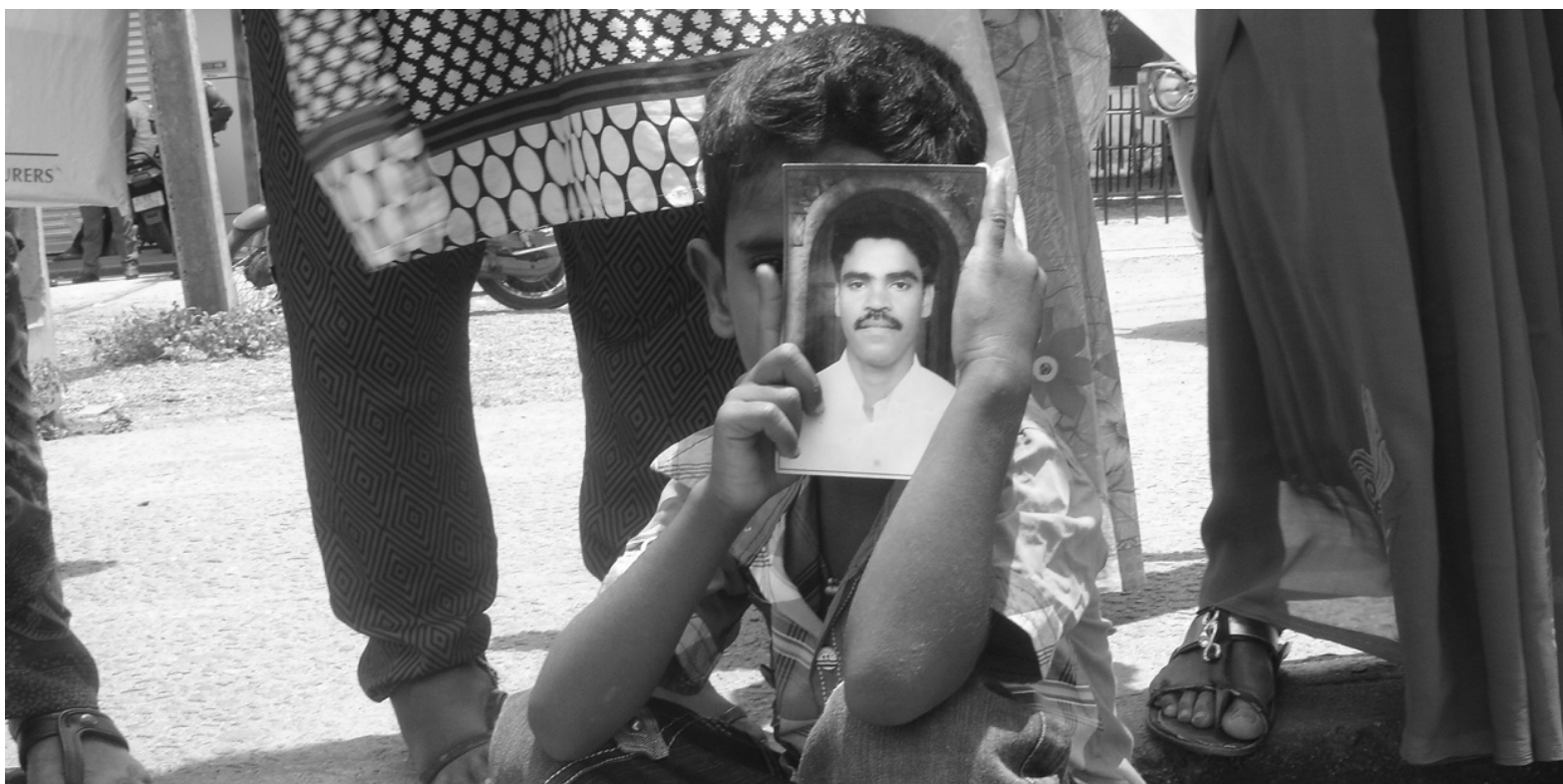


Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka

January – March 2014



16 March 2014 Jaffna – A child holding his disappeared father's photo at a protest held against the arrest of human rights defender Balendran Jayakumari (photo: anonymous)

