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Government supporters attack protesters in-front of Temple Trees and and Galle Face.



Journalist Dharshana Handungoda summoned before the CID.



Weeraketiya Police arrest three monks who were active in the people's struggle.

This report includes the incidents of the month related to Media Freedom, developments of the past incidents and related observations. The report also considers incidents related to the right to freedom of speech and expression of journalists as well as the public, as well as national and international responses to new legislation, legal reforms and relevant proposals. In May 2022, there were 35 incidents related to the scope / components covered by the Free Media Movement, in monitoring media freedom. There were 12 incidents related to the safety and protection of journalists, 19 cases under the legal category, one case related to the independence of the media and 3 cases covered under the scope of structural conditions.

Monitored Incidents :

1. Police demolish tents occupied by the demonstrators in front of Temple Trees.
2. A youth arrested for 'participating in the Galle Face agitation and making a statement against the government'.
3. Order given by the court to remove the obstructions faced by pedestrians due to the protest in front of Temple Trees.
4. The Sri Lanka Broadcasters' Guild announced that they would refrain from calling politicians to participate in programs if they fail to reach a common consensus in the face of the crisis.
5. The Batticaloa Media Forum lodged a complaint regarding a defamatory social media campaign against journalists.
6. Thirteen (13) youths protesting near the Parliament arrested.
7. Ampara journalist Shahir Khan Farooq attacked while reporting.

8. UNICEF issued a statement condemning the abuse of children during protests against the government.
9. The President declares a state of emergency with effect from midnight on May 6, 2022.
10. Tear gas and water cannons fired at students of the Inter University Student Federation who were protesting near the entrance to Parliament.
11. State Ministry of Home Affairs commences to collect information about the public officers who participated in the Hartal.
12. The Fort Police reports to the court that the Galle Face protest site is causing a public nuisance.
13. Secretary to the President, the Secretary to the Ministry of Defense and the Inspector General of Police summoned to the Human Rights Commission to inquire into the state of emergency.
14. Government supporters attack protesters in front of Temple Trees and and Galle Face.
15. Pope Francis calls on the Government of Sri Lanka to protect human rights and civil freedoms.
16. Court ordered a travel ban on 17 people, including the former Prime Minister in connection with the attack on protesters in front of Temple Trees and Galle Face.
17. A lawyer files a complaint in the Fort Magistrate's Court seeking an arrest warrant on Seven (07) persons, including the former Prime Minister.
18. Two organizations handing over a letter to the IGP requesting justice regarding the attacks on the 'Gotagogama' protest site.
19. A Rupavahini TV announcer arrested for the comments posted on social media.
20. Revelation in Parliament regarding undue influence by the Secretary to the Ministry of Public Security on the independence of the judiciary.
21. A Lawsuit against the author and publisher of a book titled 'Budhunge Rasthiyaduwa'.
22. Two journalists who were reporting inside the Parliament premises assaulted and their phones taken by force.
23. People's Tribunal on the Murder of Journalists in the Hague commence hearing evidence in the assassination of journalist Lasantha Wickrematunge
24. Freelance journalist Pushpa Weerasekera and her husband summoned to the police on a false complaint lodged by a local politician.
25. A youth service officer in Hatton arrested for posting his comments on Facebook.
26. Journalist Mohamed Buhari assaulted while filming a fuel queue in Muthur.
27. Journalist Ashoka Chandrasekara assaulted while reporting near a petrol station in Wariyapola.
28. Journalist Dharshana Handungoda summoned before the CID.
29. The arrest of Social activist Indika Gamage.
30. Court issues restraining order preventing protesters from entering several roads in Colombo.
31. Attorney-at-Law Senaka Perera, Chairman of the Committee to Protect the Rights of Prisoners, summoned to the Human Rights Commission and questioned.
32. A social media influencer and activist, Rathindu Senaratne (Ratta), arrested.
33. Weeraketiya Police arrest three monks who were active in the people's struggle.
34. Commemoration of Aiyathurai Nadesan, a senior journalist who was assassinated 18 years ago.
35. A group of Ministers and Parliamentarians including former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa summoned to the Human Rights Commission.

