

Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka

September 2014



Commemoration of Dr. Rajini Thiranagam, a leading women human rights defender and an academic, who was gunned down by the LTTE on 21st September 1989, was disrupted and a peace march was banned by authorities in Jaffna. [Photo: Internet]

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Issues Covered

- A. Death Threats, Harassment, Intimidation of Those Seen as Against the Government**
- B. Violations of Freedom of Expression**
- C. Obstructions and Threats to Commemorations and Prayer Services in the North and East**
- D. Violations of Freedom of Assembly**
- E. Repression of Student Activists**
- F. Repression of Opposition Political Parties**

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:

September was a month that saw almost daily incidents of repression of dissent. A commemoration planned for a well-known woman human rights defender and academic, Dr. Rajani Thiranagama, was obstructed when two pre-booked venues were withdrawn and a protest march was banned by the Police. A prayer service for displaced Tamils in the district of Jaffna was banned, and Police in Batticaloa obtained court orders to ban commemorations for persons killed twice within two weeks.

In Colombo, two human rights lawyers received death threats and opposition trade unionists were assaulted. The Military obstructed journalists from trying to report on the situation in the Aluthgama area where anti-Muslim riots took place in June. Journalists covering the post-election situation in the Uva province were assaulted, one of the men was hospitalized for several weeks due to his serious injuries. A Northern Tamil journalist narrowly escaped death and a Tamil media activist in Jaffna was subjected to continuous questioning, intimidation and harassment. A Tamil Catholic Priest in Jaffna was questioned after he wrote a poetry book about his war time experiences and a number of school Principals were also questioned for receiving the book. Pressure by extremist groups led to the withdrawal of a literary award to a Sinhalese writer now living in exile due to death threats, due to his critical political views of the government. The four (out of five) judges who chose him as the awardee were also discredited by an extremist writer supportive of the government.

A training workshop for web journalists was disrupted in Negombo. A civil society organized meeting in Trincomalee was also disrupted when venues were withdrawn twice and the meeting was subjected to surveillance. An Australian University admitted to un-inviting two prominent Sri Lankan human rights defenders after they were invited to participate in an international conference, due to pressure from the Ministry of Defence. Police unleashed water cannons and tear gas to suppress a peaceful protest by Catholics over a statue. When a protest calling for the release of a prominent anti-disappearance campaigner whose son had disappeared was held in Colombo, a group that held a counter protest distributed leaflets portraying her as a terrorist supporter, despite there being no charges brought against her 200 days after being detained. A banner displayed at the counter-protest showcased photos of 8 human rights defenders depicting them as traitors.

Student activists also faced suppression. Protesting students were threatened and protest banners were destroyed by the Chairman of the Moneragela Pradeshiya Saba. Police surrounding the Buddhist and Pali University searched the premises and demanded the handover of 4 student leaders. Opposition parties were subjected to a series of attacks and intimidation in the lead up to the elections in the Uva Province and there was a call for lists of opposition party activists working as government officials, which was seen as an initial move to persecute them for their political affiliations. Secretary to the Ministry of Defence accused a leading Tamil political party of causing political turmoil and encouraging separatist sentiments. The Deputy British High Commissioner was watched when she visited the Eastern Province and some of the people she met were questioned afterwards. A family that was visited by the British High Commissioner in the North was also questioned.

There were no visible attempts by authorities to address the continuing incidents of suppression of dissent. As before, government politicians, government officials, police, military, state media and journalists sympathetic to the government appear to be responsible for most reported incidents in September, and relevant institutions, such as the Police, appear unwilling to take actions even when complaints are made.

Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka – September 2014: List of incidents

