

May



Retaliatory Attacks

May 9
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Right to Life Human Rights Center

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Forward

Since the beginning of 2022, Sri Lanka is facing an unprecedented economic crisis. That crisis has created a massive political crisis as well in the country. The Executive President and the Prime Minister, who came to power with a mandate of over 6.9 million votes, had to resign.

In the protest movement which started under the theme #GotaGoHome, there was a voice that the country needs a system change and youth must be given opportunity to lead it. This peaceful public uprising that took place across the country was different from the public uprisings in the past. This struggle, in which every section of Sri Lankan population, irrespective of class, caste or creed, participated, was called the Rainbow Struggle of the urbanites.

However, with the brutal mob attack on this peaceful protest on May 9, 2022, the situation was completely turned upside down and loss of life and a large amount of property damage was reported from different parts of the country. There are many distinctive features of the popular uprising and they should be recognized. The truth should be documented objectively.

The Right to Life Human Rights Center is conducting this series of studies intending to study, record and identify the issues related to human rights violations, violence and democracy in the popular uprising in Sri Lanka in 2022 and making recommendations in this regard.

There, we will focus on three key case studies. They are the incidents related to the police firing in Rambukkana on April 19, 2022, the attack on the protest site near the Presidential Secretariat on May 9, 2022, and retaliatory violence that started on the same day.

Through this study, we try to focus our attention on the ways and means to ensure public participation in public policy decisions, reviewing such policy decisions constructively, advocacy for change, freedom to protest and freedom of expression, freedom of association, principles to be followed in peaceful protests, agitations and the law, use of police force etc.

Philip Dissanayake

Executive Director, Right to Life Human Rights Center

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Summary

An unprecedented economic and political crisis was building up in Sri Lanka, by the beginning of the year 2022. The reasons were the balance of payment crisis created by the collapse of Sri Lanka's import income and the increase in export expenses and the fiscal deficit which created a huge imbalance between the government's income and expenditure.

Farmers' struggles in Sri Lanka intensified due to the gazette notification issued by the government on April 27, 2021, banning the import of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The ban was lifted in November due to farmers' protests and public criticism, but it had a disastrous impact on agricultural production, including paddy harvest.

In mid-2021, there was an islandwide teachers' strike demanding a solution for the long-standing salary anomalies, and after an aggressive struggle, the government issued circulars addressing the teachers' salary anomaly in early 2022.

The series of explosions of domestic gas tanks was another serious problem that occurred in Sri Lanka in the last quarter of 2021. Seven deaths and serious accidents due to gas cylinder explosions were reported, but Litro Gas Company did not compensate the affected customers.

At the beginning of 2021, the opposition and the economists proposed that the government should consult the International Monetary Fund and restructure the debt. However, the decision was delayed because there were two opinions in the Ministry of Finance regarding consulting the International Monetary Fund.

Meanwhile, in the first week of April, the Cabinet including the Finance Minister and the Governor of the Central Bank resigned, and on April 12, Sri Lanka announced that it would temporarily suspend foreign loan services.

On March 31, 2022, a public demonstration was started in front of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's private residence in Mirihana, and due to the chaos, the security forces used tear gas and water cannons and arrested the people who participated in it. At the same time, the resistance against the government intensified. On the 9th of April, a group of protesters started a continuous protest near the Presidential Secretariat demanding President Gotabhaya Rajapaksa should resign. A permanent protest site called 'Gotagogama' was established near the Presidential Secretariat. Later, a similar protest site called 'Mynagogama' was established in front of the Prime Minister's official residence, Temple Trees.

On May 9, 2022, the protest sites 'Gotagogama' and 'Mynagogama' were brutally attacked by people associated with the then-ruling party Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna.

Suspensions have been raised by various sections because police did not act properly to prevent these attacks. The actions of the relevant authorities, including DIG Deshbandu Tennakoon, the Inspector General of Police in charge of the Colombo Division as well as the role of the Defense Secretary Kamal Gunarathna are problematic.

The attack was immediately reported by the media as an unjustified, brutal attack on a peaceful protest. It can be observed that wide social sympathy was created against the attack. At the same time, a series of retaliatory attacks against the people involved in the attack was started from the Galle Face protest site itself. Investigations have not yet revealed whether there was any pre-planning or whether it was a spontaneous public uprising. However, it can be observed that the incident helped to burst a pressure that was bubbling up in society. A series of retaliatory attacks against the people's representatives and activists of the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna later escalated into overthrowing of the President.

Violent acts were reported in many districts in the southern parts of the island. People who participated in the meeting chaired by former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa or who were involved in the Gotagogama attack were assaulted and tortured, and one Member of Parliament and his security police officer were beaten to death. Another group of people were injured and taken to the national hospital and it was reported in the media that some of the injured were even attacked by people suspected to be hospital workers. People who were involved in the Gotagogama attack or who participated in the meeting at Temple Trees were attacked in various parts of the island and the vehicles they were travelling in including public transport buses were attacked and set on fire. Houses, offices, business premises and other properties belonging to the Members of Parliament and local government bodies, mainly related to the ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna, were vandalized and set on fire. The incidents occurred instantly, within a very short period and the attackers did not appear to have been hindered by the fuel shortage or transport difficulties of the time.

On May 9 and 10, when these acts of violence took place, the police did very little to prevent those acts. It seems that the necessary orders had not been given to the Army.

A large number of people were involved in these attacks in an unorganized manner. Some contributed by inciting acts of violence online through social media.

The police say that investigations are still being conducted in this regard. A large number of suspects have been produced before the courts.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study was synthesizing the information gathered through interviews with the parties involved in the incident, media reports, court reports, information obtained by submitting requests under the Right to Information Act and reports from the police and other departments and then analyzing them in a comprehensive report. As a part of the same project, a series of short videos covering 20 selected events were produced¹.

