



PEOPLE FOR  
EQUALITY AND  
RELIEF IN LANKA

STATE-SPONSORED SINHALIZATION OF THE NORTH-EAST:

# THE ANTI-DEVELOPMENT MACHINE

Examining Sri Lanka's State-Led Land Dispossession  
and Anti-Development Policies Targeting Eelam Tamils

**January 2026**





People for Equality and Relief in Lanka (PEARL) is a Tamil advocacy group, based in Washington D.C. and registered as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization in the United States. PEARL advocates for human rights, justice and self-determination for Tamils in the North-East of Sri Lanka.

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## List of Acronyms

*CID* – Criminal Investigation Department

*CSD* – Civil Security Department

*GoSL* – Government of Sri Lanka

*IPKF* – Indian Peace Keeping Force

*JVP* – Janatha Vimukthi Peramana

*LTTE* – Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

*MDIP* – Mahaweli Development and Irrigation Programme

*NPP* – National People's Power

## Glossary

*Eelam* – One of several Tamil names for the entire island, used commonly in Tamil, including in historic artifacts, in the names of several current Tamil political parties and in the Tamil version of Sri Lanka's national anthem. Tamil Eelam is the name for the North-East and what is traditionally referred to as the Tamil Homeland. Tamils from the North-East are often referred to as *Eelam Tamils*.

*High Security Zone (HSZ)* – Territory occupied by government forces used to set up military camps or bases for operations. The designation of High Security Zones often seized private land belonging to Tamils, leading to their displacement.

*Militarization* – Refers to the overwhelming and disproportionate presence of the Sri Lankan military in the North-East, which encroaches on all facets of civilian life (economic, political, and otherwise).

*Pogrom* – The state-organized killings and destruction of property of a targeted group.

*Sinhala-Buddhist Nationalism* – A Sri Lankan political ideology which combines a focus upon Sinhalese culture and ethnicity (nationalism) with an emphasis upon Theravada Buddhism. This is a state ideology which upholds the idea of a unitary 'Sri Lankan State' and upholds a Sinhala-Buddhist character to the entire island. This ideology justifies the subjugation of minorities and suggests that others only live on the island because the Sinhala Buddhists allow it.

*Sinhalization* – The use of state power to facilitate Sinhala-Buddhist control and domination of the North-East of Sri Lanka in order to erase the Tamil-speaking character of the North-East.

*Sri Lankan Military* – The Sri Lankan military is comprised of the 'tri-forces': the Sri Lanka Army, the Sri Lanka Navy, and the Sri Lanka Air Force. The Sri Lankan military is governed by the Ministry of Defense.

*Tamil Homeland* – The North-East of Sri Lanka, claimed by Eelam Tamils as the traditional territory of historical habitation.

*Vihara* – Buddhist temple

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## Executive Summary

This report is part of the Sinhalization series and builds on the themes of PEARL's 2022 report, *State-Sponsored Sinhalization in the North-East*.<sup>1</sup> Sinhalization is understood as the use of state power to facilitate Sinhala-Buddhist control and domination of the North-East of Sri Lanka in order to erase the Tamil-speaking character of the North-East. The processes of Sinhalization begin with asserting control over land but extend to coercive processes of economic and cultural usurpation. It involves dispossessing Tamil populations of their ownership and access to land, so that the land, its resources, and its potential economic value can be brought under Sinhala-Buddhist control. It also involves dispossessing Tamils of their cultural and religious sites, so that these sites can be re-inscribed as Sinhala-Buddhist cultural and historical property. Sinhalization is a form of ethno-national conquest that often involves ethnic cleansing and is perpetrated coercively with state power. Since the early 1980s, powerful state elites have also used Sinhalization as a means of obstructing Tamil demands for autonomy and self-rule. They have used state power to coercively establish the Sinhala-Buddhist character of the North-East and thereby effectively foreclose the possibility of Tamil self-rule.

**Section 1** sets out the long history of Sinhalization. It shows that since the 1930s, Sinhala-Buddhist state elites have used state resources and power to exert Sinhala-Buddhist control and dominance over the Tamil-speaking areas. From the 1980s onwards, the Buddhist clergy as well as private commercial interests have also worked alongside state agencies to dispossess Tamil peoples in the North-East of their lands, access to lands, and cultural and religious sites. These ongoing processes of resource and cultural dispossession, along with the associated acts of ethnic cleansing, have often been legitimized under the guise of development. However, the consequences of Sinhalization have been the opposite of development. It has produced dispossession, displacement, ethnic cleansing, impoverishment, and ethnic antagonism.