	Incident date	Incident place (District)	Incident description	Source
A. Death Threats, harassment, intimidation of those seen as against the government				
1.	2 nd Sept. 2014	Puthukkudiriyirippu (Mullaitivu district)	Mullaitiva Tamil family threatened for meeting British High Commissioner	http://tamilguardian.com/print.asp?articleid=12073
2.	3 rd Sept 2014	Jaffna District	TID questions Tamil Catholic priest in Jaffna on his poetry	http://www.jdslanka.org/index.php/news-features/human-rights/475-sri-lankas-anti-terror-squad-grills-priest-school-teachers-over-tamil-poetry-book
3.	4 th Sept 2014	Kilinochchi District	Principles grilled over distributing the poetry book 'Uyirpathivu'	http://www.jdslanka.org/index.php/news-features/human-rights/475-sri-lankas-anti-terror-squad-grills-priest-school-teachers-over-tamil-poetry-book
4.	13 th Sept. 2014	Colombo (Colombo district)	Two human rights lawyers threatened	http://www.ft.lk/2014/09/16/lawyers-collective-condemns-death-threats-to-attorneys/
5.		Colombo (Colombo District)	Trade Union members & leaders assaulted	https://www.facebook.com/lankaenews/posts/787788224619678 (In Sinhala)
6.	30 th Sept. 2014	Eastern Province	Deputy British High Commissioner followed and subjected to surveillance	http://blogs.fco.gov.uk/lauradavies/2014/09/30/looking-over-my-shoulder/
7.	29 th Sept 2014	Colombo (Colombo District)	Detained anti-disappearances campaigner portrayed as a terrorist supporter	http://www.lankasrinews.com/view.php?220RT403dRX4e2GmEcb284Edd378qbc3tGge42TgJ023dBm3
8.	29 th Sept 2014	Colombo (Colombo District)	Human rights defenders accused of treacherous acts	http://srilankabrief.org/2014/09/pro-govt-mob-mocks-leading-civil-society-activists-in-sri-lanka/
B. Violations of Freedom of Expression				
9.			Literary Award for best novel taken away after extremists' protest	http://srilankabrief.org/2014/09/religious-extremists-threatened-not-to-select-mage-adaraneeya-yakshni-my-beloved-demoness-for-best-novel-award-2014/
10.	14 th Sept 2014 / 25 th Sept 2014		Panel of Judges of Literary Award for Golden Book branded as 'dollar crows, peace crows'	http://srilankabrief.org/2014/09/religious-extremists-threatened-not-to-select-mage-adaraneeya-yakshni-my-beloved-demoness-for-best-novel-award-2014/
11.		Aluthgama (Kaluthara district)	Military blocks a journalist covering post-riot Althgama	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rqO0Ijvigg#t=163
12.	20 th Sept. 2014	Between Paranthan and Karadipokkuu (Kilinochchi district)	Tamil Journalist escapes murder attempt in the North	http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37389
13.	Sept. 2014	Jaffna (Jaffna district)	Jaffna press freedom activist questioned and intimidated	http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37400

14.	22 nd Sept. 2014	Haliella (Badulla district)	Journalist attacked after Uva Provincial Council Elections	http://srilankabrief.org/2014/09/sri-lanka-journalists-assaulted-in-north-and-south/#more-20280
C. Obstructions and threats to commemorations and prayer services in the North and East				
15.	5 th Sept. 2014	Valikamam North (Jaffna district)	Prayers for displaced cancelled for the second time in Jaffna due to military intimidation	http://www.tamilguardian.com/article.asp?articleid=12108
16.	20 th or 21 st Sept. 2014?	Jaffna (Jaffna district)	Rajini Thiranagama Commemoration disrupted in Jaffna	http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/south-asia/revisiting-a-tamil-democrats-legacy/article6436119.ece
17.	21 st Sept 2014	Batticaloa District	Court stops commemoration of civilians killed in Batticaloa for 2 nd time in two weeks	http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37392
18.	9 th Sept. 2014	Sathorakondan (Batticaloa district)	Court order stops the commemoration of civilians killed in Sathorakondan	http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37375
D. Violations of Freedom of Assembly				
19.	15 th -17 th Sept. 2014	Colombo / Bangkok	Ministry of Defence pressurise Sydney University to un-invite two HRDs for international conference	http://www.smh.com.au/world/academic-tells-conference-delegates-not-to-upset-sri-lanka-over-human-rights-20140912-10fzdg.html
20.	27 th Sept. 2014	Negombo (Gampaha district)	Police Intimidation disrupts another Media workshop	http://srilankabrief.org/2014/09/sri-lanka-police-together-with-pro-govt-mob-disrupts-one-more-media-workshop/
21.	Sept. 2014	Trincomalee District	A civil society seminar obstructed and subjected to surveillance	Not reported in media
22.	16 th of September	Anuradhapura district	A civil society training cancelled by Police	Not reported in media
23.	21 st Sept. 2014	Katukurunda (Kaluthara district)	Protesting Catholics met with tear gas and water canons from Police	http://www.ucanews.com/news/tear-gas-water-canons-used-on-protesting-sri-lankan-catholics/72006
E. Repression of Student Activists				
24.	14 th Sept. 2014	Monaragala (Monaragala district)	Campaigning University students threatened at Monaragala	http://www.lankatruth.com/home/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7601:sabaragamuwa-students-threatened-at-monaragala-&catid=42:smartphones&Itemid=74
25.	9 th Sept. 2014	Homagama (Colombo district)	Police surrounded Buddhist and Pali University in search of student leaders	http://www.lankaviews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11835:police-surround-buddhist-and-pali-university-search-for-usf-representatives&catid=150:lead-news&Itemid=113

