

Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka

November 2014



A destroyed opposition political office: The month of November marked the beginning of a series of attacks on political opposition (Photo: CaFFE)

INFORM

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Issues Covered

- A. **Killing, Abduction and Intimidation of those seen as Against the Government**
- B. **Violations of Freedom of Expression**
- C. **Obstacles and Threats to Tamil remembrances in the North**
- D. **Repression of Student Activists**
- E. **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:

After months of speculation, the Presidential election was officially announced for the 8th of January 2015, nearly two years ahead of schedule. The General Secretary of the ruling party, a very senior party stalwart and a Minister in the Rajapakse Presidency, was chosen by a coalition of opposition parties as the “joint opposition candidate”. Repression of opposition politicians and their supporters began almost immediately. The temple of the leader of the Jathika Hela Urumaya, Ven, Athuraliye Rathana Thero, was surrounded by an angry mob days after the party announced it was quitting ministerial positions in the ruling coalition. A local council member of Sri Lanka’s main Opposition United National Party (UNP) was shot in the head during an attack on a vehicle convoy. According to news reports, “intelligence and political operatives” operating under the direct command of President’s brothers, Secretary to the Ministry of Defence, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, the Minister of Economic Development, Basil Rajapaksa, have been trying to woo grassroots Tamil members of the civic bodies in the North and East to the side of the ruling party. One such Civic member in North was given the option of crossing over to the ruling party if he wanted his son released from custody.

In the North as well as in other parts of the country, Freedom of Expression was also under threat. Sri Lanka's private television service providers blocked the common opposition candidate's first TV interview on the 22nd of November. Military intelligence personnel tried to threaten the Jaffna Press Club not to provide space for the political party Jaanatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which had severely criticized the incumbent government and the President. A Tamil parliamentarian accused the Army of threatening and questioning Tamil journalists in the Northern province and compelling a training workshop for journalists that scheduled to be held in the Jaffna district to be cancelled. The ‘Aththa’ newspaper, a publication of the Communist Party of Sri Lanka was withdrawn from circulation and its newspaper office sealed on 7th of November by the Party high command.

Ms. Mauri Inoka Jayasinghe, a mother who has been fighting for accountability and justice for her abducted and disappeared husband, Madushka Haris de Silva was herself abducted on 1st of November in Anuradhapuru town. She had been subjected to threats several times in the preceding months. The group ‘Blue Brigade’, a political movement headed by president’s son MP Namal Rajapaksa, attacked students of Inter University Students Federation who were collecting signatures against privatization of education.

As in the past, Military personnel ensured a severe crackdown on Tamils in the North and

the East, during and in the lead up to “Heroes day”, the day of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and birthday of the of the LTTE leader Prabhakaran, celebrated on the 27th and 26th of November respectively. On the 3rd of November, hand-written posters carrying death threats against the Jaffna University Teachers’ Association (JUTA) President and four student activists were found pasted in the vicinity of the university. Two ‘surveillance centers’ were reported to have been created near the University of Jaffna, with the primary task being to block activists and students from marking Heroes Day on 27th of November. The University of Jaffna was officially closed from 26th of November to the 1st of December after the Sri Lankan Army stepped up its presence and pressure on the university community. Hundreds of heavily armed military personnel were reported to have taken full control of both entrances of the university and ordered all the students to vacate the university, including hostels. The Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) of the Police was reported to have ordered the security guards of Jaffna University to submit records of the lecturers and students, who were present inside the campus premises on Heroes Day on the 27th of November. The University administration was also instructed to comply with the TID to identify the students behind the move. On the same day, the Military was deployed in front of the destroyed Heroes memorial statue inside the University had also increased foot patrol and random road checks in the area.

Sri Lankan intelligence officers were reported as preparing to investigate “the Uthayan”, leading Tamil newspaper in the Northern Province, alleging that the newspaper had celebrated LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran’s birthday. ‘Terrorist’ Investigation Division (TID) of the Police interrogated a young Tamil activist, for alleged possession of Tamil Eelam Heroes Day posters, and he was reported as arrested by soldiers on the night of the 25th of November. The Tamil National People’s Front’s (TNPFF) office was surrounded by Sri Lankan military personnel on the afternoon of the 26th of November, with Intelligence officers stationed at the office door. On the 25th of November, Sri Lankan military intelligence chased away devotees who had gathered for a pooja at the Pi'llaiyaar temple (Hindu) at Munnampoadi-veddai in Moothoor West in Trincomalee district, alleging that the Tamil devotees had gathered to pay tribute to Tamil (LTTE) Heroes. The soldiers smashed the pot in which the Saiva devotees were preparing ritual milk rice (Pongkal).

