

Report on abductions, imprisonment and intimidation  
of activists involved in peaceful protests

Inter University Student Federation  
Srilanka

Report regarding the repression unleashed on the student and labour activists following the protest march organized by the Inter Universities Student Federation and the student and mass movement for free education on 03rd August 2021 against the "Kotelawala Parliamentary Bill".

### **Introduction**

Even since the White Paper on Education brought forward in 1981, there have been numerous attempts by the selected governments to privatize education in this country, e.g., North Colombo Private Medical College, Kingsley Silva, Tara Harald Reports, SAIMM Private Medical College. All such attempts have been defeated through fights of the students and masses ensuring continuity of the rights of everybody to enjoy the free education without discrimination. The latest act brought toward to privatize education through the "Sir John Kotelawala National Defence University Bill", which aims to open the way for privatization. This is a Parliamentary Bill drafted during the previous regime and gazette by the Minister of Defense on 11th April 2018 and tabled in parliament by the present government on 26th March 2021. While this Bill if enacted by parliament would replace the Kotalawala Defense University Act No. 68 of 1981, it would be effective not only in Kotalawala Defense University but also in all the Universities in Sri Lanka.

According to this Bill, the administration board of the said university will be empowered to establish other universities, campuses, colleges anywhere in the country under this name. It would also be entitled to be affiliated to other local as well as foreign universities, this would result in the private universities to established and functioning under companies Act as well as those functioning on an unofficial and irregular basis becoming affiliated to the Kotalawala Defense University thereby furthering the process of privatization of education, removing all hindrances which presently exist for the privatizing education.

In addition to removing all obstacles to the privatization of education, a plan for militarization of education also comes to the fore through this Bill. This would establish a military administration structure which is more powerful than the University Grants Commission which has been regulating the state universities under the universities Act of 1978. Universities established under the proposed Act would be under the Ministry of Defense.. The proposed military structure would function independently from the universities Act and the University Grants Commission. Accordingly, all academic and non - academic decisions and powers related to the network of universities affiliated to the Kotalawala Defense University would be taken by the proposed military structure which is specified in the Bill.

The Inter Universities Student Federation, the Students and Mass Movement for Free Education have been involved in opposition to the privatization and militarization of education through the Sir John Kotalawala Defense University Bill from the time that it was in the process of being drafted. The mass fight has intensified to new level at this time where the government is trying to

push the Bill through parliament. Protests have been taking place in national level as well as provincial levels from the time the Bill received cabinet approval.

On the 06th August 2021, the government had planned again to get the Bill passed by parliament, the Inter Universities Student Federation, Student and the Mass Movement for Free Education had organized a Protest March which started from the Rajagiriya Ayurveda Round the bound to the parliament entrance. About 500 individuals participated in the protest, exhibiting protest placards, banners and flags. A "coffin" made of regiform was also set on fire in the protest.

At that point in time, the police had blocked the entrance road to parliament by placing barriers were pushed out of the way by the student and mass activists. The protest was, peacefully dispersed after protesting for about 02 hours.

### **The Onset of Repression**

From the moment the protest ended, the police have been pursuing the student and mass leaders of the protest movement. The police have, forcibly entering the homes and offices of the activists and also waylaying some, been abductions, threatening etc., after the protest of 03rd August 2021.

#### **1. The arrest of Koshila Hansamali Perera**

Koshila Hansamali Perera who is an activist of the student and mass movement for Free Education was arrested at her home, 13/A, Udagama kanda, Bope, Padukka on 03rd August 2021 between 9.00 and 9.30 p.m. She had been taken into custody by a group of seven (7) persons of where five (5) persons had been dressed in girls. The arresting party included a Woman Police Constable (WPC) and a person identified as "Ajith" Officer In charge of Aduruppu Street Police Station." Subsequently, she had been produced before the Magistrate's Court of Kaduwela, which had remanded her up to the 11th August 2021.

(Audio tapes recordings are available)

#### **2. The arrest of Chameera Koswatte**

Chameera Koswaththa of the Workers' Struggle Center was arrested his home in the Weliveriya area.

A group of police personnel had gone to his home at around 6.00 pm on 03rd August 2021 and inquired about his whereabouts and gone away as he was not home. Again on the same day a

group comprised of uniformed police personnel and several others dressed in civilian clothes had come to his home around 10.00 pm and arrested him. Chameera Koswatte was produced before the magistrate's court of Kaduwela which had remanded him up to 11th August 2021.

### **3. The Abduction of Amila Sandeepa**

Amila Sandeepa, who is the president of the General Student Association of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura was abducted on 05th August 2021 near the University of Sri Jayewardenepura between 2.30 and 3.00 pm. Amila Sandeepa who was proceeding to join the protest against the Kotalawala Defence University Bill organized by the Federation of University Teachers Associations (FUTA) on 05th August 2021 was abducted in front of the university by a group of persons dressed in civil individuals who came in an unmarked van.