F. Repression of Opposition Political Parties

26.	19 th /20 th Sept. 2014	Rideemaliyadda, (Badulla District)	An opposition party leader's office at his residence torched	http://www.lankatruth.com/home/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7626:vidyaratnas-office-at-his-residence-torched&catid=42:smartphones&Itemid=74
27.	10 th Sept. 2014		Defence Secretary wants to neutralise Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi (ITAK) 'threat'	http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=110143
28.	19 th Sept 2014	Uva Province (Badulla & Monaragala districts)	Minister demands a list of opposition party supporters	http://www.lankatruth.com/home/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7623:audio-siripala-wants-a-list-jvp-goes-to-hrc&catid=42:smartphones&Itemid=74

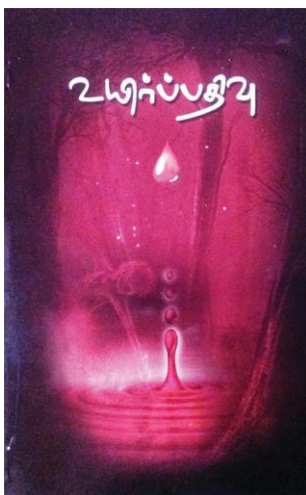
A. Death Threats, Harassment, Intimidation and Restrictions of Those Seen as Against the Government

1. Mullaitivu Tamil family threatened for meeting British High Commissioner

A Tamil family in Mullaitivu was threatened by Sri Lankan military intelligence officers following a visit to their home by the British High Commissioner John Rankin. The High Commissioner travelled to the Puthukkudiyiruppu region of Mullaitivu to speak to Tamil families about the problems they currently face. Following his visit, intelligence officers arrived at one of the houses he visited and threatened the family, the Jaffna based Tamil daily, Uthayan, reported.

<http://tamilguardian.com/print.asp?articleid=12073>

2. TID questions Tamil Catholic priest in Jaffna on his poetry



A Catholic priest who narrowly survived the final phase of the war in Sri Lanka was questioned by the Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) over a book of Tamil poetry he wrote called 'Uyirpathivu', which literally translates as, "Life Records". The priest was questioned on the 3rd of September by three officers from TID in the Jaffna Catholic Bishop's house. The interrogation focused on aerial bomb attacks of churches and schools that the priest witnessed during the last months of the war in 2009 and wrote about in his poems. TID also questioned the priest about poetry that mentioned the erection of new Buddha Statues along the main highway to the North, the A9 road, through the former conflict zone.

<http://www.jdslanka.org/index.php/news-features/human-rights/475-sri-lankas-anti-terror-squad-grills-priest-school-teachers-over-tamil-poetry-book>

3. Principals grilled over distributing the poetry book 'Uyirpathivu'

At least three school principals in Kilinochchi were grilled by the TID during the first week of September over their role in distributing the poetry book in the area. Speaking to the media on the 4th of September, a spokesman from the Ceylon Teachers Union strongly condemned the move as 'outrageous' and said that several principals have received the book by post as it was sent to them by a Tamil parliamentarian in the area. "It is just a book of poetry. If people can be summoned and questioned for reading poems, that demonstrates the level of free expression prevailing in the North" he said.

<http://www.jdslanka.org/index.php/news-features/human-rights/475-sri-lankas-anti-terror-squad-grills-priest-school-teachers-over-tamil-poetry-book>

4. Two human rights lawyers threatened

Two leading members of the Lawyers Collective, Namal Rajapakshe and Manjula Pathiraja, were threatened with death by two men who entered the legal office of Mr. Rajapakshe, situated near the Thorana junction, Kelaniya, in the Colombo district, on the 13th of September 2014. Both lawyers are leading human rights defenders with a long experience of supporting victims of human rights violations.