Table 1: Total number of incidents reported - May 2022

Covered criteria	Number of incidents reported
Safety and protection	12
Legal conditions	19
Independence of media	01
Structural conditions	03
Total	26

Safety and protection

Journalists pursue their careers freely with physical and mental concentration

The existence of an environment for journalists to pursue their careers freely with embodied physical and mental cohesion is an essential factor in the freedom of the media. Similarly, in order to protect media freedom and freedom of expression, there must be an environment in which citizens can express themselves freely through the media or in other ways without the risk of undue consequences or repercussions. Freedom of expression includes peaceful assembly, expressing dissent, and taking part in protests.

In May, Twelve (12) serious violations of this fundamental right were monitored. Five incidents of assault on journalists were observed, including one in which two journalists were assaulted by MPs inside the Parliament premises.

Table 2: May 2022: Safety and protection of journalists: Incidents - 12

Index	Number of reported incidents
Assaults	07
Mental abuse	05
Total	12

1. Police demolish tents occupied by the demonstrators in front of Temple Trees.

Police on the early hours of 1st May, demolish and clear tents erected by protesters demanding the resignation of Prime Minister in the protest site named 'Mainagama' in front of Temple Trees. Two protesters were attacked by the police.

Source: 1. <https://www.youtube.com>

Source: 2. <https://www.gossiplankanews.com>

2. The Batticaloa Media Forum lodged a complaint regarding a defamatory social media campaign against journalists.

Two supporters of a pro-government party have posted social media articles against journalists Punyamoorthy Sasikaran and Selvakumar Nilanthan, accusing them of inciting the people to protest against MP Sivanesathurai Chandrakanthan. The Batticaloa Media Forum requests the Batticaloa SSP to conduct an investigation into the matter. In addition, the journalists have lodged a complaint with the IGP.

Source: <http://www.themorning.lk>

3. Ampara journalist Shahir Khan Farooq attacked while reporting.

On the night of May 5, he was assaulted by a group of people while reporting a clash between police and residents in the Palamune area in Akkaraipattu East town and was later admitted to the Akkaraipattu Base Hospital for treatment.

Source: <https://twitter.com>

4. Tear gas and water cannons fired at students of the Inter University Student Federation who were protesting near the entrance to Parliament.

The protest against the government commenced on May 5, and continued throughout the night until the next day evening. Police attacked the protest with water cannons and tear gas several times. People traveling on the road were also affected by the attacks. The IGP, on the instructions of the Secretary to the Ministry of Public Security, has launched an investigation against SSP Chandana Kodithuwakku, who ordered the attacks.

Source: 1. <https://www.youtube.com>

Source: 2. <https://sinhala.srilankamirror.com>

5. State Ministry of Home Affairs commences to collect information about the public officers who participated in the Hartal.

The Secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs has

sent a circular to all District Secretaries requesting them to report details regarding the officers who did not report for duty on May 6, when an island-wide hartal campaign was launched, demanding the President and the government to resign.

Source: <https://si.rata.lk>

6. Government supporters attack protesters in front of Temple Trees and Galle Face

After a meeting convened by the Prime Minister, a large crowd that came out of Temple Trees, first attacked the 'Minagagama' protesters in front of Temple Trees, set fire to the tents and then attacked the Galle Face protesters, and destroyed the tents on the Galle Face protest site. Around 30 protesters were injured and hospitalized. Minister Ramesh Pathirana revealed in Parliament on May 18 that the police did not prevent the attack on the instructions of the Secretary to the Ministry of Defense and the Inspector General of Police. The Fort Magistrate's Court on May 12 issued a travel ban on 17 people, including former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, Namal Rajapaksa and Senior DIG Deshabandu Tennakoon, in connection with the attack. Seven victims and witnesses of the attack were also banned from traveling abroad.