An analysis of the attack on the protest site near the presidential secretariat in Galle on the morning of May 9 was previously provided². This study is interlinked with it and we focus on the violence associated with the series of revenge attacks that followed in this study. The purpose of the study is to focus on the background of the incidents, the way the attacks took place, human rights violations and violence, the failure of the police and security forces to provide protection, the damage caused by the attacks, the implementation of the law, the rights of the victims and their families, reparation, etc.

The main problem we faced while conducting the study is that some parties with valuable information did not come forward to provide details because they were afraid of repression. There was hardly any offer to discuss on the part of the attackers. Instead, we had to rely on outside observations and court reports about the attack. Valuable evidence was destroyed because the contents live streamed on Facebook by journalists and activists were removed by the web platform stating that they would not comply with their community standards.

There was a noticeable gap between the official information obtained from the police through the Right to Information Act and the information obtained from the ground.

Court proceedings related to the attack have been delayed, as usual, so no case has been concluded at the time of writing this report.

Sinhala was used as the base language in this study. The preliminary report was compiled in Sinhala and later translated into English and Tamil languages.

1. Visit www.Aithiya.lk and <https://www.youtube.com/@aithiyamedia2463>

2. <https://www.right2lifelanka.org/publications/>

Setting the scene for May 9 attacks

Farmers' struggles in Sri Lanka intensified due to the gazette notification issued by the government on April 27, 2021, banning the import of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The ban was lifted in November due to farmers' protests and public criticism, but it had a huge impact on agricultural production, including paddy harvest. Food prices soared and shortages of foreign exchange for essential food imports began to affect people's lives. Meanwhile, the government was accused of fraud and corruption concerning the reduction of taxes on sugar, coconut oil, etc. Commodity prices continued to rise.

In mid-2021, while the schools remained closed due to the Covid pandemic, teachers' unions decided to boycott teaching online from 12 July. There was an island-wide teachers' protest demanding a solution for the long-standing salary anomalies. Even by the time government decided to reopen schools on October 21, 2021, the salary issue had not been fully resolved. At the beginning of 2022, the government issued circulars that provided solutions to the problem of the salary anomalies of the teachers and principals³.

Exploding domestic gas cylinders is another serious problem that occurred in Sri Lanka in the last quarter of 2022. Udeni Saman Kumara, a journalist for Mawbima newspaper, reported: "Seven deaths, 16 serious injuries and 18 property damages were caused due to gas cylinder accidents. Seventy-eight domestic gas accidents were reported in 2019, 31 in 2020 and 847 in 2021. If it is explained further, in 2021, 797 out of 2.8 million gas cylinders released to the market by Litro Gas Company were involved in accidents. Litro Gas Company did not compensate the affected customers⁴."

In 2020, Sri Lanka's GDP collapsed by 3.5% due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic but grew by 3.3% in 2021⁵. Sri Lanka lost access to international financial markets due to the downgrading of credit ratings and had to use official reserves to service its external debt and continued to pay for imports using loans from the banking sector. Official reserves declined from \$7.6 billion in 2019 to \$400 million in June 2022. From the second quarter of 2022, severe shortages of fuel, pharmaceuticals, LP gas and inputs required for economic activities were created due to foreign exchange liquidity constraints. Power cuts lasted for hours. In the first week of April, Central Bank Governor Ajith Nivard Cabral and Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa resigned from their posts. Ali Sabri was appointed as the new Finance Minister and Nandalal Weerasinghe as the Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

The new governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka announced the suspension of external debt service on 12 April 2022, and subsequently appointed legal and financial advisers

3. <https://www.themorning.lk/teachers-salary-circular-finally-issued/>

4. Mawbima newspaper, 18 June 2022

5. National Output, Expenditure and Income, 2022, Central Bank of Sri Lanka

to assist in debt restructuring. Negotiations were initiated to obtain assistance from the International Monetary Fund.

According to the National Consumer Price Index, inflation rose at the fastest pace since the start of 2022 and peaked at 64.1% in September⁶

A new president was appointed in July 2022. However, the economic crisis continues and political tensions remain high. The World Bank has predicted that Sri Lanka's GDP will decline by 9.2% by the end of 2022 and by another 4.2% in 2023⁷

An unprecedented people's uprising occurred due to the economic and political crisis in Sri Lanka in the second quarter of 2022. This popular uprising spread to other major cities of the island and many different public activities took place there.

The citizens were protesting in multiple places by March 31, 2022. They started a mass protest in front of the private residence of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in Mirihana on the outskirts of Colombo city. The security forces used tear gas and water cannons to suppress the protest due to chaos and arrested the people who participated in it. With that incident, the resistance against the government and the President intensified. As an extension of that, on April 9, a group of protesters started a continuous protest occupying the front gate of the Presidential Secretariat. They demanded President Gotabhaya Rajapaksa step down and change the existing political system. Protesters set up tents and huts on the protest ground and named the place Gotagogama. From that day, the Gotagogama protest site existed until August 10. Later, protesters set up similar protest sites in front of the Prime Minister's official residence and Kandy, Galle, Kurunegala, Anuradhapura, etc. The protest site that started in front of the Prime Minister's official residence was called 'Mainagogama'. The hashtag #GotaGoHome was promoted through social media in the early days of the struggle.

The peaceful protests that emerged especially from the middle class were mostly peaceful, though they later became somewhat aggressive. The protesters occupied public places and launched continuous protests. Protesters blocked the main entrance of the Presidential Secretariat in Galle Face and made it the main protest site.

During that period, thousands of people joined this struggle and many incidents including repressive actions, human rights violations, assaults and torture were reported.

