of ‘independence’ we have in this country” Two female activists removed by police for holding placards in the vicinity of the Independence Day celebration site.<sup>40</sup>

### 03 Feb 2023: Student leader alleged that police planned to kill him.

The Inter-University Students Federation (IUSF) Convener Wasantha Mudalige alleged that the police had a plan to kill him while he was in police custody. He told a news conference that he was taken to a secluded place, blindfolded with a cloth, by the river close to the Nawagamuwa Devalaya to kill him.<sup>41</sup>

### 05 Feb 2023: Intelligence officer masqueraded as accredited journalist.

Police intelligence man identified himself as Hiru TV Journalist photographed and threatened the ‘End The Occupation’ rally participants. (Kumanan @kumanan93)



### 05 Feb 2023: YouTuber Dharshana Hadungoda arrested.

Popular YouTuber Dharshana Hadungoda was by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Police at the Bandaranaike International Airport. He was arrested on the charge of allegedly failing to record a statement with the CID regarding a video he had shared in social media for allegedly promoting the violence during the public unrest which occurred during May 9th.<sup>42</sup> He was given bail 6th February.

*Dharshana Hadungoda arrested at the Airport.*

### 07 Feb 2023: Two police were posing as journalist.

Two policemen in civvies posing as journalists caught red handed in Kilinochchi while filming activists and journalists at the Tamil protest march from Sri Lanka’s north to south. (Kumanan @kumanan93)



### **07 Feb 2023: Not providing a Media ID is a violation of rights - HRCSL.**

In a land mark decision, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka says that refusal to register the news web site [www.medialk.com](http://www.medialk.com) and there by not to issue media ID cards to its staff by the Department of Information of Sri Lanka, on the ground that it has not received security clearance from the Ministry of Defence (MoD) is a violation of the constitutionally guaranteed right to free expression.<sup>43</sup>

### **08 Feb 2023: Police obstructed a protest march by monks.**

After allowing them to burn a copy of the 13th amendment to the constitution a demonstration by nationalist Buddhist monks were barred by police from approaching Sri Lanka's parliament.<sup>44</sup>

### **09 Feb 2023: Female activist's mentally handicapped son arrested.**

Mariasuresh Eswari leader of Relatives of enforced disappearances in Mullativu accused Police of arresting her mentally handicapped son on false charges in continuing intimidation to punish for her activism.<sup>45</sup>

### **13 Feb 2023: 18 protestors arrested in Jaffna.**

Tamil National People's Front MP Selvarasa Kajendren and 17 others have been arrested for protesting in violation of a court order against the visit of President Ranil Wickremesinghe who was in Jaffna to declare open the Jaffna Cultural Centre in Jaffna city. Arrested persons:

1. S. Kajenthiren (MP), 2. K. Sugash, 3. S. Thavapalasingham, 4. I. Sathyaseelan, 5. T. Sinthujan, 6. A.T. Thileeshan, 7. T. Rajasrikanth, 8. P. Gunaratnam, 9. J.J. Sathees, 10. J. Rajeevkanth, 11. S. Suthakaran
12. S. Pathmanathan (Dilan), 13. L. Kokilan, 14. Gnaneswaran, 15. Ajanthan, 16. Gokulan, 17. Mathan
18. Soth (@kumanan93)

### **17 Feb 2023: Two student leaders rearrested soon after released.**

Kelum Mudannayaka, student council president Kelaniya University and student activist Dilshan Harshana, who were produced before Kaduwela Magistrate for allegedly damaging the front gate of education ministry were re-arrested by CID soon after they were granted bail. (Mari @EmDeeS11)

### **20 Feb 2023: Two contradictory Court orders issued re opposition SJB protest.**

The Fort Magistrate issued an order preventing several Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MPs from entering several places in Colombo. The SJB was prohibited from holding a protest while inconveniencing pedestrians or vehicular traffic. The SJB was also prohibited from entering the President's office, the President's House, the Finance Ministry, or the Galle Face area during the protest. However, the Colombo Chief Magistrate rejected a request made by the Police to issue an order preventing an SJB-led protest from entering several roads within the Cinnamon Gardens Police jurisdiction.<sup>46</sup>



*Figure 1 Armed with automatic weapons, hundreds strong military contingent waiting to block the peaceful protest by opposition SJB on 20 Feb 2023.*

**20 Feb 2023: Police attacked and dispersed protest by the opposition SJB.**

Main Opposition political party Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) organized protest march in Colombo against the postponing elections was dispersed by the Police using tear gas and water cannons, near the Technical Junction in Maradana in Colombo.<sup>47</sup>