They appeared in a series of sensitive cases challenging arbitrary actions of all organs of the Government, including the Defence Authorities. One of the intruders was armed, and took Rajapakshe to a corner, and threatened that he and Manjula Pathiraja would be killed, if they appear in 'unnecessary cases'. They particularly mentioned several cases where Rajapakshe and Pathiraja had appeared against a controversial Buddhist monk. The two individuals fled on an unidentified motorcycle. Rajapakshe made a complaint at the Peliyagoda Police Station bearing number CIB/III – 230/123.

<http://www.ft.lk/2014/09/16/lawyers-collective-condemns-death-threats-to-attorneys/>

5. Trade Union members & leaders assaulted



Trade Union of the Government Printing press protests against the assault [Photo: Daily Mirror]

Members and leaders of the trade unions that are affiliated with opposition political parties were assaulted by an outsider gang organised by the politically appointed Government printer Mr. Lalith de Silva, allege the trade union (TU) leaders. These TUs have been agitated against the appointment of Mr. Silva as the Printer on political basis, stating this is the first time an outsider with open political afflictions had been appointed to this position. A number of TU leaders were admitted to Colombo general hospital as a result of the assault.

<https://www.facebook.com/lankaenews/posts/787788224619678> (In Sinhala)

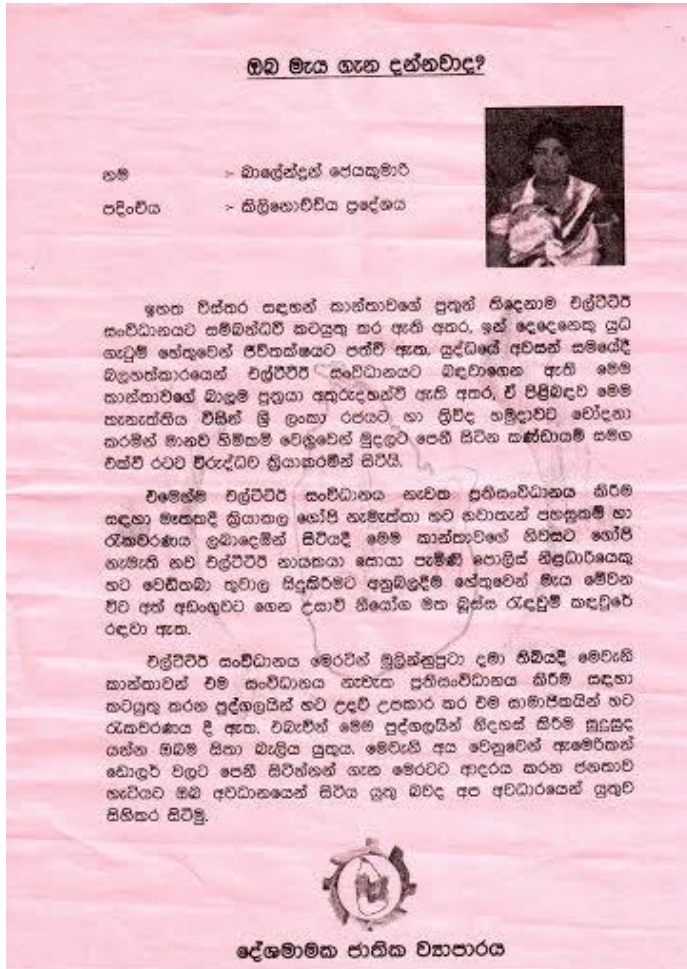
6. Deputy British High Commissioner followed and subjected to surveillance

Ms. Laura Davies, the Deputy British High Commissioner has reported that on a recent official trip to the East she was watched, subjected to surveillance and those who met her received follow up visits and phone calls, asking the purpose of her visit. Ms. Davies said that some of these had been “comic” while

other instance had been frightening to individuals and families. She further reported that several people were too scared to meet her.

<http://blogs.fco.gov.uk/lauradavies/2014/09/30/looking-over-my-shoulder/>

7. Detained anti-disappearances campaigner portrayed as a terrorist supporter



Protected by the police, around 30 supporters of the ruling party held a counter demonstration, next to the #FreeJeyakumary campaign held in front of Fort Railway station on 29th Sept. 2014, according to human rights defenders who were present. The “Free Jeyakumari” campaign called for the release of well-known anti-disappearance campaigner, Ms. Balendran Jeyakumari, who has been a prominent campaigner for truth and justice in relation to the disappearances, including her own son after surrendering to the Army. A leaflet was distributed, pointing out government’s position that she has harboured persons reviving the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and questioning calls for her release. The leaflet ignored the fact that she has been a vocal and visible anti-disappearances campaigner and that she has not been charged for 200 days, despite claims of evidence against her.