INFORM

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Issues Covered

- A. Abduction of a human rights defender (HRDs)
- B. Arrest of three human rights defenders (HRDs)
- C. Threat to arrest those advocating for accountability on alleged war crimes
- D. Hate speech against those campaigning internationally for accountability
- E. Reprisal against a Government Minister who cooperated with the UN
- F. Preventing a visit by the US Ambassador on Global Women's Issues
- G. Attacks & restrictions on freedom of expression
- H. Threats and obstructions to freedom of assembly
- I. Repression of university students
- J. Intimidation of persons petitioning the Supreme Court on rights violations
- K. Threats to a human rights defender (HRD) promoting religious freedom
- L. Suppressing opposition political parties during elections

INFORM was established in 1990 to monitor and document human rights situation in Sri Lanka, especially in the context of the ethnic conflict and war, and to report on the situation through written and oral interventions at the local, national and international level. INFORM also focused on working with other communities whose rights were frequently and systematically violated. Presently, INFORM is focusing on election monitoring, freedom expression and human rights defenders. INFORM is based in Colombo Sri Lanka, and works closely with local activists, groups and networks as well as regional (Asian) and international human rights networks

Summary

A key focus of the human rights discourse in Sri Lanka during this period was the UN Human Rights Council sessions in March 2014, where a resolution on Sri Lanka was passed, condemning the ongoing human rights violations, impunity for past violations and asking the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to undertake an international investigation and monitor domestic accountability processes. The government of Sri Lanka had strongly opposed the resolution and engaged in public campaigns to discredit and portray all those promoting and supporting the resolution as traitors and supporters of terrorism. Tamil politicians, human rights defenders and Tamil Christian clergy inside Sri Lanka bore the brunt of such attacks, but foreign governments, UN officials, international rights groups, Tamil Diaspora groups were also targeted by the government and its propaganda machinery, including the state owned and controlled media. Police reported that in March – April 2014, 65 persons were arrested on suspicion of reviving the LTTE. Thirteen had been reported as released by mid-April.

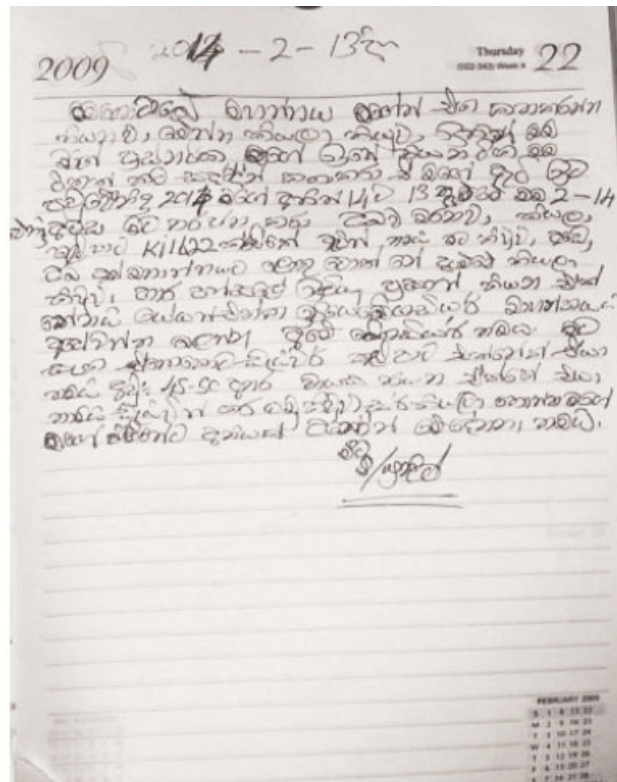
The three months saw repressive measures against a variety of dissent. The Minister of Justice and leader of a Muslim government coalition party faced reprisals due to cooperation with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Protests and seminars were obstructed and journalists were intimidated, restricted and subjected to false accusations. Three human rights defenders were arrested in the North while the sessions of the UN Human Rights Council were in session, two were released after massive domestic and international pressure and one remained in detention as of 14th April. In the Eastern province, victims of land grabbing by the military petitioning the Supreme Court were intimidated and in Colombo, a leader of a community of house owners resisting eviction by the Ministry of Defense was abducted. Even a Buddhist monk in Central Sri Lanka, who is a local government politician of the ruling party, was subjected to continuous threats due to his defense of minority religions. University students unions and student activists across the country continued to face a variety of repression. The United State's Ambassador for Women's Rights was denied the opportunity to visit Sri Lanka. In the lead up to provincial elections in the Western and Southern provinces, election campaigns of opposition parties were attacked and obstructed.