**22 Feb 2023: Court order obtained against TU demonstration.**

Fort Police, Colombo obtained a court order against a protest by banking, health, ports, power, and energy sectors demanding the revision of the government's tax policy. It ordered protestors not to block the roads causing inconvenience to the public and also ordered them not to enter the President's Office, President's House, Finance Ministry and Galle Face and not to cause any damages to the public properties.<sup>48</sup>

**22 Feb 2023: Tear gas and water cannons used against Bhikku- student demonstration.**

Police fired tear gas and used water cannons to disperse the protest by Inter-University Bhikku Federation calling for reopening of Buddhist Pali University was closed on 19th December 2022.<sup>49</sup>

**23 Feb 2023: Media company chair summoned to TID.**

Sri Lanka's Terrorism Investigation Department (TID) summoned Baskaran Kandiah, chairman of mass media company, IBC Tamil. The summons ordered Kandiah to give a statement at the TID's Kilinochchi office on an investigation that is being conducted by the anti-terrorism unit. However, the summons fails to mention what the investigation is in relation to.<sup>50</sup>

**23 Feb 2023: Lawyer's protest threat to judiciary.**

The Lawyers' Union of the Colombo Magistrate's Court held a protest at the Hulftsdorp Courts complex. More than 100 lawyers joined the protest organised under the theme of the "black coat struggle against the hunting of judges, and the suppression of lawyers and the people."<sup>51</sup>

**23 Feb 2023: 60 student protesters arrested.**

57 students, including student leader, Wasantha Mudalige, were arrested from a nonviolent sit-in at the Education Ministry, calling for the Buddhist and Pali University. The Govt attempted to frame charges for the 57 students in remand under the Offences Against Public Property Act. However, in all footage available there is no evidence that the students engaged in any act of sabotage against public property. They were all given bail on 27th (@EmDeeS11)



### 26 Feb 2023: Court order banned NPP protest.

Maradana Police obtained a court order from Maligakanda Magistrate Court to banning NPP led protest entering the Hospital Square area in Colombo 07. Earlier same day Fort Magistrate also issued an order preventing the protesters from entering the Ministry of Finance, President's House, Presidential Secretariat between 1pm to 8 pm.<sup>52</sup>



*Police crackdown of NPP protest on 26th February was brutal.*

### 26 Feb 2023: NPP protestors attacked, dozens injured, one protestor killed.

The National People's Power (NPP) organised a protest march in the Town Hall area in Colombo demanding the government to hold the Local Government election without a delay, and against the increase in electricity bill and taxes. Police fired tear gas and water near Town Hall in Colombo to disperse the protest. 28 protesters were injured and Nimal Amarasiri (61) who was a NPP candidate for LG polls died after being hospitalised.<sup>53</sup>



*Chiranthana Amarasinghe arrested without any reason.*

### 26 Feb 2023: AG justifies detention of student activist under PTA.

Attorney General Department justified the arrests and detention of Ven. Siridhamma Thera in relation to a demonstration. Lawyer from the AG department argues that the monk had engaged in illegally entering public institutions, causing damage to public property and inciting members of the public.<sup>54</sup>

### 27 Feb 2023: Chiranthana Amarasinghe detained without reason.

Human Rights defender Chiranthana Amarasinghe was arrested by the Cinnamon Gardens police on 27th February 2023, while attempting to hand over a right to information (RTI) request to the State Intelligence Service (SIS) concerning a report issued about him.<sup>55</sup> He was granted bail on the same day. Magistrate denied the request made by the police to detain him further to be produced for a psychiatric evaluation.<sup>56</sup>

### 27 Feb 2023: President banned TU action on number of sections.

Gazette notifications were issued by the President declaring a list of services as essential services, under the Section 2 of the Essential Public Services Act, No. 61 of 1979.<sup>57</sup> Declaration as essential services has been historically used by repressive governments in Sri Lanka to prevent trade union actions.<sup>58</sup>

### 01 March 2023: Tear gassed protestor in critical condition.

A 46-year-old remained in critical condition after being teargassed at the anti-government protest organized by the National People's Power (NPP) on February 26. Ajith Gamage of Kesbewa is being treated at the ICU of Colombo National Hospital.<sup>59</sup>

### 03 March 2023: Hugging banned by university officials.

Protest was held against the University of Peradeniya security officials for harassing a couple for hugging under the senate building. (Marlon Ariyasinghe @exfrotezter)