On the information received that he was being held at the Mirihan Police Station, a group of university teachers including Harini Amarasuriya, Member of Parliament, had gone to the Mirihana police station and inquired for him. However, they had been told that he wasn't there.

Later it was revealed that he had been held at the Thalangama Police Station and he was produced before the Magistrate's Court of Kaduwela on 06.08.2021 and remanded till 11th August 2021..

### **4. The Abduction of Wasantha Mudalige**

Wasantha Mudalige who is the convener of the Inter Universities Students Federation was abducted at a police barrier in the Borupana area of Rathmalana around 3.00 am on 06th August 2021 as he was returning after participating in a television program at Sirasa TV held in the night of 05th August 2021. He was travelling in a three wheeler when he was stopped at the police barrier and handcuffed by a person in civilian clothes. (Video clips are available.)





##### **5. Threatening of the inmates of the house of Udara Sandaruwan**

Udara Sandaruwan is a representative of the Inter Universities Students Federation. A group of about 20 police personnel had surrounded the house of Udara Sandaruwan at about 10.00 pm on 03rd August 2021 and searched for him threatening the inmates of the house. A group of police personnel had went back to his house at around 4.00 pm on 04th August 2021 and searched for him. , A person calling himself a police officer had telephoned Udara Sandaruwan's sister several times inquiring for him. Some police personnel from the Police Investigation unit of Peliyagoda had also went to the Rajanganaya area of Anuradhapura and asked for information regarding Udara Sandaruwan from the villagers.

The villagers of the area had inquired for Udara Sadaruwan from activists of the Students and Mass Movement For Free Education.

The police had also come to his home on the following dates and times:-

05.08. 2021 between 10.00 am and 10.30 am

06.08.2021 at around 10.00 am

08.08.2021 at around 12.30 pm

Udara Sandaruwan's father has been admitted to the Colombo Eye Hospital had undergone eye surgery and the police have visited the hospital ward and inquired from him. They have also asked the police to come to give a statement to the Open University student who was staying with Udara Sandaruwan's father.

## **6. Death Threats to Rev.Rathkawwe Jinarathana**

Rev. Rathkawwe Jinarathana is the former convener of the Inter Universities Students Federation. At the following dates and times, strangers called him and asked for information about him and other activities and threatened that they will kill him. :-

05.08.2021 around 8.00 pm

06.08.2021 around 7.00 am

06.08.2021 around 7.00 pm

The telephone number from which the calls received was 072 5167782

## **7. Threatening of the inmates of the house of Amila Sandaruwan**

Amila Sandaruwan is an activist member of the Join Teachers Service Union. The police had went to the house of Amila Sandaruwan situated at Sewanagala and threatened the inmates.

Firstly, a group of 8 police personnel had gone to his house No.982, Oneluma, Sewanagala at around 9.00 am on 05th August 2021.. Six (6) members of the said group had been from the Peliyagoda Crime Division while two (2) had been from the Sewanagala police station.

Thereafter 2 police personnel had gone to his house at each of the following dates and times:-

Around 7.30 pm on 05.08.2021

Around 8.00 am on 06.08.2021 and

Around 11.00 am on 06.08.2021

Six telephone calls had been received to his brother inquiring about Amila whereabouts. Information regarding him had been sought from the Principal, Deputy Principal and Activity Principal of Mahinda College Colombo where he works. Information regarding Amila Sandaruwan had also been sought from various relatives and friends living in different areas of the country.

## **8. Threatening of the inmates of the house of Indika Vidanapathirana**

Indika Vidanapathirana is the secretary of the Main Student Union of the University of Ruhuna. Originally, two police personnel had gone to his house situated at No.325/A, "Sriyani", Kodikaragoda, Morawaka on 04th August 2021 and inquired his whereabouts. Thereafter, on 05th August 2021 a group of 5 police personnel with uniforms and civilian clothes had surrounded the house and threatened the inmates.

### **9. The Attempted Abduction of Dr. Aminda Lakmal**

Dr. Aminda Lakmal of University of Sri Jayewardenepura is a member of the Federation of University Teachers Associations (FUTA). Dr. Aminda Lakmal was returning with other academics and students of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura in a bus on 05th August 2021 after participated in the protest against the Kotalawala Defense University Bill. The bus in which they were traveling was stopped at about 4.00 pm at the Delkada junction, Nugegoda by persons dressed in civilian clothes that said that they are police personnel and examined the identity cards of the persons traveling in the bus. And they said that there are persons wanted by them in the bus. Then they had attempted to abduct Aminda Lakmal. (Video clips available).