While the Police, Military, Government Ministers and politicians were reported as being responsible for some of the incidents reported during these three months, government allied political and religious groups and state controlled and owned media were also responsible for some incidents. ***The repression of dissent continued with impunity, with domestic mechanisms, such as the Police, Attorney General's department, Judiciary and the National Human Rights Commission appearing unwilling or unable to deter or provide remedies. However, small and dedicated groups of victims of violations and their families, human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, opposition politicians, clergy continued to protest against and expose violations and advocate for human rights.*** Below are some key trends and incidents related to repression of dissent, as reported by media, during the said period.

A. Abduction of a human rights defender (HRD)

1. Mr. Sunil Samaradeera

Wanathamulla is one of the areas where low income earners within the Colombo city were being relocated from their traditional and legal places of residences by the military. Mr. Sunil Samaradeera is a resident of the area who had resisted such unauthorized evictions. In February, he had had a heated argument about the evictions with Secretary to the Ministry of Defense (and brother of the President, Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksha and afterwards, Mr. Sunil Samaradeera was abducted by unidentified group. He was released after strong street protests by the people of that area.¹



The note made by Mr. Sunil on the argument he had with Defence secretary on the same night (Lanka Truth Photo)

B. Arrest of three human rights defenders (HRDs)

2. Ms. Balendran Jeyakumari

On 13th March 2014, Ms. Balendran Jeyakumari, was arrested at her house in the Kilinochchi district, Northern Sri Lanka by the Terrorist Investigation Department (TID) of the Police and is presently being held at the Boosa Detention Centre². She and her daughter has been participating in campaigns to

¹ http://www.lankatruth.com/home/sinhala/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9828:2014-02-22-14-58-11&catid=36:2011-10-17-04-27-38&Itemid=72 (Sinhalese)

² <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA37/006/2014/en/be93015f-1ea7-4a2b-bb36-2e8029f66737/asa370062014en.html>

find out truth about disappeared persons, including Jeyakumari's son, and both the mother and daughter had received much publicity in second half of 2013, due to their participation in an event with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on 30th August 2013 and later in November, when they participated in a public protest with other families of disappeared persons, in Jaffna, when the British Prime Minister visited Jaffna. Jeyakumari claims that her son disappeared after she had surrendered him to the Army in 2009 and that the son's photo was included in a photo published in media, of a government detention facility.

3. Mr. Ruki Fernando and Rev. Fr. Praveen Mahesan

On the night of 16th March, in Killinochchi, the TID arrested two HRDs, Mr. Ruki Fernando, Advisor to the INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre in Colombo and Rev. Fr. Praveen Mahesan, a Catholic Priest and the former Director of the Centre for Peace and Reconciliation in Jaffna³. The two men had gone to North on a fact finding mission to look into the arrest of Ms. Jeyakumari and several others and reports of increased militarization. The reasons given for arrest were for aiding and abetting the reorganizing of the LTTE, causing discomfort to the government, causing disharmony amongst peoples and sending information abroad to earn money.



Ruki Fernando: Gagged (Amnesty International photo)

Both men were released without charges on early morning of 19th February. Despite repeated requests by Mr. Fernando and several visits to the TID by his lawyers, both men were not given access to lawyers⁴. After Mr. Fernando had given interviews to local and international media⁵, the TID

³ <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/sri-lanka-free-prominent-human-rights-defenders-ruki-fernando-and-father-praveen-2014-03-17>

⁴ <http://www.sacw.net/article8006.html>

obtained fresh court orders less than 48 hours after the release, prohibiting the pair from talking to anyone about the case and TID investigations and, banning them from travelling overseas. A third court order compelled them to handover their i pads and a hard disk. A fresh case has been filed against them by the TID.