Source: 1. <https://www.youtube.com>

Source: 2. <https://girayanews.lk>

7. Two journalists who were reporting inside the Parliament premises assaulted and their phones taken by force.

On May 17, journalists Sirasa Kasun Samaraweera (Sirasa) and Prageeth Perera (Swarnavahini) who were engaged in reporting using mobile phones were attacked. Government MPs Indika Anurudha and D. Weerasinghe, had assaulted and taken the phones by force. The aggrieved journalists have lodged a complaint with the Speaker and the Welikada Police. The Free Media Movement issued a statement condemning the incident.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com>

8. Freelance journalist Pushpa Weerasekera and her husband summoned to police on a false complaint lodged by a local politician.

A journalist summoned by the Wariyapola police on 16 May based on a false complaint from a local politician, alleging that the journalist had mobilised people for an anti-government protest and attacked the politician's house.

Providing information in detail the journalist had stated that the complaint is totally fabricated.

Source: FMM Media Rights Monitoring Desk

9. Journalist Mohamed Buhari assaulted while filming a fuel queue in Muthur.

Muttur Sirasa and Shakthi TV Local journalist Mohamed Buhari was attacked on the night of 21 May and was later admitted to the Muttur Hospital. He was attacked by a group of people who were with cans. They have attacked him physically and with helmets. The incident has been reported to the Muttur police.

Source: <https://mawbima.lk>

10. Journalist Ashoka Chandrasekara assaulted while reporting near a petrol station in Wariyapola.

The attack has been carried out on 23 May at the Minuwangate Ceypetco filling station on Anuradhapura Road, Kurunegala, while Journalist Ashoka Chandrasekara was filming with his phone an incident of refueling large cans. The victim was rushed to the Nikaweratiya Hospital in an ambulance with severe injuries to his eye and spine. A complaint has been lodged with the Wariyapola Police.

Source: <https://si.rata.lk>

11. Journalist Dharshana Handungoda summoned before the CID.

Journalist Dharshana Handungoda was informed over the phone to appear before the CID on 25 May. Since there was no formal summons, his lawyers went to the CID that day and explained the details. He was summoned to appear before the CID Computer Crime Section on 31 May. The police have informed that the investigation is being carried out on a complaint received by the IGP against him for provoking and inciting people through social media.

Source: 1. <https://theleader.lk>

Source: 2. <https://www.youtube.com>

12. Attorney-at-Law Senaka Perera, Chairman of the Committee to Protect the Rights of Prisoners, summoned to the Human Rights Commission and questioned.

The interrogation was carried out in connection with a statement made causing suspicion that

prisoners had been used in the May 9 attack on 'Gota Gogama'. Attorney-at-Law Senaka Perera has written to the Commission's Chairperson requesting an explanation as to why a President's Counsel who is not a member of the Commission was also involved in the inquiry since this act exceeds the mandated powers of the Human Rights Commission.

Source: <https://sinhala.srilankabrief.org>

Legal conditions

During the month of May, 19 cases were observed that fall under the category of legal conditions related to media freedom. Many of these are related to protests that demanded the resignation of the president and government. It is clear from the monitoring activities that the police are trying to suppress the activists of the peaceful struggle by naming them as the defendants for the May 9 violence.

Table 3: May 2022: Legal Conditions - Incidents 19

Index	Number of reported incidents
Litigation	16
Impartiality of the Judiciary	01
Impunity for crimes against journalists	02
Total	19

1. A youth arrested for 'participating in the Galle Face agitation and making a statement against the government'.

A youth named Saman Kumara Ratnathilaka was arrested by the Yakkala Police on 1 May and assaulted while in custody. He was later produced before the Gampaha Magistrate's Court on a false charge of cultivating cannabis in the house and was released on bail.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com>

2. Order given by the court to remove the obstructions faced by pedestrians due to the protest in front of Temple Trees.

On 4 May, the Colombo Fort Magistrate questioned the Kollupitiya Police for not enforcing the order obtained from the Court on 2 May and ordered the OIC and the Attorney General Show cause on 9 May. The buses were subsequently removed by the police and the protesters removed the tents. The

order also states that there is no impediment to the protests without inconveniencing the pedestrians.