Unidentified gunmen shot dead a man in Vellankulam in the Mannar district on the night of the 12th of November. The victim, 34 year old Naguleshwaran Krishnasuwamy, was reported to have been engaged in encouraging Tamils to submit evidence to the ongoing UN inquiry on Sri Lanka. Another reason cited by media for the killing was his refusal to meet Military intelligence officers demands to provide information about non-rehabilitated LTTE cadres or

supporters in the region.

Although Police had announced investigations into some of the incidents, there have been no updates on actual results and like in past, impunity appears to be order of the day. There is unlikely to be any investigation into abuses by the military.

Repression of Dissent in Sri Lanka – December 2014: List of Incidents

	Incident Date	Incident Place (District)	Incident Description	Source
A. Killing, Abduction and Intimidation of those seen as Against the Government				
1	20 th of November	Colombo District	Athuraliye Rathana Thero's temple surrounded	http://www.ft.lk/2014/11/21/athuraliye-rathana-theros-temple-surrounded/
2	1 st of November	Nochchiyagama (Anuradhapura district)	Abduction of a Wife campaigning on her disappeared husband	http://srilankabrief.org/2014/11/mother-twins-wife-disappeared-abducted-threatened-abused-fighting-justice/#more-20985
3.	12 th of November	Mannar district	Gunmen Assassinate Tamil Activist in Mannar	http://www.tamilguardian.com/article.asp?articleid=12834
B. Violations of Freedom of Expression				
4.	22 nd November	Colombo District	"Satana" political program on Sirasa blocked	http://www.colombopage.com/archive_14B/Nov22_1416678446_CH.php
5.	19 th November	Jaffna District	Another media workshop cancelled in the North	http://www.lankaviews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12024:military-shows-its-force-in-the-north-journalists-threatened&catid=150:lead-news&Itemid=113
6.	November 18 th	Jaffna District	Intelligence personnel threaten Jaffa Press Club	https://twitter.com/jaffnapressclub
7.	7 th November	Colombo District	Communist party censors its own news paper	http://archive.srilankamirror.com/news/17774-aththa-withdrawn-from-circulation-office-sealed
C. Obstacles and Threats to Tamil remembrance in North				
8.	25 th November	Trincomalee district	Devotees chased away from religious event	http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37521
9.	26 th November	Colombo District (?)	SL intelligence launches investigation into Uthayan Newspaper	http://www.tamilguardian.com/article.asp?articleid=12949

10.	25 th November	Jaffna District	Arrest of Tamil youth for possession of Heroes Day poster	http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37508
11.	3 rd November	Jaffna District	University of Jaffna teachers named in threatening posters	http://www.colombomirror.com/?p=1256
12.	27 th November	Jaffna District	Military gets names of students who lit "flame of sacrifice" in Jaffna	http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37529
13	25 th November	Jaffna District	Military Surveillance stepped up in Jaffna	http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37507
14.	26 th November	Jaffna District	University of Jaffna closed fearing remembrance activities	http://www.colombomirror.com/?p=1256
15.	26 th November	Jaffna District	Tamil political party office surrounded by Sri Lankan military personnel	http://www.tamilguardian.com/article.asp?articleid=12950

D. Repression of Student Activists

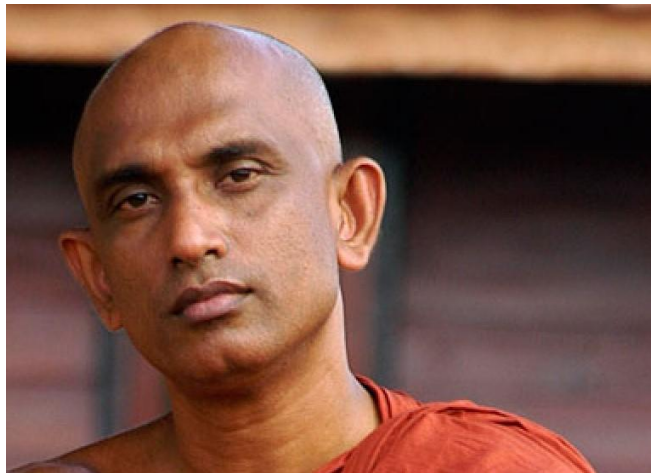
16.	24 th November	District?	University students signature campaign attacked	http://www.lankatruth.com/home/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7851:banner-for-education-causes-namals-thugs-to-stampede-&catid=42:smartphones&Itemid=74
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F. Repression of Opposition Political Parties