C. Threat to arrest those advocating for accountability on alleged war crimes

4. Catholic Bishops Rayappu Joseph and Thomas Saundranayagam

The organization “Ravana Balaya” has stated that the Catholic Bishop of Mannar, Rayappu Joseph and the Catholic Bishop of Jaffna, Thomas Saundranayagam should be arrested and questioned. Secretary to Ravana Balaya Ven. Ithekande Saddhathissa Thero was reported to have lodged a complaint to Police Headquarters stating that the two Bishops have submitted false information to Mr. Steven Rapp, the United States Ambassador on war crimes, when he visited Sri Lanka in January 2014.⁶ In a media conference, the organization “Dharmapala Parapura” had stated that the Mannar and Jaffna Catholic Bishops are trying to create tensions between Buddhist and Catholic people in Sri Lanka and they should be arrested. Ven. Induragare Dhammarathna Thero from the Dharmapala Parapura had further stated that the Catholic Bishops Conference should pay attention to the Bishops who make “terrorist statements”.⁷

5. Mrs. Anandi Sasitharan

Defense Ministry officials have stated that they are considering arresting Northern Provincial Councilor, Mrs. Anandi Sasitharan and sending her to a rehabilitation camp for LTTE cadres.⁸ She is the wife of former LTTE leader Elilan who has disappeared after surrendering to the government and she has been an active and leading member of the thousands of Tamil families campaigning for truth and justice about their disappeared family members. Mrs. Sasitharan has also been actively advocating an international investigation to look into allegations of war crimes. In response to this statement, Mrs. Sasitharan had stated to media that if she is arrested, the government may have to face serious repercussion at the international level.⁹

⁵ <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/03/19/world/asia/sri-lanka-ruki-fernando-arrest/index.html>, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-26641597> and <http://njviehland.wordpress.com/2014/03/22/ruki-fernando-is-out-of-detention-but-hes-not-free/>

⁶ www.hirufmnews.lk 16th of January 2014 (Sinhalese)

⁷ http://www.bbc.co.uk/sinhala/world/2014/01/140120_lanka_monks_bishops.shtml (Sinhalese)

⁸ http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=95913

⁹ <http://colombogazette.com/2014/01/15/anandi-cautions-against-arrest/>

D. Hate speech against those campaigning internationally for accountability

6. Catholic Bishops Rayappu Joseph and Thomas Saundranayagam

During the 66th Independence Day celebrations on 4th February 2014, President Mahinda Rajapaksha stated that it's people who don't like peace that are proposing a resolution at UN Human Rights Council in Geneva and that today in Sri Lanka, there has to be a fight between traitors and patriots.¹⁰ The Archbishop of Colombo, Rt. Rev. Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith had stated that the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Sri Lanka wouldn't endorse the call for international investigations made by the Catholic Bishops of Mannar and Jaffna about allegations that the Sri Lankan military had used cluster bombs as well as chemical weapons during that last phase of Eelam war IV, during a meeting the two Bishops had with United States Ambassador at large on War Crimes, Mr. Stephan Rapp and the United States Ambassador in Colombo Michele J Sison. The Cardinal has emphasized that the controversial statement attributed to the two Northern Tamil Bishops were their personal opinions.¹¹

7. Eight human rights defenders (HRDs) and 24 civil society organizations

During the 8pm prime time news on 6th of March 2014, the state owned TV station, Rupavahini, accused 24 civil society organizations of submitting false information to the UN Human Rights Council. During the news, photographs of 8 civil society leaders were shown in the back ground with names of the civil society organization they are associated with.¹²

8. Mr. Sunanda Deshapriya and Mrs. Nimalka Fernando

On 14th of March, during the prime time news on the Independent Television Network (ITN), another stated controlled TV station, the "Wimasuma" programme accused that international and local enemies against motherland had helped passed the resolution in Geneva, showing well known Sri Lankan HRDs Mrs. Nimalka Fernando and Mr. Sunanda Deshapriya at the sessions of the UN Human Rights Council. While showing these images, the announcer expressed regret that people who are greedy for "Dollars" are sitting in the UN Human Rights Council¹³. The Sinhala daily "Divaina" newspaper published number of articles by its defense columnist attacking Mr. Sunanda Deshapriya and Mrs. Nimalka Fernando for their presence at the 25th session of UNHRC.¹⁴