6. <https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/en/measures-of-consumer-price-inflation>

7. Sri Lanka Development Update, October-2022, World Bank

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On April 19, one person was killed due to police firing during the chaos by the people who were protesting against the shortage of fuel in Rambukkana in the Kegalle district. Another 13 civilians and 20 police officers were injured, police said '

Among them, the events that took place on May 9 are extremely important politically. Those events can be classified into two parts. A report was previously compiled on the attack on the protest site called Gotagogama near the Presidential Secretariat on May 9 by parties related to the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna⁹. The purpose of this document is to study and report the problems related to human rights violations, violence and democracy after those events.

8. <https://www.bbc.com/sinhala/sri-lanka-61150034>

9. <https://www.right2lifelanka.org/publications/>

After May 9 Gotagogama attack

On May 9, a group of activists of the Sri Lanka Podujana Peamuna gathered at the Prime Minister's official residence, Temple Trees, and then launched a fierce attack on the two protest sites, 'Mainagogama', which was located near the Prime Minister's official residence, and 'Gotagogama', which was located near the Presidential Secretariat at Galle Face. As a result of those attacks, a significant number of people were injured and tents, propaganda equipment and personal belongings of the protestors were destroyed at the protest sites. These events were telecast live on television and social media. At the same time, the process called 'retaliatory violence started near the Galle Face, and then rapidly spread to many areas across the country. Several special features of the retaliatory attacks that took place on May 9, 10 and nearby days can be identified as follows.

- The mainstream media and social media reported the attack on Gotagogama in a sensational manner.
- Mainstream media and social media incite public hatred and disseminate information about attacks, targets and routes.
- Some people who participated in the meeting at the Prime Minister's official residence, and then joined the attack on the protest sites in front of the Prime Minister's official residence and in front of the President's Secretariat, were assaulted and harassed near those places.
- Other persons suspected to be involved in the attacks were also persecuted.
- Buses and other vehicles suspected of transporting people to the meeting held at Temple Trees were attacked, overturned, damaged and in some instances set on fire.
- MPs of the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna and members of the local governments who participated in the Temple Trees meeting as well as those who neither participated in the event nor the attacks faced vandalizing of their houses, offices, vehicles and other properties.
- People from other political parties such as United National Party and Samagi Jana Balavegaya were also attacked.
- The attacks took place very fast, within a short period and the lack of fuel and transportation problems that existed at that time did not hinder the attackers.
- Some alleged that organized personnel were behind the attacks and some accused political parties associated with the 'struggle'. However, those parties denied the allegations¹⁰.

10. Silumina newspaper, 9 July 2022

- Some persons who were involved in the attacks were accused of being under the influence of alcohol and drugs. They were accused of theft and other misdemeanours.
- The inaction of police and security forces regarding preventing murders, violence, destruction of property etc.
- The slowness of investigations, the ineffectiveness of law enforcement against the perpetrators and the non-disclosure of the truth.

Killings

	Name	Status	Crime scene	Cause for death
01	Amarakeerthi Athukorala (57)	Member of Parliament (Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna)	Nittambuwa town	Severe beating
02	Jayantha Gunawardhana (51)	Police officer - Personal Security Officer of MP Amarakeerthi Athukorala	Nittambuwa town	Severe beating and gunshot injuries
03	Harsha Nadeeshan Perera (27)	Small businessman, resident of Kaleliya, Meerigama	Nittambuwa town	Gunshot injuries
04	A.V. Sarath Kumara	Chairman of Imaduwa Pradeshiya Sabha	Imaduwa	Due to a heart attack that happened when his house was attacked by mobs
05	M.N. Mohammed Nasir (32)	Resident of Yakgasmulla, Weeraketiya	Weeraketiya	Due to a shoot-out near the house of the Chairman of Weeraketiya Pradeshiya Sabha
06	R.G. Sugath Janaka	Art teacher of a government school in Walasmulla	Weeraketiya	Due to a shoot-out near the house of the Chairman of Weeraketiya Pradeshiya Sabha
07	Priyantha Kumara (21)	A resident of Minuwangoda	Negambo	Due to a shoot-out near Avenra Garden Hotel in Negambo
08	Shehan Udayanga (19)	A resident of Negambo	Negambo	Due to a shoot-out near Avenra Garden Hotel in Negambo

The killing of Polonnaruwa District Member of Parliament Amarakeerthi Athukorala and his police security officer at Nittambuwa

On the 9th of May around 5.30 a.m., Polonnaruwa district Member of Parliament Amarakerthi Athukorala and seven other persons including his driver and personal security officer (Police) left for Colombo in his official jeep from Polonnaruwa to participate in the meeting held at Temple Trees.

This group participated in the meeting and came out of the Temple Trees around noon. After that, they had lunch at the house of Minister Siripala Gamlath in Colombo and

left for Polonnaruwa at around 2.30 pm. The car in which the group was travelling was ambushed by people who behaved violently that day in Nittambuwa town and the MP and the group said that they were returning after attending a wedding ceremony.

H.I.G. Saman Kumara has been working as the driver of Amarakeerthi Athukorala since 2012. He is a resident of Polonnaruwa New Town. On May 9, between 3.00-3.30 pm, the driver had to stop the vehicle in which Amarakeerthi Athukorala and others were travelling due to the obstruction of the protesters. While the vehicle was stopped, one of the protestors dragged Amarakeerthi Athukorala's personal security officer police sergeant Jayantha Gunawardena out of the vehicle and beat him with a stick. Another protester dragged Athukorala, who was in the front seat of the car, out of the vehicle. As the group was questioning the MP, a protester attacked him with a stick. By this time, the rest of the people who were in the car got out of it and dispersed.