(Leaflet Distributed by group against Jeyakumari’s release)

8. Human rights defenders accused of treacherous acts

At the same protest, a banner showing leading human rights defenders in Sri Lanka was displayed, ridiculing them and accusing them of treacherous acts against the country. [From Right to left in the banner: President of the International Movement against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), Dr. Nimalka Fernando; Attorney-at-Law and Executive Director, Rights Now Collective for Democracy, Sudarshana Gunawardana; Journalist and Convener Web Journalists Association, Fredy Gamage; Writer and Advisor, INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre, Ruki Fernando; President, 'Families of the Disappeared' Brito Fernando; Executive Director, Center for Policy Alternatives Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, Anglican Priest, Rev. Fr. Sathivai and convener of the Free Media Movement Sunil Jayasekara]

<http://srilankabrief.org/2014/09/pro-govt-mob-mocks-leading-civil-society-activists-in-sri-lanka/>



The banner: Do you recognise these traitors? [Photo: twitter]

B. Violations of Freedom of Expression

9. Literary Award for best novel taken away after extremists' protest

Four out of five judges of the 'Swarana Pusthaka Sahithya Sammanaya' (Literary Award for Golden Book) had recommended the Sinhala language novel 'Mage Adaraneeya Yakshni' (My Beloved Demoness) by Manjula Wediwardena to be awarded the best novel of 2014. Their decision has been communicated to the organisers by four judges. However the award was given to another novel due to threats made by the Sinhala Buddhists extremist forces. Extremist writers branded the novel as anti-national and its author, Manjula Wediwardena, as a traitor in articles published in mainstream media. Award winning writer, journalist and human rights defender Manjula Wediwardena has been living in exile since 2009 due to the threats he has received. The extremist group reportedly threatened to invade the award ceremony if the award was presented to Wediwardena's book.

<http://srilankabrief.org/2014/09/religious-extremists-threatened-not-to-select-mage-adaraneeya-yakshni-my-beloved-demoness-for-best-novel-award-2014/>

Article by Gunadasa Amasekara in Sinhala at:

http://www.lakbima.lk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=39610:2014-09-12-12-32-43&catid=48:2012-04-02-08-50-52&Itemid=75



[Photo; Manjula Wediwardana Face Book]

10. Panel of Judges of Literary Award for Golden Book branded as ‘dollar crows and peace crows’

Writing in the Sunday Sinhala weekly ‘Lakbima’, on the 14th of September 2014, one of the leading theoreticians of the Sinhala chauvinism, Dr. Gunadasa Amarasekara said, “You see, some of those appointed to the panel of judges are always from NGOs, they are dollar crows, peace crows, etc. They are not innocent. They have their own agendas. This came to light in well-known literary festival recently. I came to know that the NGO panel of judges had selected a Novel by a Tiger agent... We cannot allow this. This is dangerous.” The four judges who came under attack were Dr. Sunila Wijesiriwardena, Dr. Harshana Rambukwella, Mr. Lionel Fernando and Mr. Saman Wikramaarchchi.

<http://srilankabrief.org/2014/09/religious-extremists-threatened-not-to-select-mage-adaraneeya-yakshni-my-beloved-demoness-for-best-novel-award-2014/>

Another nationalist writer, Mr. Sena Thoradeniya, published an article in Sinhala daily ‘Divaina’ on 25th September accusing Manjula Wediwardana as well as panel of judges of being separatists.

<http://www.divaina.com/2014/09/25/sarasavi%204.html> (Sinhala)

11. Military blocks a journalist covering post-riot Aluthgama

The military personal stationed in Aluthgama Muslim areas blocked journalists from ‘Lanka Irida’ weekly newspaper on the grounds that the area is under an Army General and Army rule. In a video posted by the Lanka Truth website, officers from the Military Police and Military tell a journalist on camera that without a prior permission he cannot enter the area because “this is not a civilian controlled area.”