Source 1: <https://sinhala.asianmirror.lk>

Source 2: <https://www.newswire.lk>

3. Thirteen (13) youths protesting near the Parliament arrested.

Police arrested the group while they were protesting near the entrance to Parliament on May 4 after handing over a letter to the Speaker and they were produced before the Kaduwela Magistrate's Court and released on bail. A large number of lawyers appeared for them. The Bar association of Sri Lanka released a statement reiterating that the right of the public to protest peacefully must be respected and upheld.

Source 1: <https://www.bbc.com>

Source 2: <https://www.newswire.lk>

4. **Secretary to the President, the Secretary to the Ministry of Defense and the Inspector General of Police summoned to the Human Rights Commission to inquire into the state of emergency.**

Secretary to the President Gamini Senarath, Defense Secretary General Kamal Gunaratne and Inspector General of Police C. D. Wickramaratne were summoned to appear before the Human Rights Commission on May 9. The Commission emphasized that the freedom of assembly and expression of the people should not be hindered, even during the period of the state of emergency.

Source: <http://nethnews.lk>

5. **The President declares a state of emergency with effect from midnight on May 6, 2022.**

The government announced that it was taking steps in the interests of public security, the protection of public order and the maintenance of supplies and services essential to the life of the community as it is expedient, the gazette read. However, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, the Bar Association and a number of foreign diplomats, opposed the declaration of emergency. The Bar Association said in a statement that the state of emergency should not be used to suppress freedom of speech and expression and to make arbitrary arrests and detentions.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com>

6. **The Fort Police reports to the court that the Galle Face protest site is causing a public nuisance**

The Fort OIC filed a 15-page statement through the Attorney General's Department in the Hulftsdorp Chief Magistrate's Court on May 6 under Case No. 21990 stating that the Galle Face protest site was a public nuisance. The case was called on May 10 and 12, and scheduled to be called on June 13.

Source 1: <https://www.youtube.com>

Source-2: <https://www.a5news.lk>

7. **Court issues travel bans on 17 people, including the former Prime Minister in connection with the attack on protesters in front of Temple Trees and Galle Face.**

The order was issued by the Fort Magistrate on May

12 and the witnesses and seven injured protesters were also banned from traveling abroad.

Source: <https://www.newsfirst.lk>

8. **A lawyer files a complaint in the Fort Magistrate's Court seeking an arrest warrant on Seven (07) persons, including the former Prime Minister.**

Attorney-at-Law Senaka Perera filed a petition on May 13 with the Fort Magistrate's Court requesting an order to be issued to the CID to immediately arrest and produce seven persons, including former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, in connection with the alleged conspiracy and aiding and abetting of attack and threats to the peaceful protest march in front of the Galle Face and Temple Trees.

Source: <https://www.dailymirror.lk>

9. **A Rupavahini TV announcer arrested for comments posted on social media.**

Vasundara Gamage, the Rupavahini TV presenter, was arrested on May 18 under the Computer Crimes Act on charges of aiding and abetting violence and was released on bail after being produced in court.

Source: <https://www.lankadeepa.lk>

10. **Revelation in Parliament regarding undue influence by the Secretary to the Ministry of Public Security on the independence of the judiciary.**

Thalatha Athukorala revealed in Parliament on May 18 that the Secretary to the Ministry of Public Security had sent an explanation letter to the Chief Justice on May 12 stating that the reason for not being able to prevent the violence was that the court had rejected the requests of the police for restraining orders against the protesters. Many stakeholders criticized the above letter as a threat to the independence of the judiciary, and the Bar Association of Sri Lanka and the Administrative Services Association also issued statements in this regard.

Source: 1. <http://sinhala.adaderana.lk>

Source: 2. <https://lankaweb.lk>

11. **A Lawsuit against the author and publisher of a book titled 'Budhunge Rasthiyaduwa'.**

A case has been filed against the author K.K. Srinath Chathuranga and publisher Upul Shantha on the charge of insulting the Buddha and Buddhism in the book titled 'Budhunge Rasthiyaduwa'. The case was first heard in the Colombo Magistrate's Court number 1 on May 20. The suspects were released on personal sureties of Rs. 50,000 each. The case was adjourned to September 9.