According to Saman Kumara, as he heard three rounds of gunshots fired, the protestors seemed to disperse and at that moment, Amarakeerthi Athukorala and his guard. Gunawardena ran along the sidewalk and entered the Nihal Fashion textile store in Nittambuwa town. Saman fled towards a nearby road and while hiding, several protestors found him and attacked him again. One person who saw Saman Kumara

injured on his head due to those attacks took him away. He spent the night on May 9 at Nittambuwa Bus Depot. He was handed over to the Nittambuwa Police on the following day, i.e., May 10 by the aforementioned person who saved him from further assault. The protestors had stolen his wallet containing his National Identity Card, driving license and his wife's ATM card.

The situation escalated when the police officer fired his revolver and a man died. After that, mobs invaded the textile store.

In Nihal Fashion, MP Amarakeerthi Athukorala tried for about thirty minutes to seek police security, but the relevant departments did not respond responsibly. Ranindu Athukorala, the Minister's son, believes that the police neglect led to his father's murder.

Polonnaruwa District Member of Parliament Siripala Gamlath and the private secretary of MP Amarakeerthi Athukorala, Nishantha Vithanage, say that they contacted the relevant authorities over the telephone but they did not act.

During the debate held in Parliament on June 10, Polonnaruwa District Member of Parliament Siripala Gamlath said: “On the day of the murder, we informed the police that this MP was trapped and they should protect him. However, I must say that this murder took place because he did not receive any protection in any way.”

Mobs who invaded Nihal Fashion seized the revolver from the police officer and videos circulating on social media showed the violent mob assaulting them and dragging them down the stairs with their heads down.

The killing of Harsha Nadeeshan Jayaweera

Harsha Nadeeshan Jayaweera, a 27-year-old married man, and resident of Kaleliya, Meerigama lost his life in the gunfire that took place in Nittambuwa town on May 9. The mother of the deceased person said that he had not supported any protest and went to Nittambuwa town that day to buy some spare parts for his motorcycle. Harsha was engaged in the business of buying, repairing and selling motorcycles.



Nittambuwa Police Station Chief Inspector K. P. D. Abeyrathna started Investigations regarding the deaths and the facts were reported to the Attanagalla Magistrate's Court on the morning of the next day, May 10.

Atthanagalla No. 02 Magistrate visited the dead bodies of the MP and the police officer at the crime scene and made observations and went to Wathupitiwala Base Hospital to examine the body of the deceased youth of Meerigama and ordered to conduct of a post-mortem on all three dead bodies.

After the post-mortem examination conducted by Ramesh Alagiyawanna, Forensic Medical Consultant at Wathupitiwala Base Hospital, it was concluded that MP Amarakeerthi Athukorala died due to internal bleeding caused by severe beating. The report also mentioned that there were multiple injuries on the MP's body.

The post-mortem examination of the body of security officer Jayantha Gunawardhana, who died along with the MP, revealed that the sergeant was killed by a gunshot in the chest. The bullet passed through his lungs and exited the body. His skull had cracked due to the attack. The medical report also stated that the police sergeant too had multiple injuries on his body.

Police spokesman Senior Superintendent of Police Nihal Thalduwa said that further investigations would be carried out by the homicide and organized crime investigation division operating under the Criminal Investigation Department.

As of May 26, 14 suspects had been arrested in connection with this incident and two of them were drug addicts. Police Media Spokesman Senior Superintendent of Police Nihal Thalduwa stated that the two suspects had tied the driver of the deceased MP to a lamppost and assaulted him. Later, they used the stolen ATM card and bought items worth nearly Rs. 250,000. The Police Media Spokesperson added that some of the purchased goods were sold by the suspects to find money to buy drugs¹¹.

As of August 11, 37 suspects were in remand custody for the murder, including two suspects who were said to have taken away the gold jewellery the MP was wearing. CID found the revolver that was stolen from the personal security officer of the MP.

Members of Parliament also presented their opinions regarding the investigations and judicial processes related to these murders.

“There is some kind of doubt about the way this case is handled in the Attanagalla court. We hope to make a request to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in this regard, “Premnath C. Dolawatta, MP (Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna) said.

Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna Member of Parliament Madhura Withanage said: “As an MP and a professional lawyer, I saw an unfortunate situation when I went to the Attanagalla Magistrate's Court on May 22. It is essential that a learned Magistrate assists police investigations into homicides. Atthanagalla Magistrate behaved in a way that the investigating police officers were embarrassed in the open court.”

In addition to the killings in Nittambuwa, deaths occurred in Weerakatiya, Negombo and Imaduwa. The chairman of Imaduwa Pradeshiya Sabha, A.V. Sarath Kumara died while being taken to the hospital due to a heart attack he suffered when his house was attacked¹². Also, in a shooting that took place near the house of Piyasena Dissanayaka, the Chairman of the Weeraketiya Pradeshiya Sabha, 32-year-old M.N. Mohammad Nasir, a resident of Yakgasmulla, Weeraketiya, and R.G. Sugath Janaka, a resident of Hakuruwela, Weeraketiya, an art teacher at a government school in Walasmulla, were killed. Both were fathers of three children each¹³.

Two persons were killed near Avenra Gardens Hotel in Negombo. Accordingly, the total number of people killed due violence on May 9 was 07.

11. Derana News <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=32wGajky470>

12. <https://si.rata.lk/25851/>

13. Silumina newspaper

Torture

The attack on Samagi Jana Balawegaya (Opposition) Member of Parliament Kumara Welgama

Kalutara district Member of Parliament Kumara Welgama, who participated in a discussion held in Colombo on the morning of May 09, went to Kottawa, Makumbura highway entrance along with his driver and private security officer, to reach Matugama where his house is located. Around 8:00 p.m., when he arrived at Makumbura Junction, a motorcycle crossed and stopped the vehicle. Around 300-400 people had gathered there. After that, the driver was beaten and thrown out of the vehicle. The vehicle was hit with wooden sticks and the windows were smashed. At that time, Welgama was sitting in the left front seat and his bodyguard came and covered him to protect him from the blows. At the time the bodyguard was pulled out, the car door automatically locked. But the driver's side door was open and a stick was thrown from it and MP Welgama was severely beaten. He was badly injured and bleeding inside the vehicle.