Video of the obstruction available <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rqOOIjvig#t=163> (Minutes 2.12 – 2.45, in Sinhalese)



“This is a military area ruled by the military; No entry for journalists without prior permission” officer tells the journalist
[Photo: screen shot of the Lanka Irida video]

12. Tamil Journalist escapes murder attempt in the North

Two men suspected to be members of the security agencies attempted to kill Mr. Sinnarasa Siventhiran (33), an area correspondent of the Jaffna Daily ‘Uthyan’. The two masked men stopped Mr Siventhiran, while he was on his way home on his bicycle on the A9 road after filing stories at the office of the Tamil daily ‘Uthayan’. The two men introduced themselves as officers from the Criminal Investigation Division of the Police and interrogated him for 10 minutes. After attacking the journalist, in an attempt to kill him and make it appear like an accident, the masked men tried to throw him in front a speeding bus. However, the attempt failed as the driver of the approaching vehicle managed to turn his vehicle away from the person lying on the road. Mr Siventhiran managed to run towards a restaurant and the public gathered to confront the masked men who were chasing him. Siventhiran, in his complaint to the Police said that he could identify one of the masked men who had pulled off his mask before pushing the journalist in front of the vehicle on A9 road.

<http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37389>

13. Jaffna press freedom activist questioned and intimidated

According to media reports, media activist Thayaparan Ratnam, in Jaffna, has been subjected to continuous interrogation, intimidation and harassment by Defence Ministry operated 'investigation' units, such as the Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) and the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). This appears to have started after the Northern based Tamil journalists tried to attend media training workshops in Colombo and other provinces. Mr. Thayaparan was amongst the journalists who were stopped by Military and Police on the way to Colombo for a media workshop. The workshop had to be cancelled due to a protest and threats by a mob believed to be government supporters. Media reports indicated that Mr Thayaparan, who is associated with Jaffna Press Club (JPC), was questioned on his interactions with international media watchdogs and training programmes with journalists from South and

a protest for media freedom held in Jaffna. He is also reported to have been questioned about false allegations of LTTE connection in the past.

<http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37400>

14. Journalist attacked after Uva Provincial Council elections

According to the media freedom watchdog, the Free Media Movement of Sri Lanka, on the 22nd of September 2014, two Sinhala journalists were assaulted by a pro government mob led by government politicians, in Haliella, Badulla district. Journalists Chandana Kuruppu Arachchi of MTV and Swarnawahini TV stations and journalist Palith Ariyawansa, Badulla area correspondent of daily 'Lankadeepa' newspaper were both assaulted by the mob. FMM alleged that the incident is part of the post-election violence unleashed by pro-government mobs against opposition political parties after the recently concluded (20th Sept. 2014) Uva Provincial Council election. Journalist Chandana Kuruppu Arachchi was admitted to the Badulla General Hospital before he was later transferred to two private hospitals for treatment, due to the serious injuries inflicted on him.

<http://srilankabrief.org/2014/09/sri-lanka-journalists-assaulted-in-north-and-south/#more-20280>

C. Obstructions and Threats to Commemorations and Prayer Services in the North and East

15. Prayers for displaced cancelled for the second time in Jaffna due to military intimidation

Sri Lankan military intimidation has, for the second time, led to prayers that were going to be held for the displaced people of Valikamam North in the Jaffna district, to be cancelled. Military intelligence reportedly threatened the organisers with "consequences" if the prayers, organised for those displaced in Valikaamam North on 5th September 2014 went ahead. Joint prayers were due to be held at the Sabapathipillai Welfare Centre and preparations were already underway when military intelligence came to the centre and warned the organisers to remove the hut that was being erected for the occasion.

<http://www.tamilguardian.com/article.asp?articleid=12108>

16. Rajini Thiranagama Commemoration disrupted in Jaffna

A commemoration for Dr. Rajini Thiranagama that was organised by her colleagues, associates and family was denied venues, a peace march (which was a part of the event) and was banned by the Police in Jaffna. Dr. Thiranagama, founder member of the University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna), was gunned down 25 years ago by the LTTE. Organisers had booked a hall to hold a meeting at the University of Jaffna, where Dr. Thiranagama served, and Police permission had been obtained to hold a procession. However, both were revoked a few days ahead of the event. Later, Municipal authorities revoked permission obtained by the organisers to hold one of the seminars at Jaffna's public library. Finally the event was organised in the premises of a church. But even then, a few men introducing themselves as members of the Criminal Investigation Department, visited the venue and noted down the

details of the event. The husband of late Dr. Thiranagama was also summoned by the Army Commander in Jaffna.