**Section 2** shows how Sinhalization works as the antithesis of development, or more bluntly, as an anti-development machine. The impact of Sinhalization on Tamil-speaking communities is clearly anti-developmental. Sinhalization processes seek the economic and cultural dispossession of the Tamil-speaking communities they target, actively degrading their prospects for economic security and prosperity. The economic dispossession works by appropriating or destroying existing economic resources and processes whilst prohibiting the emergence of new ones. The processes of Sinhalization have contributed to the relative impoverishment and poverty of the Tamil-speaking regions in the decades since independence.

Beyond these obvious effects, however, Sinhalization also drains state resources. There is clear evidence that the resources invested in the most capital-intensive form of Sinhalization, namely irrigation and settlement schemes, have failed to produce a return on investment and are effectively wasted. There is also an opportunity cost associated with Sinhalization. The

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<sup>1</sup> PEARL, *State-sponsored Sinhalization of the North-East* (Mar. 2022), <https://pearlaction.org/sinhalization-of-the-North-East/>. PEARL's 'Sinhalization of the North-East' series can also be found at this link.

opportunities and improved economic outcomes that may have come with alternative and wiser investment of the same resources have also been lost. Despite these considerable costs, Sinhalization has been a consistent and resilient state project since the 1930s and it continues into the present day. This leads to yet another intangible but significant cost. The centrality of Sinhalization to state policy and politics has effectively crowded out alternative, more productive ways of using resources and thinking about development. This has not only harmed Tamil people, but it has also harmed Sinhalese and Muslim people.

**Section 3** presents the implications and recommendations of the analysis provided in this report.

## Section 1: Sinhalization over the decades

### Sinhalization in the late colonial era

Sinhala nationalist state elites have a long-standing commitment to Sinhalization that can be traced back to the late colonial era. The growth of the plantation economy in the predominantly Sinhala areas created problems of landlessness, urban migration, and social unrest. This concerned colonial officials and Sinhala nationalist elites, many of whom were plantation owners themselves. They sought a solution to this problem in the establishment of Sinhala peasant settlements in the relatively unpopulated dry zones of the country, including the predominantly Tamil-speaking Northern and Eastern areas.<sup>2</sup>

For the Sinhala elites of the time, peasant colonization in the dry zones also came with an extra nationalist charge. In the early twentieth century, the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist movement was gathering momentum and building support. The nationalist histories that were associated with it characterized the island's past in mono-ethnic terms as a land bequeathed to the Sinhala people by the Buddha himself and one that once hosted a flourishing agricultural civilization that was repeatedly invaded and finally destroyed by the menacing Tamil presence from South India.<sup>3</sup> The actual history of the island is more complex and multi-layered.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the notion of the past that has become politically dominant in Sri Lanka, and one that continues to inform efforts to forcibly take land in the North-East, is the idea of 'reclaiming' a lost Sinhala civilization in the Tamil areas and defending it against the threat of future Tamil incursions.<sup>5</sup>

### The colonization of the Dry Zone

An important figure in the project is D. S. Senanayake, Sri Lanka's first post-independence Prime Minister and a key figure in the politics of the late colonial era. Senanayake's family wealth came from plantations, and they were also avid supporters and funders of the Sinhala-Buddhist revivalist movement.<sup>6</sup> In 1931, he became the Minister of Agriculture and Lands in the newly established State Council: the first legislative body to be directly elected through universal franchise.<sup>7</sup> Under his leadership, Sri Lanka initiated the policy of using public resources and state land for the ethnic resettlement of the Dry Zone. Senanayake

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the evolution of the policy of Dry Zone colonization in the colonial era, see B. H. Farmer, *Pioneer Peasant Colonization in Ceylon: A Study in Asian Agrarian Problems* (1957).

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the historiographical trends informing Sinhala Buddhism, see Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed: Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka* (1992).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Tambiah, *supra* note 3; Murugar Gunasingam, *Tamils in Sri Lanka: A Comprehensive History* (C. 300 B.C. – C. 2000 A.D.) (2014).

<sup>5</sup> See N. Serena Tennekoon, *Rituals of Development: The Accelerated Mahaweli Development Program of Sri Lanka*, 15 *American Ethnologist* 294, 296 (1988); Patrick Peebles, *Colonization and Ethnic Conflict in the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka*, 49 *The Journal of Asian Studies* 30, 30-35 (1990). For the post-war era, see Thiruni Kelegama & Benedikt Korf, *The lure of land: Peasant politics, frontier colonization and the cunning state in Sri Lanka*, 57 *Modern Asian Studies* 2002 (2023).