09. Mrs. Anandhi Sasthitharan

On the 13th of February 2014 Lanka C News web had published news depicting Chief Minister of the Northern Province, Justice C. V. Wignaswaran's photo, with a heading "I am not going Geneva, but sending Tiger Elilan's wife". The news has revealed that Northern Provincial Councilor Mrs. Anandhi

¹⁰ <http://www.tbcuk.net/?p=28178>

¹¹ http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=95800

¹² <http://www.srilankabrief.org/2014/03/reprisals-against-hrds-in-sri-lanka.html#more>

¹³ http://varunamultimedia.com/videos/btv/vmtube/wimasuma/wimasuma_-28-03-14/play.html?1 (Sinhalese)

¹⁴ <http://www.divaina.com/2014/04/06/defence.html> & <http://www.divaina.com/2014/03/30/defence.html>
(Both in Sinhalese)

Sasthitharan will participate at the UN Human Rights Council sessions in Geneva. She is wife of former LTTE leader Eililan who has disappeared after surrendering to the government and she has been an active and leading member of the thousands of Tamil families campaigning for truth and justice about their disappeared family members. Mrs. Sasitharan has also been actively advocating an international investigation to look into allegations of war crimes.¹⁵

10. Mrs. Sandya Eknaligoda

On 30th March, the Sinhala daily “Divaina” newspaper published a photograph of Mrs. Sandya Eknaligoda with Rev. Fr. S.J. Emmanuel, the president of the Global Tamil Forum (GTF) and attacked her for talking to 'Tiger sympathizers'. Mrs. Eknaligoda is the wife of Prageeth Eknaligoda, a cartoonist / journalist who disappeared in January 2010. She has been a leading campaigner against disappearances and human rights in Sri Lanka. GTF is among the organizations and individuals proscribed by the Sri Lankan government as terrorist outfits in first week of April 2014.¹⁶



10 March 2014 Geneva: Mrs. Eknaligoda speaking at a UNHRC side event on the disappearance of her husband (Photo: S. Deshapriya)

¹⁵ <http://lankacnews.com/sinhala/news/110229/> (Sinhalese)

¹⁶ <http://www.divaina.com/2014/03/30/defence.html> (Sinhalese)

E. Reprisal against a Government Minister who cooperated with the UN

11. Mr. Rauf Hkeem

Reprisal against Human rights defenders who cooperate with the UN and international human rights mechanisms has been widespread in Sri Lanka and amongst the latest victim is the Minister of Justice and leader of the government coalition partner, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), Mr. Rauf Hakeem¹⁷. The primary reason has been the handing over of a report detailing attacks against Muslims in Sri Lanka to UN High Commissioner Human Rights.

In cabinet meeting President Rajapaksha is reported to have shouted at Minister Hakeem over the report and asked him whether he and his party wanted to remain in the Government. The Jathikia Hela Urumaya, a Buddhist a constituent party of the government with a strong Buddhist orientation has stated that submitting an anti Sri Lanka report to the UNHCR stating that Muslims are denied their religious freedoms in Sri Lanka is a most shameless and degrading policy and has requested the President to take stern action against the SLMC leader. Another government constituent party, the National Freedom Front (NFF) has alleged that Minister Hakeem had collaborated with those bent on subverting the country and that the SLMC leader had contributed to the UN's damaging report meant to justify international war crimes investigation over accountability issues. A close confidante of the President and Minister for Youth Affairs Dulles Alahapperuma, told media that *'Minister Hakeem had committed his treacherous act against the nation ... and " that there were several agreements signed between the Leader of the SLMC, Minister Rauff Hakeem and the Leader of the LTTE Velupillai Prabhakaran, during the war"*. The Minister for public relations, Mervyn Silva warned Mr. Hakeem that Prabhakaran's fate (death) awaits anyone resorting to treacherous activities against the country. Leader of the Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist army, an militant and extremist Buddhist group) Ven. Galabodaatte Gnanasara Thero said Minister Hakeem is a "pariah" and vowed not to allow him to be active further. He said that the Minister had to apologize to the Sinhala community for sharing information with the UN, or face the consequences – which would include Muslims being denied access to 90% of the Sri Lankan market.