17.	November	Northern Province	Government threatens Tamil party's civic members to cross over	http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37524
18.	21 st November	Colombo District	Election violence against opposition political parties	http://www.colombomirror.com/?p=1202

A. Killing, Abduction and Intimidation of those seen as Against the Government

1. Athuraliye Rathana Thero's temple surrounded



On the 20th of November Police security was tightened around the temple led by Jathika Hela Urumaya Chairman Athuraliye Rathana Thero in Rajagiriya (Colombo district) after the premises were surrounded by an angry mob who alleged he was illegally occupying Government land. This was only days after the party announced it was quitting ministerial positions in the ruling UPFA coalition. Election monitors have referred to the incident as the first attempt at

intimidation ahead of the proclamation of snap elections by the President.

(Above: Athuraliye Rathana Thero Image - colombogazette)

<http://www.ft.lk/2014/11/21/athuraliye-rathana-theros-temple-surrounded/> Last Accessed 29/12/14

2. Abduction of a Wife campaigning on her disappeared husband

Ms. Mauri Inoka Jayasinghe, a mother who has been fighting for accountability and justice for her abducted and disappeared husband, Madushka Haris de Silva, was herself abducted on 1st of November in Anuradhapuru town. After receiving death threats for continuing to campaign on behalf of her husband Madushka, her abductors dropped her in Nochchiyagama (Anuradhapura district) some 30 KM away. Inoka is a mother of twin sons aged one year. The abductors threatened Mauri reportedly saying:

"You talk too much. It is up to you to decide whether you want to live or die. Although you are climbing on to stages we will not allow you to go far away. Stop looking for your husband." Mauri stated that she was very afraid of what would happen to her twin sons if she was killed. She also stated that those who abducted her looked like they were from security forces.



to her twin sons if she was killed. She also stated that those who abducted her looked like they were from security forces.

Ten minutes after she was dropped by her abductors, Nochchiyagama police arrived at the scene and took her to the Police station. Mauri told BBC Sinhala service that the police treated her like she was as a sex worker and shouted at her using filthy language.

(Above right; Mauri Inoka Jayasinghe; Image – SriLanka Brief)

<http://srilankabrief.org/2014/11/mother-twins-wife-disappeared-abducted-threatened-abused-fighting-justice/#more-20985> Last Accessed 29/12/14

3. Gunmen Assassinate Tamil Activist in Mannar



An unidentified gunmen shot dead a former member of the LTTE Police Department in Vellankulam in Mannar district on the night of the 12th of November. The victim, 34 year old Naguleshwaran Krishnasuwamy, was allegedly engaged in encouraging Tamils to submit evidence to the UN inquiry into mass atrocities committed against the Tamil people. Military intelligence officers had recently demanded that Naguleshwaran provide information about non-rehabilitated LTTE cadres or supporters in the region, however, he refused, a local source added.

(Left: Krishnasamy Nakuleswaran; Image – Tamil Net)

<http://www.tamilguardian.com/article.asp?articleid=12834> Last Accessed 29/12/14

B. Violations of Freedom of Expression

4. “Satana” political program on Sirasa blocked

Sri Lanka's private television service providers blocked the common opposition candidate's first TV interview on the 22nd of November. Peo TV cable television network and Dialog TV satellite television network have reportedly blocked the Sirasa TV from broadcasting the "Satana" program which interviewed the common opposition candidate and several other members of opposition. The program was streamed live on the internet. The Peo TV cable television network and Dialog TV satellite television network have blocked Sirasa, Shakthi and MTV Sports channels of the MTV/MBC media network. Common opposition candidate Maithripala Sirisena, former Minister Dr. Rajitha Senaratne, JHU MP Ven. Athuraliye Rathana Thero and JVP leader Anura Kumara Dissanayaka were participating in the programme.

http://www.colombopage.com/archive_14B/Nov22_1416678446CH.php Last Accessed 29/12/14

5. Another media workshop cancelled in the North

TNA parliamentarian Suresh Premachandran stated that the Army continues to threaten journalists in the Northern Province. According to him, a number of journalists have been threatened in the past few days, while one of the journalists and his family members living in Jaffna have been questioned

by the army. He said that due to this issue, the training workshop for journalists that was scheduled to be held in Kankasanthurai (Jaffna district) was cancelled.

http://www.lankaviews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12024:military-shows-its-force-in-the-north-journalists-threatened&catid=150:lead-news&Itemid=113 Last Accessed 29/12/14

6. Intelligence personnel threaten Jaffa Press Club

According to a tweet sent by the Jaffna Press Club, military intelligence personnel tried to threaten them not to provide space for the political party Jaanatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP).