Source: <https://theleader.lk>

12. People's Tribunal on the Murder of Journalists in Hague commence hearing evidence in the assassination of journalist Lasantha Wickrematunge

Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, Bhashana Abeywardena, Sandhya Ekmaligoda and Dilrukshi Handunnetti testified at the trial on May 12 and 13. The case is being heard against the Sri Lankan government for failing to ensure justice for Lasantha's murder.

Source: <https://ptmurderofjournalists.org>

13. A youth services officer in Hatton arrested for posting his comments on Facebook.

Arumugam Balasubramaniam, a youth services officer in Hatton, was arrested on May 16 for posting comments on Facebook against the unleashing of state-sponsored violence against youths protesting against the government in Colombo. He was produced before the Hatton Magistrate's Court and released on bail.

Source: FMM Media Rights Monitoring Desk

14. The arrest of Social activist Indika Gamage.

Indika Gamage, a social activist and President of the Sri Lanka Information Technology Professionals Association, was arrested by the Matale Police on May 27. After being produced before the Matale Magistrate's Court, he was ordered to be remanded at the Palkelele Dumbara Prison.

Source: <https://twitter.com>

15. Court issues restraining order preventing protesters from entering several roads in Colombo.

The Colombo Fort Magistrate's Court on May 27 issued an injunction order restraining protesters

from entering several roads in Colombo to mark the 50th anniversary of the 'Gotagogama' protest on 28 May.

Source: <https://www.lankadeepa.lk>

16. A social media influencer and activist, Rathindu Senaratne (Ratta), arrested

Rathindu Senaratne a leading activist in the Gotagogama struggle was arrested and was produced in court by the Slave Island police on May 30 on several charges, including obstruction of police duty and blocking the road during a protest near the court on May 25. His lawyers pointed out that the granting of police bail is possible for the charges levelled against and the court ordered that he be released after signing at the police.

Source: 1. <https://www.youtube.com>

Source: 2. <https://mawbima.lk>

17. Weeraketiya Police arrest three monks who were active in the people's struggle.

Monks Wekandawala Rahula, Dewalegama Pamarathana and Wakamulla Uditha were arrested by the Weeraketiya Police on May 9 on charges of involvement in the riots and unruly incidents in Weeraketiya and remanded till the 31st after being produced before the Walasmulla Magistrate's Court. They were released on bail on the 31st after a series of protests. The case is scheduled to be called on the 4th of October.

Source: 1. <https://www.youtube.com>

Source: 2. <https://www.aithiya.lk>

18. A group of Ministers and Parliamentarians including former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa summoned to the Human Rights Commission.

Ministers Mahinda Rajapaksa, Namal Rajapaksa, Rohitha Abeygunawardena, Johnston Fernando and Ramesh Pathirana were summoned to appear before the Human Rights Commission on June 01 to make statements regarding the investigation into the attack on protesters at Temple Trees and Galle Face.

Source: <https://island.lk>

19. Commemoration of Aiyathurai Nadesan, a senior journalist who was assassinated 18 years ago.

Three commemorations of senior journalist Aiyathurai Nadesan, who was shot dead on May 31, 2004 by members of the state-sponsored paramilitary forces, were held in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The commemorations were held on 31 May by the Eastern Province Tamil

Journalists Association and the Batticaloa District Tamil Association at the Gandhi Park in Batticaloa, the Mullaitivu Media Club held it in Mullaitivu and the Jaffna Media Club held the commemoration on May 29 in Jaffna.

Source: 1. <https://twitter.com>

Source: 2. <https://twitter.com>

Source: 3. <https://twitter.com>

Independence of the media

The component of media independence includes the influence of outside parties on the right of journalists to determine the contents of the media as a whole. This includes pressure exerted by media owners. The decision of the media owners not to allow politicians to 'participate in the programs' is clearly an invasion of the space for journalists by the owners. The above scenario will be considered under the 'Professionalism' component of 'Self Censorship' and 'Journalist's Understanding of Their Role' and 'All points of view and sources represented in the Media' component of the 'Diversity and Quality of Media Products' component.