Minister Hakeem had said that extremist groups like the Bodu Bala Sena, Ravana Balaya and Sinhala Ravaya has spun out of control and they should be kept on a tight leash by the government and the law should apply to all and sundry and containing those extremist groups would help stop attacks on places of religious worship. The SLMC leader had also said that the SLMC was not only disappointed with some actions taken by the government but also strongly condemned it.

¹⁷ See Sri Lanka Brief Briefing note 8/3 – 24 March 2014 <http://srilankabrief.wordpress.com/>

F. Preventing a visit by the US Ambassador on Global Women's Issues

12. Women HRDs

United States of America had expressed concern about the Sri Lankan government refusing to grant visa to the United States Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, Ms. Catherine Russell. She had planned to visit Sri Lanka in February during which she also had planned to meet women human rights defenders working in Sri Lanka¹⁸. However, according to the Sri Lankan Ministry of External Affairs, the Sri Lankan government had only requested her to postpone her visit¹⁹, which has been denied by the US Embassy in Colombo.

G. Attacks & restrictions on Freedom of Expression

13. Mr. Daya Neththasingha

"Lanka" newspaper journalist Daya Neththasingha was summoned to court due to his attempt to report about a protest which was held at Morawaka, demanding the renovation of a road from Morawaka to Siyabalagoda via Paragala. He was summoned under the offence of obstructing roads on which Very Important Persons (VIPs) travel.²⁰

14. Street drama group of Society for Socialist Art

The People's Liberation Front (JVP – Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) has alleged that persons associated with the government had assaulted a street drama group of "Society for Socialist Art" while they were performing at Panadura bus stand of Kaluthara district, to educate the public about political issues. Nine persons of the drama group were injured and hospitalized and three were in serious condition²¹.

H. Threats and obstructions to freedom of assembly

15. Commemoration of Mr. Anthony Fernando

On the 15th of February 2014 there was commemoration of Mr. Anthony Fernando, who had been assassinated few years ago at the fishermen's protest in Chilaw, in the Puttalam district. Police had tried to get a court order to cancel the protest, but the Magistrate had refused it

The protest was held with the participation of the Leader of the Opposition, fisheries organizations and civil society organizations. During the protest, men in civil attire with iron rods had come and when the organizers of the protest requested the Police to arrest them, a senior Police officer had stated that

¹⁸ <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/140209/news/us-envoys-visit-us-embassy-rejects-eam-statement-85098.html>

¹⁹ <http://www.mea.gov.lk/index.php/en/media/statements/4396-alleged-refusal-of-a-visa-for-catherine-russell-the-united-states-ambassador-at-large-for-global-womens-issues>

²⁰ <http://www.globaltamilnews.net/MobileArticle/tabid/81/language/si-LK/Default.aspx?pn=home&aid=103608>

²¹ http://www.lankatruth.com/home/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6602:govt-thugs-attack-street-drama-troupe-&catid=36:top-stories&Itemid=124

they belong to Police intelligence department but they had not done their duties properly.²² When the organizers protested against the men with iron rods being there, the Senior Superintendent of Police present had said that the protest should be stopped.²³ Police had also deployed several photographers to take photos of protesters and when organizers inquired about this, a senior Police officer stated that they can take photos and ordered policemen to take photos using their cellular phones.²⁴



15 Feb 2014, Chilaw: Fishing community gathered for peaceful protest (Vikalpa Photo)

16. “Search for Common Ground” and group of provincial journalists

A two day training programme for journalists organized by the organization “Search for Common Ground” in Polonnaruwa on the theme “search for peace” had to be abandoned after being interrupted by group of Buddhist monks. These Buddhist monks has declared that due to United States moving a resolution against Sri Lanka at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, United States funded programmes are not allowed in Polonnaruwa area²⁵.