Someone told Welgama that the vehicle had caught fire and the MP asked him for help to get out of the vehicle. One young man broke the door of the vehicle with an iron rod and took MP Welgama out to the pavement.

According to Welgama, by that time, the car was on fire and all the clothes he was wearing had been torn and only his underwear remained. The young man who saved him was also attacked by the people there and then the young man dragged Welgama along the pavement and put him in a three-wheeler to take him to Homagama hospital¹⁴.

Mahinda Kahandagamage, a former Colombo municipal councillor and peddlers union leader was accused of attacking Gotagogama, and his house was also attacked. Mahinda Kahandagamage was caught, his clothes were torn and assaulted. His request to those around him to take him to the hospital became a popular joke on social media¹⁵.

Videos showed how Wasantha Handapangoda, a leader of a teacher's union associated with the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna, was tortured by a group of men and women. A video made fun of the harassment using the famous Sinhala song "Handapane, Handapane" were also circulated on social media¹⁶.

A group of people suspected of being involved in the Gotagogama attack were assaulted and thrown into the Beira lake with dirty water near the Galle Face and tortured. The video was also edited with a famous song "Basa Seethala Gangule Peena Peena Namuko Sudo" was also circulated on social media¹⁷.

14. <https://youtu.be/FskQPLde2Xc>

15. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KiVmaIVv2GU>

16. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5Twr82X0>

17. https://www.youtube.com/shorts/9B_8j-jnTug

When the people in the revenge attacks were taken to the National Hospital, people including even the suspected minor employees of the hospital attacked the patients on the trolleys¹⁸. Few doctors bravely fought to prevent violence against patients. Near the National Hospital, the police and the army were also seen being abused¹⁹.

Physical violence against the police was very rare. But throughout this entire process, verbal abuse against the police and the army was commonly used by the protestors.

18. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xr62VUrLf5w>

19. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ju973Q0fj2s>

Damage to property

Attacks on vehicles, destruction of property and arson started on the evening of May 9. The police curfew, which was initially imposed only in the Colombo metropolitan area, was extended into the entire country by that afternoon. However, since the police did not actively work to control the spread of violence, mobs engaged in destructive activities amidst the curfew. They vandalized the houses and offices of 58 MPs and 75 local government chairpersons and members. Further, the mobs set fire to vehicles and caused enormous destruction.

Attacks against the property of the people's representatives

MPs whose houses, offices, vehicles, businesses and other property were destroyed: Ministers Chamal Rajapaksa, Rohitha Abeygunawardena, Ramesh Pathirana, Johnston Fernando, Prasanna Ranatunga, Bandula Gunawardena, Keheliya Rambukwella, Gami, Lokage, Wimal Weerawansa, Basil Rajapaksa, Pavitra Vanniarachchi, Shehan Semasinghe, Kanchana Wijsekara, Nasir Ahmed, Dinesh Gunawardena, Vidura Wickramanayake, Nalaka Godaheva, Janaka Bandara Thennakone, Pramitha Bandara Thennakoon, SM. Chandrasena, Channa Jayasumana, Kanaka Herath, former Deputy Speaker Ranjith Siyambalapitiya, former State Ministers Arundika Fernando, Mohan Silva, Sashendra Rajapaksa, Sanath Nishantha, Shantha Bandara, Gunapala Ratnesekara, Siripala Gamlath, D.V. Herath, Nimal Lanza, Duminda Dissanayake, Geetha Kumarasinghe, Ashoka Priyantha, Rohana Dissanayake, Milan Jayathilaka, Kokila Harshani Gunawardena, Uddika Premaratne, Ali Sabri Rahim, Sampath Athukorala, Sanath Pradeep Witharana, W.D. Weerasinghe, Samanpriya Herath, Anupa Pascual, Rajitha Wickramasinghe, Jagath Kumara, Tissa Kuttiarachi, Chandima Weerakkodi, Jayantha Katagoda, Premanath Dolawatta, Nipuna Ranawaka, Sanjeeva Edirimanna and Lalith Warankumara.



The house of Kurunegala District Member of Parliament Johnston Fernando, who played a major role in the meeting held at the Temple Trees on the morning of May 9, was attacked, vandalized and set on fire, and the house of Kurunegala Mayor Thushara Sanjeeva, who is said to be a close ally of him, was also set on fire and damaged. A farm belonging to Johnston Fernando in Laggala was also destroyed after its animals were released into the forest. A house belonging to Johnston Fernando situated at Talangama Lake Road was also completely burnt down on the night of the 10th. Offices and business premises in Kurunegala belonging to Johnston Fernando, a bottle warehouse and a liquor factory were also set on fire.

The house of Puttalam District Member of Parliament Sanath Nishantha was burnt down. Sanath Nishantha was seen present in Galle Face during the attack against the protestors. His brother Jagath Samantha's house was severely damaged.

Former Minister Prasanna Ranatunga's house in Udugampola was also attacked and later burnt down. Around 25 motorbikes parked in front of the house were burnt and destroyed. The Ranatunga family's house on this land was set on fire in 1977 also due to political violence.

A house in Kurunegala belonging to former President Mahinda Rajapaksa was also set on fire and destroyed.

Member of Parliament Uddika Premaratne runs his office in a house belonging to the Anuradhapura Municipal Council quarters and it was also attacked with stones.