<sup>6</sup> See Kumari Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka* (2002).

<sup>7</sup> Farmer, *supra* note 2, at 144. Farmer notes that Senanayake immediately took several "measures of administrative reorganisation which became imperative as the scope of aid colonization broadened." *Id.*

exemplified the paternalistic approach of the Sinhala elites and sought to establish colonies of sturdy independent peasant proprietors by providing generous subsidies and inducements, but also by prohibiting customary forms of tenure characterized by co-operation and reciprocal obligations.<sup>8</sup> The colonization schemes also provided the Sinhala elite with a means of making common cause with the Sinhala peasantry and thereby occluding their own interests as large landowners with interests in the plantation sector.<sup>9</sup> Importantly, colonization of the Dry Zone became the prime consideration itself and was no longer secondary to the problems of landlessness or food shortages.<sup>10</sup>

The colonization of the Dry Zone had clearly nationalist inspiration. Senanayake made colonization a central component of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism; he infused “Sinhala nationalism with the vision that the colonization of the Dry Zone was a return to the heartland of the ancient irrigation civilization of the Sinhalese.”<sup>11</sup> Since Senanayake’s time, Sinhala state elites have promoted Sinhalization in historical and existential terms as an effort to hold back South Indian and specifically Tamil aggression. In the early 1950s, at the founding of the Sinhala colonization scheme in Padaviya (at the borders of the Northern, Eastern, and North-Central Provinces), Senanayake is remembered by his grandson as having invoked the threat of Tamil aggression and giving the settlers a grand sense of historical purpose:

*“Today you are brought here and given a plot of land. You have been uprooted from your village. You are like a piece of driftwood in the ocean; but remember that one day this country will look up to you. The final battle for the Sinhala people will be fought on the plains of Padaviya. You are men and women who carry the island’s destiny on your shoulders. Those who are attempting to divide this country will have to reckon with you. The country may even forget you for a few years, but one day, very soon they will look up to you as the last bastion of the Sinhala.”*<sup>12</sup>

The impetus of ethnically colonizing the Dry Zone continued apace from the 1930s onwards. It can be broken down into three distinct waves.

### ***The first wave***

The first wave is the era from the 1930s up until 1979 and was concentrated on irrigation and colonization schemes in the Trincomalee district of the Eastern province and the southern part of the Batticaloa district, which became the Ampara district. The colonization schemes in Trincomalee were done with the objective of producing a Sinhala majority in Trincomalee.<sup>13</sup> The colonization in Trincomalee took place through building and restoring water tanks. There

<sup>8</sup> Farmer, *supra* note 2, at 128, 151-152.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Muggah, *Relocation Failures in Sri Lanka: A Short History of Internal Displacement and Resettlement* 83 (2008).

<sup>10</sup> See Farmer, *supra* note 2, at 141 (“...for the first time the actual colonization of the Dry Zone became a prime consideration, and not merely an expedient for disposing of unsaleable land, or for tiding over a short-term food shortage problem, or for dealing with some purely local or agronomic problem.”).

<sup>11</sup> Mick Moore, *The State and Peasant Politics in Sri Lanka* 45 (1985).

<sup>12</sup> Malinga H. Gunaratne, *For a Sovereign State* 231 (2009).

<sup>13</sup> University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna), *Report 11: Land, Human Rights and the Eastern Predicament - Appendix II* (Apr. 15, 1993), <https://www.uthr.org/Reports/Report11/Report11.htm>.

were three large schemes – Kanthalai Kulam, Pathavik Kulam, and Allai Kulam and Muthalikulam – which involved bringing Sinhala settlers into existing Tamil populations. The Kanthalai Kulam and Muthalikulam schemes involved the forced eviction or ethnic cleansing of existing Tamil and Muslim villagers.<sup>14</sup> Between 1948 and 1969, approximately 15,000 families were settled because of these schemes, and although some were Muslim and Tamil, the vast majority were Sinhalese, such that today these settlements are almost exclusively Sinhalese.<sup>15</sup>

The southern part of the Batticaloa district was the site of the Gal Oya project (1948-52), named after the river which flowed through that area. It was the first of Sri Lanka's two large-scale multi-purpose irrigation projects; the second was the Mahaweli Development and Irrigation Programme (MDIP), which was launched in 1969 and continues, though at a much-reduced scale, into the current day. The Gal Oya and Mahaweli projects were ambitious and resource-intensive, and even in an era of "grand development schemes," they were "two of the world's largest multi-purpose irrigation, electrification and settlement programmes in the second half of the twentieth century."<sup>16</sup> The Gal Oya scheme irrigated 95,000 acres and led to the settlement of 80,000 Sinhalese in the predominantly Tamil-speaking Eastern province of the island.<sup>17</sup> Tamils and Muslims were often ethnically cleansed from project sites, and Tamils were subsequently "disproportionately excluded from the colony units." The project as a whole constituted "a visible expression of the ways in which the Sinhalese-dominated government pursued exclusionary policies."<sup>18</sup>