### **10. The arrest of Nimansa Prabuddha Chandratilake**

Nimansa Prabuddha Chandratilake is a second year student of the University of Kelaniya. He had been arrested on 05th August 2021, while he was on his way to participate in the Protest organized by FUTA. He had been held at the Kurunduwatta police station for about a day and released on bail after producing before the magistrate's court of Aluthkaday. The charge against him is participation in a Protest.

### **11. Threatening the inmates of the home of Dhammika Munasinghe.**

Dhammika Munasinghe is the Convenor of the Join Development Officers Union. A group of persons dressed in police uniforms and civilian clothes had surrounded his house situated at “Dilani”, Delgalla, Gandara, Matara around 1.00 am on 04th August 2021 and searched the house. They had also gone and searched the homes of his wife and other relatives.

### **12. The police Visiting the house and office of Chathura Samarasinghe**

Chathura Samarasinghe is the President of the Ceylon Estates Staffs’ Union.

On 4th August 2021, a group of persons dressed in police uniforms and civilian clothes had gone to the Ceylon Estates Staffs’ Union office in No. 6, Aloy Road, Colombo 03. Apart from that group of Police officers went to his house and his friend's house searching for Chathura on the same day. And also police officers went to his working office in Cloud estate in Matugama. In the same day at 8.00 PM civil dressed Police officers visited to his house in Kalawana and searched for him.

On 5th and 6th August 2021, people identified themselves as police officers who visited chathura's cousins' houses searching for him.

### **13. Prosecution of the rented vans Drivers**

The below named drivers who drove vans transporting persons to the Protest were arrested on the night of 05th August 2021 , later produced before the magistrate's court of kaduwela and bail.

1. Jayantha Upul Kumara (Medirigiriya )
2. Rajitha Amal (Tissamaharama)
3. 3.Neelaweera weerathunga (Gampola) .
4. 4.Prabath jayasingha (kandy) Had been arrested on 09th August 2021.

### **14. Threatening of the intimats of Raveendra Mudalige's house**

Raveendra Mudalige is an activist of the Worker's Struggles Center.

On 04th August 2021 a group of police personnel had gone to his house in Hambantota and obtained his telephone number and whereabouts, on the pretext that it was for purposes of the program to control COVID-19. Thereafter, on 05th August 2021 two persons had come to the office of the Frontline Socialist Part at Yakkala around 3.00pm in a red colour motor car bearing registration number KF 6818 and inquired for him pretending to be friends. On the same day, the



same persons had gone to his house at Nittambuwa and inquired for him. On the same day 05th August 2021 around 10.00 pm a group comprised of personnel dressed in police uniforms and civilian clothes had surrounded and searched the house while threatening the inmates.

(Video clips available).



#### **15. Prosecution of the rented Lorry Driver to transport loudspeakers and the placards**

The police had gone to the house of the lorry driver in which loudspeakers and the placards transported for the Protest held on and asked him to come to the Homagama police station to give a statement.

#### **16. Police going in pursuit of Sijith Kuruvita**

Two persons had come to Sujith Kuruvita's house situated at Kalapaluwawa on 03rd August 2021 around 7.00 p.m. They had said that they were from the Singer shop at Battaramulla and that they had come regarding the payment of arrears of installments for goods purchased 3 years before. They had asked for the new address and telephone number. However, Sujith's mother had not given the address and had given only the telephone number of Sujith's wife Inoka.

On the same day, a call was received from telephone number 0112864060 of the officer in charge of the Welikada Police station to Inoka's telephone, saying that two persons from the Singer shop had complained. The police had asked for information regarding Sujith. And he had asked for Sujith's contact number to send Singer transaction details via Whatsapp and the home address to discuss the matter inoka had refused to share the contact number and home address.

On 06th August 2021 two persons had again come to Kalapaluwawa house and said that they are from the police and asked for the phone number and address of Sujith from his sister's son and he had replied that he doesn't know. They had also asked for the phone numbers Sujith's mother, elder and younger sisters. The mother had given the phone number of Sujith's younger sister.

On the same day Sujith's younger sister received a call from phone number 0718594325 at around 7.00 p.m. The caller had pretended to be a friend of Sujith identifying himself as Ranjith. The sister had not revealed any information regarding Sujith. The caller had asked for the telephone number or at least contact number of one frontline socialist party friend. Sujith's sister had not given the requested details.,

On the same day Inoka had received a call from phone number 0718594325 pretending to be from Battaramulla a singer. Inoka had perceived that the call was being recorded and disconnected the call.