[Jaffna Press Club @JaffnaPressClub · Nov 18](#) Last Accessed 29/12/14

#GOSL trying to stop us from traveling to North. Used intelligence personnel to threaten @JaffnapressClub not to host our Press Conf.#JVP

7. Communist party censors its own news paper



The 'Aththa' newspaper, a publication of the Communist Party of Sri Lanka was withdrawn from circulation and its newspaper office sealed on the 7th of November by the Party high command. The newspaper was edited by Dr. Michael Fernando, former Head of the Peradeniya University's Department of Fine Arts. Dr. Fernando stated on Facebook that authorities have even removed the online edition. Quoting an 'Aththa' journalist, the 'Ada Derana' website reports that the newspaper was withdrawn from circulation after an article was written confirming rumored disputes within the party.

<http://archive.srilankamirror.com/news/17774-aththa-withdrawn-from-circulation-office-sealed> Last Accessed 29/12/14

C. Obstacles and Threats to Tamil remembrance in North

8. Devotees chased away from religious event

On the 25th of November, Sri Lankan military intelligence chased away devotees who had gathered for a pooja at the Pi'llaiyaar temple (Hindu) at Munnam-poadi-veddai in Moothoor West in Trincomalee district. The Sinhala military personnel alleged that the Tamil devotees had gathered to pay tribute to Tamil (LTTE) Heroes. The soldiers are reported to have smashed the pot in which the Saiva devotees were preparing ritual milk rice (Pongkal).

<http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37521> Last Accessed 29/12/14

9. SL intelligence launches investigation into Uthayan Newspaper



Sri Lankan intelligence officers launched an investigation into the Uthayan, leading Tamil newspaper in the Northern Province, alleging that the newspaper had celebrated LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran’s birthday, reported BBC Sinhala service. The investigation was launched after the Jaffna based Daily published an article which included a photograph of a billboard in India, which featured Prabhakaran’s image and the words: “60th birthday of the leader of the Tamils. The auspicious day the god of our nation was incarnated.”

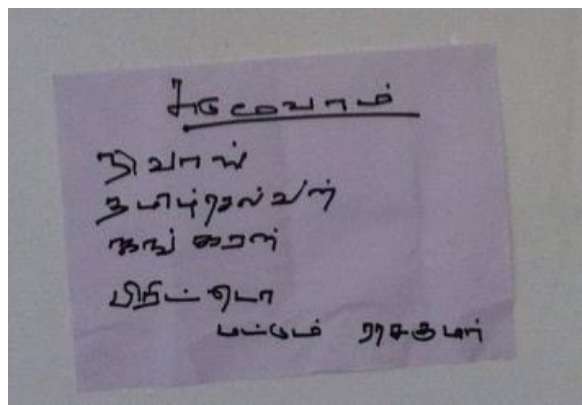
(Above: The Uthayan Front page; image form Tamil Guardian) <http://www.tamilguardian.com/article.asp?articleid=12949> Last Accessed 29/12/14

10. Arrest of Tamil youth for possession of Heroes Day poster

‘Terrorist’ Investigation Division (TID) of the Police interrogated a young Tamil activist, S. Sulaxan, from Meesaalai in Thenmaraadchi for alleged possession of Tamil Eelam Heroes Day posters, according to Police in Thenmaraadchi. He was arrested by soldiers on the night of the 25th of November while he was riding on a motorbike.

<http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37508> Last Accessed 29/12/14

11. University of Jaffna teachers named in threatening posters



On the 3rd of November, hand-written posters carrying death threats against the Jaffna University Teachers’ Association (JUTA) president Rajakumar and four students named Nivas, Thamilselvan, Ainkaran and Britto were found pasted in the vicinity of the university. One poster in Tamil slang said “Will kill Nivas, Thamilselvan, Ainkaran, Britto and Rajakumar” while the other read “These people are reviving the LTTE. We will

kill them. We will not allow Heroes’ Week commemorations”.

The LTTE Heroes’ week is annually commemorated on the 27th of November. In the past, The Sri Lankan Security Forces have attacked and arrested several student activists for commemorating LTTE’s Heroes’ Day.