Ali Sabri Rahim, Member of Parliament for Puttalam District of the All Ceylon People's Congress led by Rishad Badiuddin, was attacked. Also, three houses belonging to his son and daughter were attacked.

The homes and offices of former United National Party MPs Lakshman Wijmanna and Wijepala Hettiarachi and Jaffna District Sri Lanka Freedom Party MP Angajan Ramanathan were also attacked.

The Medamulana house belonging to former provincial council member Kapila Dissanayake was also attacked and the Udahamulla house of former provincial council member Upali Kodikara was seriously damaged.

Moratuwa Mayor Saman Lal Fernando's house was also set on fire and severely damaged. Violent mobs also set fire to the Moratuwa Municipal Council, the Mayor's office and some of its vehicles and caused serious damage.

Dambulla Mayor Jaliya Opatha's house as well as his mother's and brother's houses were burnt and destroyed.

Other local government members whose property was damaged:

Galle Mayor Priyantha Sahabandu, Horana Mayor Vitaramage Sirisoma, Minuwangoda Municipal Council Chairman Neil Jayasekara, Minuwangoda Pradeshiya Sabha Chairman Kumara Arangalla, Walallavita Pradeshiya Sabha Chairman Udeni Athukorala, Bope Poddala Pradeshiya Sabha Chairman Dilruk Abeykoon, Anamaduwa Pradeshiya Sabha Chairman Priyantha, Elpitiya Pradeshiya Sabha Chairman Karunaasena Ponnampereuma, Karandeniya Pradeshiya Sabha Chairman Gamini Amarawansa, Ambalangoda Pradeshiya Sabha Chairman Pushpalal Kumarasinghe, Bandaragama Pradeshiya Sabha Chairman

Devendra Perera, Gampaha Mayor Eranga Senanayake, Pannala Pradeshiya Sabha Chairman Ranjith Langsakkara, Kesbewa Mayor Laxman Perera, Katana Pradeshiya Sabha Chairman Kumara Arangalla, Bingiriya Pradeshiya Sabha Chairman Dimuth Thushara Akanayake, Chairman of Balangoda Pradeshiya Sabha Sunil Premasiri, Former Chairman of Puttalam Pradeshiya Sabha Nimal Bamunuarachi, Anuradhapura Mayor H.P. Somadasa, Vice Chairman of Baddegama Urban Council Anura Narangoda, Chairman of Devinuwara Pradeshiya Sabha Sujeeva Vedage, Chairman of Negombo Pradeshiya Sabha Prasanna Rohana, Negombo Mayor Dayan Lanza, Vice Chairman of Byagama Pradeshiya Sabha Ajith Kumara, Vice Chairman of Gampaha Pradeshiya Sabha Ranjith Gunawardena and members of various local councils.

There was also an attack on the house of the president of Seethawaka Co-operative Society, who allegedly attacked a woman in the Galle Face struggle ground. Avissawella Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna organizer lawyer Ravindra Jayasinghe's house was also set on fire and damaged. The house in which former Chief Minister of North Central Province S.M. Ranjith maintained his office was also severely damaged by pelting stones.

Two people lost their lives in a shooting that occurred when some group came to attack the residence of Weerakatiya Pradeshiya Sabha Chairman Piyasena Dissanayake in Medamulana. The house of the chairman of the local council was also completely burnt down.

The chairman of Imadua local council A.V. Sarath Kumara's house was attacked with stones by some groups and he fell ill and died after being admitted to Galle Karapitiya Hospital.

The Bogambara house of a municipal councillor who allegedly attacked the protest centre in Kandy city centre was also damaged in an attack.

Several local government representatives who were stoned were hospitalized.

Two people were injured in the shooting that took place near the Medamulana home of Weerakatiya Pradeshiya Sabha chairman Piyasena Liyanarachchi when a mob tried to set the house on fire.

The house of the chairman of Rathgama Pradeshiya Sabha was also attacked and four people were injured in the shooting and taken to hospital.

Local residents were able to save the house of Kalutara District Member of Parliament of Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna Lalith Ellawala from the rioters. He is the Bandaragama organizer of that party.

Meanwhile, the house of United National Party member of Bope Pohoddala local council Premalal Abeysekera was also attacked on May 9th .

The house of chief organizer of the Akmeemana Constituency of Samagi Jana Balawega, B.H. Wijepala was attacked by a mob on May 09 around 9.15 p.m.

Sources

- <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/05/10/heres-a-list-of-slpp-politico-property-destroyed-so-far/>
- <http://www.themorning.lk/slpp-releases-list-of-mps-properties-destroyed-in-mondays-violence/>
- <https://youtu.be/XOchIm5osls>
- <https://youtu.be/iayCm86ISkg>
- https://youtu.be/JXzC_3lAS-E

Damage to the property of the Rajapaksa family



Properties of the Rajapaksa family in their home district Hambanthota and elsewhere sustained severe damage. Among them was the destruction of the D.A. Rajapaksa and Dandina Samarasinghe Dissanayake monuments established at Medamulana intersection, which caused great controversy in the country in the past. Inaugurated in 2014, the monument





was built at a cost of 81.3 million rupees. Former Member of Parliament, late DA Rajapaksa and his wife, the late Dandina Samarasinghe Dissanayake, are the mother and father of Presidents Mahinda Rajapaksa and Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, as well as the political siblings' Basil and Chamal Rajapaksa.

The statue of D.A. Rajapaksa installed in Tangalle town was also overturned and destroyed.

Stones were pelted at a house used by former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa in Weerakatiya Carlton estate and the people who came to the attack also set fire to a vehicle parked in the garden.

After that, an attack was made on the house of Southern Provincial Council member Kapila Dissanayake, who is a brother of Chamal Rajapaksa's wife, located at Medamulana junction. The three-storied house was destroyed by fire.