### 04 March 2023: Activist Dananjaya Rathnayake arrested.

Police arrested an activist of Kandy Gota Go Gama protest site Dananjaya Rathnayaka, under the charges of violating the curfew and engaging in unlawful assembly during the mass uprising in 2022. He was an active protester in the anti-government protest site in Kandy.<sup>60</sup>

### 06 March 2023: Death threat to Lankadeepa provincial journalist.

Lankadeepa provincial journalist Nimal Jayarathne in Manampitiya in Polonnaruwa district received a phone call from an unknown phone number threatening to kill his wife and son demanding him to report on a treasure trove incident at the historical Dimbulagala Aranya Senasanaya.<sup>61</sup>

### 07 March 2023: Court order obtained against student march.

Fort magistrate court issued an order preventing a protest march organised by the Inter-University Student Federation (IUSF) in Colombo. The court issued an order barring the protesters from marching towards and entering Galle Face Green, Presidential Secretariat, President's House, Finance Ministry premises etc.<sup>62</sup>

### 07 March 2023: Police used tear gas & water cannons against student protest.

IUSF protest was attacked with tear gas near University of Colombo, well outside the prohibited area. Police even assaulted some students inside university premises. It was reported that ongoing academic activities in the university were disrupted, and some students were hospitalised because of these attacks.<sup>63</sup>



### 07 March 2023: Nimal Amarasiri, security guard died due to teargas.

A NPP Local Government election candidate for Nivithigala, Nimal Amarasiri, (61) injured during the protest march on Sunday in Colombo died at the Colombo National Hospital. He was a former Administrative Officer at the State Plantation Corporation. Amarasiri popularly known among his friends as "CC Mahattaya" was contesting from the Noragolla Division for the Nivithigala Pradeshiya Sabahawa.<sup>64</sup>

*Nimal Amarasiri, security guard at the Colombo University dies of tear gas attack by police.*



### **March 2023: Police defend teargassing University of Colombo.**

Federation of University Teachers' Associations (FUTA) demanded that legal action be taken against the Police officers who forcibly entered, and tear gassed the University of Colombo premises, the Police defended the entry into university and stated that its officers, in special cases, are able to enter any premise even without permission.<sup>65</sup>

### **08 March 2023: Police disperse the Colombo Uni Students protest.**

Student union of the University of Colombo organised protest march against the forcible entrance, and tear gas attack by the Police, was also dispersed by the Police firing tear gas and water. School children in the area were also affected by the tear gas.<sup>66</sup>



### **08 March 2023: Uni student protest attacked, and six students arrested/assaulted.**

Six students were arrested after Police crackdown of Kelaniya University student protest. Four students were eventually tracked down to being held at the Biyagama & Peliyagoda Police stations. Two students were held at Ragama police, later found out. At least 3 students were hospitalised following the violence unleashed on them by State. (Mari @ EmDeeS11) They were granted bail next day.

*Iresh Chathuranga was badly injured in Police/STF attack on unarmed students by the Police.*

### **09 March 2023: Two assaulted students hospitalised for treatment.**

University student, Iresh Chathuranga was badly injured in Police/STF attack on unarmed students by the Police, outside the Kelaniya University on 8 March, received treatment at the National Hospital. Another student activist from Kelaniya University, Sachin Kasthuri, who was also injured at the Police attack, had to undergo a surgery on his leg at the National Hospital. (Mari @EmDeeS11)

### **09 March 2023: Kasipillai Jayavanitha, leading campaigner for disappeared arrested.**

Police arrested the head of the Association of Relatives of the Disappeared, Kasipillai Jayavanitha, for allegedly illegally obtaining electricity for the shed which has served as the base for their six-year-long protest. The arrest follows years of intimidation, surveillance, and harassment by Sri Lanka security forces against the Tamil Families of the Disappeared.<sup>67</sup>

### **9 March 2023: "People will attack protesters soon" - State Minister**

Speaking at the parliament, State Minister of tourism Diana Gamage stated that people will attack the protesters soon, as the protesters are trying to sabotage the gradually reviving economy.<sup>68</sup>

**10 March 2023: Police using expired tear gas against protesters.**

Lawyers representing the Opposition political party National People's Power (NPP) alleging that Police have used expired tear gas canisters and contaminated water against protesters, causing three deaths, and other health complications submitted a Right to Information (RTI) request to the Inspector General of Police (IGP) to obtain a full report on tear gas and water used to disperse protesters.<sup>69</sup>



*Military carrying polls to attack students (Photo credit Shehan Gunasekara)*

**10 March: Investigation of military carrying polls that never happened.**

Army Spokesperson Brigadier Ravi Herath speaking to media said that an investigation has been launched to see whether the soldiers deployed to disperse the Inter University Students' Federation (IUSF) protest carried iron rods and clubs. He denied the involvement of the Sri Lankan Army to control the protest.<sup>70</sup> No outcome of the investigation was published up to now.