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/south-asia/revisiting-a-tamil-democrats-legacy/article6436119.ece>

17. Court stops commemoration of civilians killed in Batticaloa for 2nd time in two weeks

On the 21st of September 2014, for the second time in two weeks, Police in Batticaloa reportedly blocked a remembrance event by obtaining a court order on the grounds that the commemoration may “cause disturbance to peace” (see below for first incident). The families of the victims of 1990 Puthukkudiyiruppu massacre faced harassment when they gathered to observe the annual memorial event in front of the statue of 17 civilians who were slain in 1990 by “Homeguards” (a village level military force operated under the Sri Lankan Police). When people started to light candles at the memorial site, Police officials interrupted them based on a court order they had obtained. Police instructed the people to find a temple to light their candles in memory of the slain victims. Later, when the people gathered at a nearby temple, riot control police deployed intimidated the people.

<http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37392>

18. Court orders to stop the commemoration of civilians killed in Sathorakondan



Police had obtained the court order on the ground that the event may hamper the peace in the area (Photo: BBC Sandeshaya)

Courts reportedly blocked a commemoration event on the 9th of September for civilians killed in Sathorakondan, in the Batticaloa district. Police had reportedly told Courts that such a commemoration may “disturb the peace”. Families of those affected have expressed regret about the prohibition to light lamps at the monument for those killed.

<http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37375>

D. Violations of Freedom of Assembly

19. Ministry of Defence pressurise Sydney University to de-invite two HRDs for international conference

The University of Sydney withdrew invitations for two Sri Lankan human rights organisations to an international conference, after the Ministry of Defence threatened to withdraw from the conference unless the two invited human rights defenders were un-invited. The conference titled "Enhancing Human Rights and Security in the Asia Pacific" was held in Bangkok, Thailand, from the 15-17th of September 2014. The other main NGO in Sri Lanka which was invited for the conference and several international human rights organizations, withdrew from the conference in protest. The two HRDs un-invited due to MoD pressure were two prominent human rights defenders and leaders of two well-known Sri Lankan human rights NGOs, Mr. Brito Fernando from 'Right to Life' and Mr. Sudarashana Gunawardana of the 'Rights Now Collective'. Both have been vocal public critiques of the Sri Lankan government locally and internationally. Conference organizers had also urged international delegates to the conference not to be critical of the Sri Lankan military personnel at the conference, asking delegates to be "mindful of the heightened sensitivity and fragility" and that "while we will all no doubt find ourselves on occasion wishing to question the legitimacy of claims being made by Sri Lankan authorities, I would ask us to keep in mind the minimal positive impact that such confrontations would in fact have and their potentially deleterious effect on the conference."



Mr. Sudarshana Gunawardane on left and Mr. Brito Fernando (Photo: Internet)

<http://www.smh.com.au/world/academic-tells-conference-delegates-not-to-upset-sri-lanka-over-human-rights-20140912-10fzdzq.html>

Copy of one of the letters from the University of Sydney is available at <http://srilankabrief.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Deinvite-letter-to-Right-to-Life.pdf>

20. Police intimidations disrupt another Media workshop

Yet another media workshop was threatened and disrupted by state intelligence agencies using the name of so-called "Nation Building Union" which has disrupted media workshops on two previous occasions. The mob belonging to the Nation Building Union threatened to teach the journalists a lesson if they continued to hold workshops. This group allegedly consists of former military personal. An officer from the Terrorist Investigation Division of the Police called the convener of the Professional Web Journalists Association and told him that a group called Nation Building Union was going to surround venue of the workshop, the Rani Beach Hotel in Negombo. He was told that the Police can not ensure the protection of the participants to the workshop. Subsequently, Police officers threatened the owner of the hotel that immediate action will be taken to halt this workshop. Following intimidation and threats, the organizers had to move the workshop to a different and undisclosed venue.

<http://srilankabrief.org/2014/09/sri-lanka-police-together-with-pro-govt-mob-disrupts-one-more-media-workshop/>

21. A civil society seminar obstructed and subjected to surveillance

According to information INFORM received, a meeting organized in the Trincomalee town in the Trincomalee district by two civil society organizations in latter part of September, was disrupted by intelligence officers, who had compelled the staff members of the venue to cancel the booking made for the venue. When the organizers managed to make a booking for another venue, that too was disrupted and the meeting had to be held at a different venue. Intelligence officers also subjected the meeting to surveillance.