The protesters then pelted stones at the house used by former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa in Carlton Estate in Weerakatiya and set fire to a vehicle parked in the garden.

Many properties belonging to the former minister Chamal Rajapaksa were also damaged. The house and office of former Minister Chamal Rajapaksa located at Tissamaharama, Debarawewa, Senapura in Tissamaharama Police division and another house located at Magama, Kirinda in Kirinda Police division were damaged by fire. Paddy, fertilizer etc. from those houses were stolen.



The supporters of Rajapaksa family who worked closely with them as well as local leaders were attacked. A group of about 50 youths attacked and set fire to the Carlton House located on Beliatta Road in Tangalle police area around 7:00 PM on the 10th. On the morning of May 10, the unfinished three-storey hotel belonging to former minister Namal Rajapaksa, located at Medaketiya Road, Madilla of Tangalle police area, was also set on fire.



In addition, the hotel complex belonging to Yoshita Rajapaksa, which was built on a twenty-acre land at the foot of Gongala mountain, bordering the Sinharaja forest reserve in Ratnapura district, was set on fire and destroyed on May 10.

The protestors also attacked and set fire to the Malwane house, which is said to belong to former minister Basil Rajapaksa.

Sources

2022 May 14 Silumina newspaper

<https://youtu.be/FoADLOUhR6E>

<https://youtu.be/FomqQ13tIZM>

Damage to public transport

Gamunu Wiejrathna, President of the Ceylon Private Bus Owners' Association, pointed out that on May 9, around 50 buses were damaged and 38 of them were fully condemned due to the attacks on the buses that transported people to Temple Trees.



He said that all these buses are provided on a hire basis for any type of private travel and it is a part of their business. Pointing out that harming inanimate objects in this way is a useless act, he said that complaints have been sent to the European Union, the United Nations Human Rights Commission and the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka and copies of all those complaints have been given to the Inspector General of Police. Due to these attacks, the bus owners who suffered the destruction are in a desperate situation since the buses have been insured at the price of 3.8 to 4 million rupees which was the price at the time of buying the bus. He also pointed out that it is difficult for them to buy new buses even if they get insurance. He stated



that in those attacks, the bus drivers and assistants who were just employed in the buses were attacked and although there were no casualties some bus workers were severely tortured. He pointed out that in Eppawala area mobs attacked such a bus worker in such a way that his knee bones was crushed.

He also said that if the police can arrest the culprits through video evidence related to the attacks which are abundant, they will seek compensation through civil lawsuits against the culprits'

Sources

<https://youtu.be/cNzeJ35pcuA>

Damages to businesses

Destroying the Avenra Gardens Hotel in Negambo²¹

Avenra Hotel Group, located in the tourist town of Negombo, suffered the most from the arson and looting that took place across the island on and around May 09. A mob of nearly a thousand people stormed the hotel on May 9 and set fire to the entire hotel complex. The next day, another group entered the hotel complex and took away many valuables, gold, money in rupees and dollars etc. The looting was video recorded and telecast via electronic media as people took away bed sheets, chairs, tables and other valuables even in vehicles.



The mob did not stop at setting fire to the Avenra Hotel Complex in Negombo and they burnt down the Bayfront Tourist Hotel in Negombo, one of the biggest restaurants in the city, and a newly built house on Temple Road belonged to the same person.

The owner of the Avenra Hotel Group located in the Maha Hunupitiya, Negombo, Dhanesh De Silva, said, "I was at home with my children that day. After a mob attacked the mayor's house, someone called me and advised me to leave as soon as possible because they were moving to attack us. I called the Senior Superintendent of Police and he said that he would send police although they lacked personnel.

21. <https://youtu.be/SKpifS82X3Q>



“At the same time, I sent out the vehicles in the hotel as much as possible. All the others were sent out. After the Hummer and another vehicle took the children, there was a Lamborghini and a Hummer Jeep at the hotel. I parked them in the hotel car park. I didn't think it would be so much worse. When I was at home, the people who worked said, Sir, let's go, don't stay here.

“They destroyed the entire hotel without sparing anything. There were 12 vehicles. A Hummer that was taken out and several other vehicles were caught on the road and set on fire. After that, the mob looted the hotel and only the clothes we were wearing were spared.

“Four safes were broken. Three big safes about five feet tall were broken. While taking the manager's safe on a bicycle, the tire of the bicycle was blown and then it was loaded into a lorry and taken away. It had one day's income. The accountant's locker was broken and all the 1.8 million rupees of money in it was stolen. The manager's safe had more than 4 million rupees. I had nearly 35 million in my locker. There were more than 200,000 US dollars and more than 35,000 Euros. More than 200 pounds of gold were stolen. All the safes in the hotel were broken and money was taken. About 10 to 15 watches of my wife and children were stolen and later, three watches were found with the people who took them. One such watch is worth about 800,000 rupees.



“I started this business in 2008 on a land of five acres. There are 37 rooms and three banquet halls. There are conference rooms, a restaurant, plunge pools, a salon and a restaurant in front and all of them were set on fire. I made these with the money I earned myself. Nobody has invested a rupee here other than me. The capital is loans from banks. I have suffered a loss of more than two billion rupees due to this incident.

“I still have two hotels in Wennappuwa and Hikkaduwa. Nothing had been done to them. I can't imagine why this was done. I have no business enemies. This is an organized crime. People did it out of hatred. But I haven't done anything wrong.”

He further stated that he is sorry about the behaviour of the police not only in Negombo but in entire of Sri Lanka that day. He also stated that if the police had responded to these incidents in the right way, it would have been possible to reduce the losses and he has

doubts whether there was any influence on the police and the army to act in this way.