**12 March 2023: Minister threatens to confiscate property of striking workers.**

Chairman of the Presidents party UNP, MP Vajira Abeywardena speaking to media said that under the Essential Public Services Act No. 61 of 1979, all movable or immovable property of every person who commits an offence will be confiscated, referring to a recent gazette notification of essential services issued by the President Wickramasinghe.<sup>71</sup>

**12 March 2023: No government jobs for anti-government protestors**

The Government has decided to investigate candidates, including graduates, applying for jobs and promotions in all sectors of the Public Service on whether they have been engaging in anti-Government activities. This decision was taken based on recommendations of retired high officials of the Public Service and intelligence reports which says anti-government activities are surreptitiously disrupting Government affairs.<sup>72</sup>

**13 March 2023: Strikes banned by Gazette notification.**

President Wickramasinghe issued two gazette notifications declaring all services connected to postal services, supply of electricity, and distribution of fuel and petroleum products as essential services, under the Section 2 of the Essential Public Services Act, No. 61 of 1979. prevent trade union actions.<sup>73</sup>

**21 March 2023: Parliament passed a resolution against a TV journalist.**

Ruling MPs have passed a parliamentary resolution against the presenter of Siyatha TV's Tele Wekiya and journalist Lal Hemantha Mawalge.<sup>74</sup> The proposal was supported by 75 MPs and opposed by 43 MPs in the opposition. The resolution calls for the implementation of recommendations of a parliamentary committee on the violation of privileges of MPs.<sup>75</sup>

**23 March 2023: President threatens to make school education an essential service.**

Addressing a school ceremony, the President stated that he would declare school education an essential service, in a bid to control trade union actions by teachers.<sup>76</sup>

**27 March 2023: CID summons the web journalist to reveal his sources.**

The Criminal Investigation Department summoned journalist G P Nissanka Mayadunna, of Ravana Lanka web site and questioned him on the sources of articles published in the website mainly on incidents of corruption and other issues related to Rajapaksa family.<sup>77</sup>

**31 March 2023: Police disrupts the peaceful anniversary gathering.**

Police disrupted the first anniversary of the Aragalaya that was planned to be held at the Jubilee Post in Mirihana area in Nugegoda in Colombo suburbs, with a protest calling for abolition of the executive Presidency system. The protest was planned to be held in remembrance of the beginning of the anti-government protest movement 'aragalaya' in 2022.<sup>78</sup>

**31 March 2023: Activists Anuruddha, Dhanish and Sudhara detained and released.**

These 3 social activists were abducted & taken to Mirihana police station around 5.45pm. They were beaten by police while chasing them. Then around 7pm all of them were released on the basis of no official arrests taken place. Police has taken a letter from them stating that they will not take any legal actions in future against the police in relation to the incident.<sup>79</sup> (Anuruddha Bandara @anuruddha\_lka

The end.