(Above: one of the posters phased; “They are creating tigers, we will shoot them,” Image- Tamil Guardian)

<http://www.colombomirror.com/?p=1256> Last Accessed 29/12/14

12. Military gets names of students who lit “flame of sacrifice” in Jaffna

The Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) was reported to have ordered the security guards of Jaffna University to submit records of the lecturers and students, who were present inside the campus premises on Heroes Day on the 27th of November. The University administration was also instructed to comply with the TID to identify the students behind the move. The Military was deployed in front of the destroyed Heroes memorial statue inside the University on that day. They also occupied storied houses and buildings in the neighborhood of the Jaffna University to keep an eye on the campus. But, some students had lit the common flame of sacrifice. The SL military has registered the numbers of the vehicles that were spotted in the vicinity of the Jaffna University on Heroes Day. The security guards have been instructed to identify the owners of the vehicles, an informed source at the university administration told TamilNet.

<http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37529> Last Accessed 29/12/14

13. Military Surveillance stepped up in Jaffna

Tamilnet reported that the Sri Lankan military was engaged in creating fear psychosis among the Tamil youth, ex-LTTE members and the civil society in North before Tamil Heroes Day. Two ‘surveillance centers’ were created near the University of Jaffna at Naachchimaar koayil and at Kaladdi Junction, obtaining civilian houses within 500 meters and one km from the university premises. The primary task given to the intelligence operatives was reportedly to block activists and students from marking Tamil Heroes Day on 27th of November.

<http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37507> Last Accessed 29/12/14



Military deployments increased in Jaffna; Image – Tamil Net

14. University of Jaffna closed fearing remembrance activities

The University of Jaffna was officially closed from 26th of November to 1st of December after the Sri Lankan Army stepped up its presence and pressure on the university community, aiming to prevent any effort to mark LTTE Heroes' Day commemoration on the 27th.

The media reported that several hundreds of heavily armed military personnel took full control of both the entrance of the university and ordered the entire students to vacate, even from their hostels in Jaffna. The military also increased their foot patrol and random road checks in the area.

<http://www.colombomirror.com/?p=1256> Last Accessed 29/12/14

15. Tamil political party office surrounded by Sri Lankan military personnel

The Tamil National People's Front's (TNPF) office was surrounded by Sri Lankan military personnel on the afternoon of the 26th of November at 4pm local time, the party said. The military surveillance came on the day before the birthday of the LTTE leader, V. Prabhakaran. Intelligence officers were stationed at the office door, as a result local residents were afraid to leave their houses due to the overwhelming military presence, the party said.

<http://www.tamilguardian.com/article.asp?articleid=12950> Last Accessed 29/12/14

D. Repression of Student Activists

16. University students signature campaign attacked

The group 'Blue Brigade', a youth political movement headed by president's son MP Namal Rajapaksa reportedly attacked students of Inter University Students Federation who were getting signatures to a petition against privatization of education. Media reported that there had been huge mass support for the campaign. Despite obstacles in several towns, the campaign was carried out in many towns on the island.

http://www.lankatruth.com/home/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7851:banner-for-education-causes-namals-thugs-to-stampede-&catid=42:smartphones&Itemid=74 Last Accessed 29/12/14

E. Repression of Opposition Political Parties

17. Government threatens Tamil party's civic members to cross over

According to a news report in Tamilnet, "intelligence and political operatives" operating under the direct command of President's brothers, Secretary to the Ministry of Defence, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, the Minister of Economic Development, Basil Rajapaksa, have been trying to woo grassroots Tamil members of the civic bodies in the North and East to the side of the ruling UPFA. TNA urban Council chairpersons and deputy chairpersons in North to the side of the UPFA through Colombo-based Tamil operatives, informed sources in Jaffna said. One such Civic member in North, was given the option of crossing over to UPFA if he wanted his son, an ex-LTTE member in Sri Lankan military custody to be released.

<http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37524> Last Accessed 29/12/14

18. Election violence against opposition political parties



Chamila Ranasinghe was in a critical condition'; Image – SriLanka Brief

A local council member of Sri Lanka's main Opposition United National Party (UNP) was shot in the head during an attack on a vehicle convoy, hours after a top minister of President Mahinda Rajapaksa's ruling coalition quit his government and was named as the common opposition candidate at the upcoming snap presidential poll, scheduled to be held on the 8th of January. According to reports, an unknown group of men arriving in a car shot Chamila Ranasinghe, former opposition leader of the Beruwala Pradeshiya Sabha in the head while a group of UNP supporters were celebrating the crossover of government ministers to the opposition at Maggona in Payagala Friday evening.

<http://www.colombomirror.com/?p=1202> Last Accessed 29/12/14