17. The Bar Association of Sri Lanka

The administration of Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH) in Colombo had suddenly cancelled the booking by the Bar Association of Sri Lanka to conduct a public forum on

²² <http://www.vikalpa.org/?p=19586> (Sinhalese)

²³ <http://www.vikalpa.org/?p=19617> (Sinhalese)

²⁴ <http://www.vikalpa.org/?p=19683> (Sinhalese)

²⁵ <http://www.srilankabrief.org/2014/03/sri-lanka-monks-break-up-us-sponsored.html#more>

implication of Gazette notification to vest Police powers in the Armed forces. According to the BMICH administration, they were advised to cancel the booking as the President was planning to visit the BMICH.²⁶

I. Repression of University Students

18. Mr. Mahesh Sanjeewa Bandara

A report submitted by Colombo Crime Division of the Police, requesting to arrest Mahesh Sanjeewa Bandara, the former convener of the Inter University Student Federation was refused by Fort magistrate, who ordered him to be released on bail for Rs. 200,000 worth surety bail. The report submitted had stated that he had committed offences of public nuisance by organizing a protest on 13th November 2013 and disturbing vehicle movement from Fort to Pettah in the Colombo district.²⁷

Mr. Bandara had submitted petition to Colombo High Court requesting to revise a Fort magistrate bail condition ordering him not to participate in public protests and not to enter any university in the country after being charged for the offence of public nuisance due to participating in public protests. The petitioner had declared that the bail condition was violating his fundamental rights. The Colombo High Court Judge ordered that he resubmit an amended plaint.²⁸

Mr. Bandara had in the meantime, informed the Inspector General of Police by a letter dated 28th of January 2014 that he had been followed by unidentified men on motor bicycles and three wheelers on the 27th of January 2014, after a public meeting held at Public Library in Colombo. He has stated further that he suspects those following him were part of the military and that he felt his life was at threat²⁹.

19. Students of four faculties in University of Rajarata

Students of four faculties in University of Rajarata had been engaged in protests for 80 days against the suspension of 27 student activists. The Anuradhapura Magistrate had issued a court order declaring that protest in front of University of Rajarata is illegal.³⁰ In the meantime, Senior Lecturer at the same University, Mr. Randeni Koralage Dharmasiri had lodged a complaint to the nearby Mihintale police, claiming that the protests were disturbing the education of other students³¹.

²⁶ <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/140309/news/vesting-of-police-powers-in-the-armed-forces-bmich-cancels-basls-booking-for-a-forum-88460.html>

²⁷ Maubima (Sinhalese) newspaper of 25th of January 2013

²⁸ Lankadeepa (Sinhalese) newspaper of 10th of January 2013

²⁹ Letter to Inspector General Of Police on the date of 28th of January 2014 by Sanjeewa Bandara, former convener of Inter University Student Federation.

³⁰ http://www.colombopage.com/archive_14A/Feb18_1392704153JV.php

³¹ <http://www.dinamina.lk/2014/02/25/art.asp?fn=n1402257> (Sinhalese)

J. Intimidation of persons petitioning the Supreme Court on rights violations

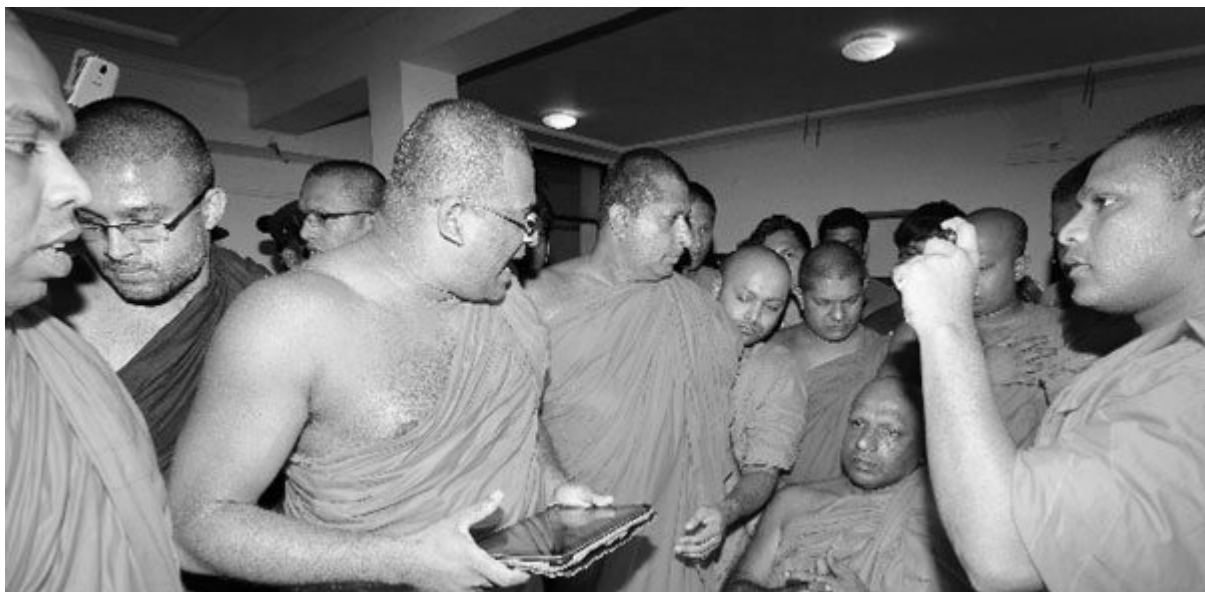
20. Residents of Kasankeni, Ashraff Nagar