- 1 [http://documents.gov.lk/files/bill/2022/9/270-2022\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/bill/2022/9/270-2022_E.pdf)
- 2 <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2023/01/21/qphz-j21.html>
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 [http://documents.gov.lk/files/bill/2023/3/304-2023\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/bill/2023/3/304-2023_E.pdf)
- 5 <https://sri.lankabrief.org/450-sri-lankans-of-all-wakes-of-life-writes-callon-rights-commissioner-to-respond-re-dreadfulata/>
- 6 <https://sri.lankabrief.org/in-a-joint-letter-un-special-rapporteurs-take-proposed-sri-lankas-anti-terrorism-act-to-the-task/>
- 7 <https://www.news19.lk/the-new-anti-terrorism-act-will-not-be-changed-minister-wijedasa/>
- 8 [http://documents.gov.lk/files/bill/2023/4/311-2023\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/bill/2023/4/311-2023_E.pdf)
- 9 (Deshapriya- Karunathilaka V. Commissioner of Elections and 13 others – {1999 -1-SLR-157})
- 10 (Egodawela / Mediwaka V.Disanayake – 2001-1-SLR-177)
- 11 [https://elections.gov.lk/web/wp-content/uploads/publication/ext-gz/LAE\\_2315\\_27\\_E.PDF](https://elections.gov.lk/web/wp-content/uploads/publication/ext-gz/LAE_2315_27_E.PDF)
- 12 [https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking\\_news/LG-polls-not-legally-declared-President/108-254704](https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/LG-polls-not-legally-declared-President/108-254704)
- 13 [https://elections.gov.lk/web/wp-content/uploads/media-release/2023/MR\\_2023\\_40\\_S.pdf](https://elections.gov.lk/web/wp-content/uploads/media-release/2023/MR_2023_40_S.pdf)
- 14 [https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking\\_news/Law-and-Order-maintained-to-prevent-anarchy-President/108-254421](https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/Law-and-Order-maintained-to-prevent-anarchy-President/108-254421)
- 15 <https://sri.lankabrief.org/two-interim-injunctions-against-the-postponement-of-the-lg-polls-granted-ordered-to-release-funds-full-text-of-the-rf-petition/>
- 16 <https://sri.lankabrief.org/commonwealth-lawyers-calls-on-gosl-to-abide-by-sc-court-order-re-lg-polls/>
- 17 <https://sri.lankabrief.org/ruling-party-mps-statement-on-sc-judgement-re-lg-polls-undermines-the-independence-of-judiciary-bas/>
- 18 <https://sri.lankabrief.org/lg-polls-sri-lanka-election-date-postponed-sc-orders-sec-finance-to-release-money-opp-asked-earlier-date-ec-says-25-april/>
- 19 <https://www.themorning.lk/articles/CocxJzF4SF85EApv6Zjp>
- 20 <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2023/01/02/kelaniya-uni-student-leader-and-activist-arrested/>
- 21 <https://www.newswire.lk/2023/01/05/uae-arrivals-activist-arrested-gr-returns-home/>
- 22 <https://www.dailymirror.lk/2023/01/18/law-order/295431/sepal%E2%80%99s-offences-fall-under-iccpr-act-magistrate>
- 23 <https://www.dailymirror.lk/2023/02/22/law-order/297939/youtuber-sepal-released-after-apology-court>
- 24 <https://www.newswire.lk/2023/01/07/regulating-social-media-president-reveals-opinion/>
- 25 <https://twitter.com/Welikumbura/status/1612034879130316801>
- 26 <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-police-summon-maaveerar-naal-organisers-muliyawalai>
- 27 <https://crisis24.garda.com/alerts/2023/01/sri-lanka-police-fire-water-cannons-to-disperse-protesters-in-jaffna-jan-15>
- 28 <https://www.adaderana.lk/news/87633/court-issues-order-preventing-protestors-from-entering-galle-face-green>
- 29 <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2023/01/18/sfuw-j18.html>
- 30 <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/civil-society-leader-velan-swamigal-released-bail-after-arrest-sri-lankas-police>
- 31 <https://www.adaderana.lk/news/87831/sanjeewa-dhammika-and-ananda-palitha-arrested>
- 32 <https://sri.lankabrief.org/sri-lanka-activist-arrested-for-posting-a-critical-comment-of-independence-day-on-fb/>
- 33 [http://www.colombopage.com/archive\\_23A/Jan30\\_1675034974CH.php](http://www.colombopage.com/archive_23A/Jan30_1675034974CH.php)
- 34 <https://shorturl.at/xz1Y7>
- 35 [https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking\\_news/SC-granted-leave-to-proceed-against-Deshabandu-Tennakoon-and-others/108-253275](https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/SC-granted-leave-to-proceed-against-Deshabandu-Tennakoon-and-others/108-253275)
- 36 <https://english.theleader.lk/news/3547-ampara-activist-summoned-before-courts>
- 37 <https://sundaytimes.lk/online/news-online/Court-order-issued-preventing-protest-marches-during-Independence-Day/2-1140633>
