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# TAMIL MEMORIALIZATION UNDER THREAT

*People for Equality and Relief in Lanka*



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*Picture: Tamil Guardian*

Security forces have perpetrated several incidents of harassment, threats, and perhaps even physical violence in relation to Tamil memorialization efforts over the last few weeks, particularly in connection with Maaveerar Naal, the Tamil National Remembrance Day observed on November 27, in the North-East of Sri Lanka. As in recent years, Tamils from across the North-East organized memorial events at the sites of LTTE cemeteries destroyed by the government of Sri Lanka. However, the government said it did not grant permission for the events to take place.[1]

PEARL verified at least two cases filed by police in an attempt to ban events in their entirety. Notably, the courts declined to issue a blanket ban on commemorations.

**“Despite the increased ability to remember our dead in recent years, this Maaveerar Naal we were painfully reminded how much we remain at the mercy of the state and the whim of Sinhala politicians. This year were forced to dismantle gravestones – over ten years after military destroyed our cemeteries, they made us destroy them again. Who knows what we will have to go through next year.”**

**– Witness, Vaaharai Maaveerar Naal event, November 2018**

[1] <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/no-permission-maaveerar-naal-commemoration-says-sri-lankan-govt>

# Police Attempt to Ban Commemoration Events

**Koppay, Jaffna:** police applied for a ban ahead of the day under Penal Code §120 and PTA regulations.[1] Unknown persons circulated a fake notice that the court had banned commemorations to Tamil media.[2] On November 23, the Jaffna Magistrate Court banned "LTTE flags, symbols, and maps" from being used at the event planned outside an army camp in Koppay, which the military built on the site of a destroyed Tamil cemetery.

Except for the display of those items, Magistrate Sinnathurai Satheestharan said the event could go ahead.[3]

**Kayts, Jaffna:** police also requested a blanket ban on commemorations at the destroyed LTTE cemetery in Chatty. Similar to the Jaffna court ruling, the Kayts magistrate did not ban the events, but he prohibited the display of LTTE flags or images with LTTE uniform.[4]

## Police and Other Security Personnel Intimidate Event Organizers

**Point Pedro, Jaffna:** Police briefly detained an 18-year-old organizer of a commemorative event in Point Pedro on November 27, as police tore down decorations and threatened those who were there. That night, unknown persons attacked and vandalised his home. The police also handed out copies of a gazette notification issued during Mahinda's presidential reign, "Prevention of Terrorism (Proscription of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) Regulations No. 1 of 2011, No. 1721/2.[5]

**Kudaththanai, Jaffna:** In nearby Kudaththanai, suspected intelligence officers told residents that they were not allowed to attend remembrance events. Sinhala men handed out the same gazette notification there too.[6]

**Kokkadichcholai, Batticaloa:** Police intimidated residents in a village near Kokkadichcholai, Batticaloa during their

preparatory work at Maavadi Munmaricemetery and also told them that the Batticaloa magistrate judge had banned the display of LTTE flags. Police collected the details of all those involved in clearing work at the cemetery.[7]

**Vaaharai, Batticaloa:** In Kandalady, Vaaharai, suspected intelligence officials blocked Batticaloa residents from entering and preparing the cemeteries the day before their Maaveerar Naal event. They told the locals that the event was banned. The residents had already put up replica headstones in place of the ones destroyed by the military. On the remembrance day, police and other security personnel forced those who attempted to hold the event to remove the headstones one by one, threatening them with legal action. In total, 120 were removed. Neither decorations nor the song traditionally played at the event were allowed.[8],[9]

[1] Civil Society Activist, PEARL Interview, November 2018

[2] <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lanka-police-apply-maaveerar-naal-ban-koppay>

[3] <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/court-bans-use-ltte-symbols-koppay-maaveerar-naal-event>

[4] <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/kayts-court-allows-maaveerar-naal-event-chatty-ban-ltte-flags>

[5] <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/villagers-told-not-attend-maaveerar-naal-mahinda-has-returned>

[6] Civil Society Activist, PEARL Interview, November 2018

[7] <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamils-complete-final-preparations-maaveerar-naal-ltte-cemeteries>

[8] Civil Society Activist, PEARL Interview, November 2018

[9] <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/police-force-removal-memorial-headstones-vakarai-ltte-cemetery>

# Summary

In PEARL's 2016 report "**Erasing the Past - Repression of Memorialization in Sri Lanka**," we examined the Sri Lankan state's repression of memorialization activities and their destruction of memorials linked to the Tamil armed struggle.

Our field work confirmed that:

**"The constraints on memory are symptomatic of the absence of any true post-war settlement. Without a comprehensive political solution, many in the North-East will continue to view any improvements on the ground as temporary and reversible. The failure of successive Sri Lankan governments to meaningfully grapple with the political dynamics that led to war or the human rights violations that characterized the conflict is rooted in the widespread perception in the south that such a reckoning would constitute a threat to the Sinhala-Buddhist nature of the state. But political deference to this paranoia only feeds southern extremism, which in turn exacerbates Tamil grievances."**

As we noted in 2016, Sri Lanka's continuing failure to tackle the difficult questions around impunity and a sustainable political solution for the Tamil people, including by addressing the chauvinist nature of the Sinhala Buddhist state, will remain a stumbling block to a sustainable peace.



VAAHARAI, BATTICALOA  
BEFORE AND AFTER

*Picture: Tamil Guardian*