Three residents of Kasankeni, Ashraff Nagar, in Oluwil, in the Ampara district had complained to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka that that Army was causing continuous torture and harassment, due to them filing a fundamental rights petitions in the Supreme Court challenging the Army's attempts to remove them from their land³².

K. Threats to a human rights defender (HRD) promoting religious freedom

21. Ven. Vijitha Thero

On 18th March 2014, a supporter of Bodu Bala Sena (BBS - Buddhist Army, an extremist Buddhist group) and local politician had come to the place where Ven. Vijitha Thero had taken refuge in Colombo due to attacks and threats from BBS³³. In the afternoon of the same day, the Chief Buddhist Monk of that temple had received a threatening call from BBS telling that he also might have to face issues if he continues to offer accommodation to Vijitha Thero. Having understood this is no longer a safe place for himself, Vijitha Thero left his place of refuge on the evening of 24th March 2014.



Vijitha Thero (seated) is surrounded by angry Bodu Bala Sena monks threatening him publicly on 10 April 2014 (Sri Lanka Mirror photo)

On 24th of March, 2014 Vijitha Thero along with some other religious leaders had organized a campaign at "Galle Face Green" (an open space in Colombo) against religious extremism targeting Muslim people in the country and calling for inter-religious harmony. The Police had interrupted the campaign and dissolved the crowd and Watareka Vijitha Thero was taken to the Police to get a verbal

³² <http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2014/03/09/ashraff-nagar-residents-seek-hrc-solution/>

³³ <http://groundviews.org/2013/10/09/buddhist-monk-attacked-by-bodu-bala-sena-and-police-inaction/>

statement. The Court had ordered to organize the campaign at another venue, saying the original venue was in a high security zone and will cause inconvenience to the public³⁴.

On 30th March, 2014 the mediation board hearing about previous attacks and threats Vijitha Thero had suffered was scheduled to be held in Mahiyangana (Vijitha Thero's hometown, situated in the Uva province) as the case was referred to mediation board through the Court. Mr. K.P. Gunawardane, who stands accuse of attacking Vijitha Thero, had not attended the mediation board hearing and sent a letter mentioning that he is unable to attend the hearing as he is sick, and requested another date to attend. Hence, the hearing was postponed.

L. Suppressing opposition political parties during elections

22. Opposition Parties

The elections for the Southern and Western Provincial Councils took place on 29th March 2014 and according to PAFFREL, a long standing Sri Lankan election monitoring body, elections took place in conditions that were not adequately free and fair, with significant and blatant violations of the election laws in a widespread manner and at the highest levels of the government³⁵. Most of these violations were committed by ruling party candidates and senior members of the ruling party, with blatant abuse of governmental resources for campaigning, including misuse of government staff officers, their offices and vehicles. PAFFREL also reported receiving complaints about many incidents of disrupting election campaigns, most notably of the opposition Democratic Party candidates and instances when spaces for election meetings were not given by local authorities. PAFFREL stressed that there is a need for much action to improve the situation especially for opposition political candidates.

³⁴ <http://www.lankadeepa.lk/index.php/articles/219626> (Sinhalese)

³⁵ PAFFREL statement on 29th March 2014