22. A civil society training cancelled by Police

According to information received by INFORM, Police compelled the cancellation of a training program, half way through it's course, on the 16th of September 2014, in the Anuradhapura district. The training was organized by a Colombo based human rights organization, for activists from North, at a venue run by a leading national NGO.

23. Protesting Catholics met with tear gas and water cannons from Police

Police used water cannons and tear gas on the 21st of September to disperse a group of about 3,000 Catholics who were peacefully protesting, demanding the return of a statue that had been confiscated by Police earlier in the day. The statue of St Philip Neri had been erected on government-owned property in Katukurunda in the Kaluthara district, across the street from St Philip Neri Church. Police removed the statue after a group of Buddhist monks complained that the church had erected it without official permission from government authorities. "The Sri Lankan constitution guarantees freedom of religion for everyone, not only the majority religion. Catholics have every right to place the statue there," Fr Attidiya, a Catholic Priest had told ucanews.com.

<http://www.ucanews.com/news/tear-gas-water-canons-used-on-protesting-sri-lankan-catholics/72006>

E. Repression of Student Activists

24. Campaigning university students threatened at Monaragala

While students of Sabaragamuwa University were engaged in an agitation in Monaragala town, the Chairman of Monaragala Pradeshiya Sabha (local government body) from the ruling party, threatened students and destroyed their protest banners. The students of Sabaragamuwa University were campaigning for the re-establishment of Students Council and Faculty Councils in the University for nearly two weeks. Students' agitation in Monaragala town was to make the public aware of the issue and their demands.

http://www.lankatruth.com/home/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7601:sabaragamuwa-students-threatened-at-monaragala-&catid=42:smartphones&Itemid=74

25. Police surrounded Buddhist and Pali University in search of student leaders

The Police together with the anti-riot squad were reported to have surrounded the Buddhist and Pali University on the ground that they needed to search the University premises. Police obtained a court order to enter the university. When the student Bikkhus (Buddhist Monks) argued that only the university administration has the power to conduct such a search of the university, Police said that they were looking for leaders of the Inter-University Students Federation.

http://www.lankaviews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11835:police-surround-buddhist-and-pali-university-search-for-iustf-representatives&catid=150:lead-news&Itemid=113

F. Repression of Opposition Political Parties

26. An opposition party leader's office at his residence torched

The election office of Samantha Vidyaratna, the leader of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP – People's Liberation Front) group of candidates for the Uva PC election, was reportedly burnt. The election office at Mr. Vidyaratna's residence at Rideemaliyadda was broken into and destroyed by a group of thugs that arrived at midnight on 19th September 2014. On the morning of the 20th the group returned and set it on fire. The 20th of September 2014 was the day of election in Uva provincial council.

http://www.lankatruth.com/home/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7626:vidyaratnas-office-at-his-residence-torched&catid=42:smartphones&Itemid=74



Around 50 election offices of the opposition parties were attacked during the Uva Provincial Council election [A burned three wheeler Taxi belongs to a UNP election office ; Photo:CaFFE]

27. Defence Secretary wants to neutralise Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi (ITAK) 'threat'

The Secretary to the Ministry of Defence (and brother of President Mahinda Rajapakse), Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, reportedly alleged that the majority of resolutions adopted at the 15th National Convention of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi (ITAK) held in Vavuniya recently aim to cause fresh political turmoil. Therefore, he said, a tangible campaign was necessary to neutralise the ITAK's threat. The ITAK is the dominant partner of the five-party Tamil National Alliance (TNA) which controls the Northern Provincial Council. Defence Secretary Rajapaksa stated that almost all resolutions encourage separatist sentiments thereby undermining the government of Sri Lanka. and therefore urged those among the international community supportive of the TNA's strategy, as well as other local political parties, to closely examine the set of proposals at issue.

http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=110143

28. Minister demands a list of opposition party supporters

P. Illeperuma, a Coordinating Secretary of the Minister of Irrigation & Water Resources Management, Nimal Siripala de Silva was reported to have sent a letter to all state institutions in Uva Province asking to immediately submit a list of opposition political party activists from two major opposition parties, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and the United National Party (UNP). The JVP leader of the group of candidates for Uva Provincial Council election, Samantha Vidyaratna filed a petition in Human Rights Commission against the letter on the ground that it violates the fundamental rights of state employees.

http://www.lankatruth.com/home/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7623:audio-siripala-wants-a-list-ivp-goes-to-hrc&catid=42:smartphones&Itemid=74