#### **17. Police harassment of the renter of loudspeakers for the Protest.**

On the morning of 04th August 2021 four (4) police personnel had gone to loudspeaker supplier's house at Walgama, Homagama and inquired regarding the renting loudspeakers. Four (4) police persons had again gone there on 06th August 2021 around 5.00 p.m. and police group including the OIC and HQI of Homagama police had again gone there on 07th August 2021 around 7.00 p.m. and told him to come to the police station to give a statement

#### **18. Attempts to arrest people involved in peaceful protests and commenters**

The police have issued lists of names on several occasions that the students and labor leaders who engaged in the protest on 03rd August 2021, will be arrested.

List of names issued by the Thalangama Police on 04th August 2021

- Amila Sandaruwan
- Udara Sandaruwan
- Chathura Samarasinghe
- Ravindra Mudalige
- Dhammika Munasinghe
- Indika Vidanapathirana
- Sujith Kuruwita

List of Names issued by the Thalangama Police on 06th August 2021

- Amila Sandaruwan
  - Udara Sandaruwan
  - Chathura Samarasinghe
  - Dhammika Munasinghe
  - Indika Vidanapathirana
  - Sujith Kuruwita
  - Wasantha Mudalige
  - Mahi mendis
  - Dhanushka
  - Galwawa Siridamma thero
  - Tampitiye Sugathananda thero
  - Thanne Gnanananda thero
  - Amila Sandeepa
- Among those to be arrested, Dr. Mahim Mendis of the Federation of University Teachers' Associations (FUTA) who was involved in commenting in the protest on the 3rd August 2021.
  - Chathura Samarasinghe of the Ceylon Estates Staffs' Union
  - Danushka of the Ceylon Bank Employees Union
  - Includes the names of the convener of the Inter-University Student Federation and its activists.

#### **19. Attempting to obtain information on 'Tharindu Prasad' by posing as Security Officials**

On or around 19.08.2021 several persons had arrived at the Higher Technical Institute situated at Waidya Road, Dehiwala and had sought information on the whereabouts and details of 'Tharindu Prasad' who is the Convener of the Student Movement to protect the Higher National Accounting Diploma Course. It is important to note that this sudden visit by persons claiming to be from the security services takes place in a backdrop where Tharindu Prasad had participated in a protest march against the Kothelawala Bill on August 03<sup>rd</sup> 2021.

#### **21. Arrest of Heshan Harshana**

A student activist of the Rajarata University-Heshan Harshana was arrested on 13.08.2021 in his house in Pahathgama, Hanwella. The police had also made a visit to his brother's place of employment and sought information on Heshan's whereabouts. Subsequent to the arrest Heshan was produced to the Talangama Police Station and thereafter upon being produced before the Magistrates' Court of Kaduwela, he is now being placed under Remand custody.

**22.Wasantha, Amila and Chameera have tested positive for Covid 19 whilst being in Remand Custody.**

The convener of the Inter University Students Federation-Wasantha Mudalige, President of the University of Jayawardhenapura Students Union- Amila Sandeepa and member of Workers Struggle Center- Chameera Koswatta have been tested positive for Covid 19 whilst being inside remand prison.

Accordingly Chameera was arrested on 3<sup>rd</sup> August, and Amila on 5<sup>th</sup> August whereas Wasantha was arrested on 6<sup>th</sup> August,2021. When all three of the above persons were initially subjected to PCR and Rapid Antigen Tests they were tested negative. However thereafter when a subsequent PCR tests were performed after around 20 days it was reported that all of the above persons have been tested positive for Covid 19. Therefore it becomes amply clear that all of the above persons have in fact been exposed to and tested positive for Covid 19 while being in detention in remand prison. These facts demonstrate a larger and much serious issue where it becomes apparent that the State machinery has intentionally exposed these members of alternate political views to health risks with a latent intent of frustrating their political activism.

**23.Refusing permission for those in Remand Custody to meet lawyers and refusing permission to provide essential medicine.**

Permission has been refused for the lawyers of Wasantha, Amila and Chameera to meet them at the Thaldena Quarantine Center, so in order to obtain their signatures and instructions to file bail applications in the High Court. These high handed attitudes of refusing the legal entitlements of these members raise serious concerns over rule of law and due process.

Furthermore Koshila Hansamali who is held in the female section of the Welikada prison is also denied of receiving her essential medicines for her Asthma condition. This demonstrates the lackluster attitude of authorities regarding urgent medical conditions of opposition political activist under detention.

We, the inter university students federation (IUSF) deeply call upon the international community to stand against the repressive and undemocratic acts conducted by the current government of Sri Lanka which violate the fundamental and human rights, especially the rights of freedom of expression, freedom from unlawful detention and to respect the rights Which are recognized universally as well as the constitution of Sri Lanka.

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