Table 4: May 2022: Media Independence - Incidents 01

Index	Number of reported incidents
Independence of Journalists in a Media Institution	01
Total	01

1. The Sri Lanka Broadcasters' Guild announced that they would refrain from calling politicians to participate in programs if they fail to reach a common consensus in the face of the crisis.

The Sri Lanka Broadcasters' Guild made this statement at a press conference held at the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute on 4 May, while one of their members of the forum has already refrained from involving any politician in its channel's programs. Media researcher Vijayananda Jayaweera points

out that this situation of the Media owners making decisions about content and initiating censorship of the content of the programs is a violation of media freedom as well as the right of information of the public.

Source: 1. <https://www.youtube.com>

Source: 2. <https://www.facebook.com>

Structural conditions

'Structural conditions' are an important component of media freedom. This dimension includes six potential indicators that apply to the overall scope and structure of the media system as well as to the overall environment in which media freedom is activated. Among them were 'Active Support for Media Freedom by Monitoring Groups' and three incidents coming under this component were monitored in May.

Table 5: May 2022: Structural conditions – Incidents 03

Index	Number of reported incidents
Active support for media freedom by monitoring groups	03
Total	03

1. UNICEF issued a statement condemning the abuse of children during protests against the government.

The UNICEF statements emphasised that according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children and adolescents have the right to participate and express their opinions on issues that affect them. The State, local communities and families have a shared responsibility to protect children and safeguard their rights. UNICEF based on the recent protests in which even small children were subjected to tear gas attacks made the announcement on May 7.

Source: <https://www.unicef.org>

2. Pope Francis calls on the Government of Sri Lanka to protect human rights and civil freedoms.

The Pope made a special statement on May 11 regarding the current crisis in Sri Lanka saying “I appeal to all those with responsibilities to listen to the aspirations of the people and to ensure full respect for human rights and civil liberties.” The

statement called on all stakeholders to work for peace without resorting to violence. The Pope said he sends his greeting especially to the “young people who in recent times have made their cry heard in the face of the country's social and economic challenges and problems.”

Source: <https://www.vaticannews.va>

3. Two organizations handing over a letter to the IGP requesting justice regarding the attacks on the 'Gotagagama' protest site.

The Young Lawyers 'Association and the Young Journalists' Association handed over a letter to police headquarters on May 15, pointing out critical areas regarding the conduct of the investigation, which was not impartial and unreliable. It further states that DIG Deshabandu Tennakoon and the IGP should resign immediately since they are also accused of this crime.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com>

Table 6: Media Freedom: Incidents reported to the Free Media Movement from January to May 2022.

Covered criterion	January 2022 – April 2022		May 2022
	New Incidents	Developments of the previous incidents	
Security and safety	16	-	12
Legal conditions	11	07	19
Independence of media	03	-	01
Structural conditions	07	01	03
Professionalism	02	-	-
Total	39	-	35

[FMM Press Freedom Reports - from January 2022 from here](#)

Postscript: FMM recognizes press freedom as a human right based on national and international conventions and judgments. Freedoms of thought, conscience, religion and knowing others' opinions are human rights. On that basis, FMM identifies press freedom as a collection of the following ten components. 1) Freedom of thought 2) Freedom of having opinions 3) Freedom of expression 4) Freedom to meet peacefully 5) Freedom for information 6) Freedom of audiovisual recording and storing records 7) Freedom of publication 8) Press freedom 9) Freedom of the electronic media 10) Freedom of the internet. These freedoms are inter-connected, and blocking one freedom disturbs the enjoyment of all other freedoms. Therefore, FMM also emphasizes that misuse of these freedoms in an irresponsible and hateful manner is a wrongful practice.

These monthly reports are prepared by FMM based on the study and analysis of information available for the organization. For this analysis, FMM uses criteria selected through seven internationally recognized elements that cover the ten components mentioned above.

Media Freedom Rights Monitoring Desk Supported by Program on Independent Journalism



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