- 38 <https://sundaytimes.lk/online/news-online/Court-order-issued-preventing-protest-marches-during-Independence-Day/2-1140633>
- 39 <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2023/02/05/hrcl-probes-attack-on-peaceful-protestors-in-maradana-on-eve-of-independence-day/>
- 40 <https://twitter.com/NewsWireLK/status/1621537558663663617>
- 41 [https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking\\_news/Police-planned-to-kill-me-Wasantha-Mudalige/108-253471](https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/Police-planned-to-kill-me-Wasantha-Mudalige/108-253471)
- 42 <https://english.newsfirst.lk/2023/2/6/social-media-activist-dharshana-handungoda-arrested>
- 43 <https://sri.lankabrief.org/refusal-to-register-medailk-com-by-information-dept-violates-right-to-free-expression-hrc-sl/>
- 44 <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sinhala-buddhist-monks-clash-sri-lankan-police>
- 45 <https://twitter.com/UstpacAdvocacy>
- 46 <https://www.newswire.lk/2023/02/20/court-rejects-police-request-to-stop-sjb-prot/>
- 47 <https://www.themorning.lk/articles/RUVdMdv4XhzUPsebeBky>
- 48 <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2023/02/25/jobz-f25.html>
- 49 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CylZzfHgCw>
- 50 <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankas-tid-summons-ibc-tamil-chairman>
- 51 <https://www.themorning.lk/articles/d2CinJP5EPI0jT5016>
- 52 <https://english.newsfirst.lk/2023/2/26/court-issues-order-against-anura-kumara-dissanayaka-and-others-from-entering-several-areas-in-colombo>
- 53 <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/sri-lanka-one-person-killed-and-dozens-injured-after-police-attack-peaceful>
- 54 <https://www.sundaytimes.lk/230226/news/sc-dismisses-fr-application-of-university-bhikkhu-front-convenor-513024.html>
- 55 [https://www.dailymirror.lk/print/front\\_page/Civil-Society-Activist-Chirantha-Amarasinghe-arrested/238-254983](https://www.dailymirror.lk/print/front_page/Civil-Society-Activist-Chirantha-Amarasinghe-arrested/238-254983)
- 56 <https://www.themorning.lk/articles/Aep6HvoMzV5ETOTGkFk>
- 57 <https://www.lawnet.gov.lk/essential-public-services-4/>
- 58 <https://www.dailymirror.lk/2023/02/28/local/298343/new-essential-services-declared>
- 59 <https://english.theleader.lk/news/3845-teargas-victim-remains-in-critical-condition>
- 60 [https://twitter.com/hashtag/Ampitiya?src=hashtag\\_click](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Ampitiya?src=hashtag_click)
- 61 <https://shorturl.at/bHQXY>
- 62 <https://www.newswire.lk/2023/03/07/iusf-protest-several-court-orders-issued/>
- 63 <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2023/03/10/fjud-m10.html>
- 64 [https://www.dailymirror.lk/front\\_page/toxic-gas-being-used-to-suppress-protests-AKD/238-255561](https://www.dailymirror.lk/front_page/toxic-gas-being-used-to-suppress-protests-AKD/238-255561)
- 65 <https://www.themorning.lk/articles/OgBDNchtWVgqLRhGNTR>
- 66 <https://www.newswire.lk/2023/03/08/school-children-caught-in-police-tear-gas-attack-video/>
- 67 <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-police-arrest-leader-association-disappeared-vavuniya>
- 68 [https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking\\_news/People-will-attack-protesters-soon-Diana/108-255589](https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/People-will-attack-protesters-soon-Diana/108-255589)
- 69 <https://www.ft.lk/news/NPP-files-RTI-on-tear-gas-and-water-used-by-Police-to-disperse-protests/56-746141>
- 70 <https://ceylonontoday.lk/2023/03/10/did-soldiers-use-clubs-iron-rods-at-iusf-protest/>
- 71 <https://www.dailymirror.lk/2023/03/13/local/299190/strikers-can-be-dealt-under-essential-public-services-act-unp-mp>
- 72 <https://www.sundayobserver.lk/2023/03/12/no-promotions-govt-jobs-those-engaged-anti-govt-protests>
- 73 [http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2023/3/2323-02\\_E.pdf](http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2023/3/2323-02_E.pdf)
- 74 <https://www.parliament.lk/uploads/documents/hansard/1670584660012397.pdf>
- 75 <https://english.theleader.lk/news/4076-mps-pass-privilege-resolution-against-siyatha-tv>
- 76 <https://ceylonontoday.lk/2023/03/18/if-teacher-transfer-board-dissolved-tus-to-strike/>
- 77 <https://www.ravanalankanews.lk/the-owner-of-ravana-lanka-brings-the-cid-here-is-the-reason/>
- 78 <https://www.adaderana.lk/news/89491/aragalaya-activists-stage-demonstration-to-mark-one-year-sincemirihana-protests>
- 79 <https://twitter.com/IsharaMadhu/status/1641831928113532930>