He said that he is not engaged in politics but has friendly relations with a few people who are involved in politics. There was a suspicion among the people that this hotel belonged to Negombo Mayor Dayan Lanza and was connected with the Rajapaksa family.

Senior Superintendent of Police Saman Sigera has appointed four police teams to act in this regard. Nearly 120 people were arrested based on intelligence reports within one and a half months. According to the information received, they were the people who looted the hotel complex. During the interrogation, a large amount of looted property was found and the officers were also able to find a large truck that was stolen from the hotel.

More than a hundred hotel workers have lost their jobs due to this vandalism.

Racism at Dheen Junction

Racist tendencies were the least visible in connection with the May 9 events. However, there was also a racist aspect in the mob violence in the Dheen Junction area of Negombo²²

According to Rajen Fernando, who eyewitnessed the incident, a large group of people came towards Dheen Junction with swords, knives and sticks, the Catholic priests intervened



to calm the situation but could not stop it. Violent mobs pelted Muslim areas with stones. This conflict has resulted in a huge damage to properties. The vehicles of the people who had gathered at Dheen junction at that time were also set on fire, assuming that they were the vehicles of Muslims.



The information obtained under the Right to Information Act is available on the Right to Life Human Rights Center website²³.

22. <https://youtu.be/sA6Ds3DWEIA>

23. www.right2life.lk

Violence, law and media

Commenting on the struggle and the violent situations that took place on May 9, the President of the Bar Association of Sri Lanka, President's Counsel. Saliya Peiris said that the Bar Association considers it a social responsibility to stand up for the basic rights of the citizens of the country and intervenes when those rights are violated. Also, the Bar Association emphasizes that they intervene only if the protests are conducted peacefully and legally according to the framework of the law.

The Bar Association specifically mentioned that if there is any form of violence, that would undermine the aims of dissent in the protests.

The homes of several members of the Bar Association who were engaged in political activities at the national level were also attacked amidst the violent incidents that occurred on May 9. Bar Association of Sri Lanka intervened through the Inspector General of Police to enforce the law on those who behaved violently.

Basil Fernando, a lawyer at the Asian Human Rights Center, says that since the police is an institution which requires public participation under a legal framework to prevent possible harm to people peacefully, it should be a sign of public relations. He alleges that the police have not performed their duty on May 9th and they have acted under the influence of some party, leaving aside the responsibilities assigned to them by law.

“The police could have easily controlled the crowd that came to Temple Trees on May 9th and if they did so, none of the incidents that happened after that would have happened. Therefore, Sri Lanka Police is ultimately responsible for all the violent acts that took place on and after May 9. What was controllable became uncontrollable because of the lack of responsible police intervention. Failure to do so where intervention is required is a criminal act.”

Tudor Weerasinghe, professor of mass media, points out that the phenomenon called struggle is a process that has been going on since the beginning of mankind, and that by the 21st century, new media or social media has entered the field of struggle as an important component. He said that digital technology has spread all over the world and set the scene to unite scattered peoples, and the struggle has come on the internet and social media infrastructure. He points out that this virtual space has become the most prominent place and a very decisive factor for organizing, conducting and discussing.

The struggle that started in the country indicated two aspects and the first is the political and economic crisis that resulted from the neo-liberal policies of forty years in the country and the problems caused by the inefficient control of the ruling elites, as well as the shortage of commodities. Due to the problems they faced, people mobilized through social media and started the struggle. He pointed out that when social transformation takes place, there must be leadership, ideology and purpose. However, these struggles neither have such a great idea nor did they have a common goal. He points out that there were day-to-day objectives to which people joined. In his opinion, the social media space was a very decisive factor in that mobilization, and it is the latest form of global struggles.

Reparation

Due to the wave of violence that spread across the country on May 9, the houses and other properties of some of the Members of Parliament were damaged and destroyed. As soon as the cabinet decided that the government should pay compensation for the damages, there was opposition from political parties and the media. They emphasized that the politicians who own the property should also be questioned about the way they acquired the property.

For example, the Hiru News website reports as follows²⁴. “Government valuation officers are also in a lot of trouble because some politicians are trying to get unlimited compensation by submitting excessive valuation reports for the destroyed properties. However, even the police teams conducting investigations say that many of the damage reports presented by various politicians are not acceptable.

“While these politicians have submitted very high compensation demands for their destroyed property, the government has not yet done any inquiry, audit or investigation on how they earned that property. They point out that all these assessment reports should be carefully audited through the Auditor General's Department of the Government and income tax should be imposed on those excessive earnings. They are also confident that if the government follows such a step, all the politicians who submit fake assessment reports will withdraw those assessment reports.”

However, this does not apply to all the politicians.

24. www.hirunews.lk

Recommendations of the study

1. A full investigation should be carried out regarding the events that took place across the country on or around May 9 and 10. A mechanism like a truth commission must be established to document the information and grievances revealed in all investigations and to take necessary actions in that regard.
2. Conduct a special investigation into find the reasons for the police and other security agencies failed to act to provide security to the public and prevent illegal activities on these days.
3. Conducting a special investigation into the responsibility or irresponsibility of the government and senior government officials led by the then President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in this whole process.
4. Bringing all those involved in the violence to justice
5. Identify the forces that have encouraged violence through mainstream media and social media, and if illegal acts have occurred, take legal action against them and hold those media and journalists accountable for ethical reporting.
6. Implement a program to identify minor contributors to violence and rehabilitate them under a conditional amnesty.
7. Accurately assess the damage caused by violence at the national level and disclose those statistics to the country
8. Initiate a reparation process to provide fair compensation to victims of violence
9. Study the political, social, cultural and psychological factors that lead to public hatred and educate policymakers and social leaders about it
10. Implementation of a post-conflict peace-building and reconciliation programme



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