### *The second wave*

The second wave of Sinhalization began in the late 1970s when the existing Mahaweli Scheme was relaunched at an accelerated pace. Instead of being implemented over a period of thirty years, it would be implemented in five.<sup>19</sup> The catalyst for the change was the 1977 election of a new centre-right government that radically changed the country's economic policies from state-led and welfare-oriented to market-led and foreign investment-oriented.<sup>20</sup> This shift, in the context of the Cold War, garnered enormous Western support and goodwill. The government seized the opportunity and sought international development support to accelerate the Mahaweli plan from thirty years to just six. Western donors were keen to reward a government that had recently shifted from state-oriented policies towards free market ones

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<sup>14</sup> The Oakland Institute, *The Long Shadow of War: The Struggle for Justice in Postwar Sri Lanka*, at 20-21 (2015), [https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/default/files/files-archive/OI\\_The\\_Long\\_Shadow\\_of\\_War\\_0.pdf](https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/default/files/files-archive/OI_The_Long_Shadow_of_War_0.pdf) [hereinafter *The Long Shadow of War*].

<sup>15</sup> The Oakland Institute, *Trincomalee Under Siege: Land Grabs Target the Tamil Homeland in Sri Lanka*, at 6 (2024), <https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/default/files/files-archive/trincomalee-report.pdf> [hereinafter *Trincomalee Under Siege*].

<sup>16</sup> Muggah, *supra* note 9, at 82.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 84.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.* at 86.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.* at 87.

<sup>20</sup> Ronald J. Herring, *Making Ethnic Conflict: The Civil War in Sri Lanka*, in *Carrots, Sticks, and Ethnic Conflict: Rethinking Development Assistance* 140-175 (Milton J. Esman & Ronald J. Herring eds., 2001).

and backed the project. There was an “explosion of aid”<sup>21</sup> and according to Sri Lanka’s then-Finance minister, because of the international community’s confidence in the government’s economic policies, the country had been “able to obtain a greater volume of foreign aid... *per capita* than perhaps any other third world country.”<sup>22</sup>

The development aid was ostensibly given to support the government’s transition to a free market economy.<sup>23</sup> The government itself promoted the accelerated project as a means of supporting further investment through infrastructure and creating employment.<sup>24</sup> Yet arguably, the animating purpose of the scheme, for the government at least, was that of “re-establishing the glory of Sinhala kings on Tamil territory.”<sup>25</sup> Approximately two-thirds of the land proposed for development under the scheme were in the North and East.<sup>26</sup> The accelerated plan envisaged resettling 700,000 people, or five per cent of the country’s population, in just six years.<sup>27</sup> By 1998, the Mahaweli Authority had distributed lands to 123,630 Sinhala families, along with just 3,068 Muslim families and 1,825 Tamil families.<sup>28</sup> The government’s domestic promotion of the projects also took on unabashed Sinhala-Buddhist tones. The opening of each new scheme was accompanied by elaborate Sinhala-Buddhist rituals, and the official material idealized the simple and pious life of an imagined Sinhala-Buddhist peasantry.<sup>29</sup>

The colonization schemes and the control of land soon became a key issue in the rapidly escalating conflict between Sinhala-Buddhist governments and Tamil nationalist leaders. Between 1950 and 1970, there were thirty acts specifying the conditions in which the state could acquire land and most of them provided only very limited rights for those who were evacuated.<sup>30</sup> The legislation was successively strengthened and included provisions for “the Minister to mandate district and divisional secretaries to appropriate land within forty-eight hours.”<sup>31</sup> Tamil nationalist leaders also began to focus on colonization and land as a key threat to their demands for equality and autonomy.

S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, the pre-eminent Tamil leader of the 1950s – 1970s, warned of the dangers of state-aided colonization schemes in the Tamil-speaking areas as early as 1949.<sup>32</sup> In 1956, Chelvanayakam’s party, the Federal Party, which would dominate electoral politics until 1977, adopted the cessation of state-aided colonization in the Tamil-speaking areas as one of its four key demands. These demands formed the basis of two pacts with Sri Lankan Prime Ministers, the first with SWRD Bandaranaike (1957) and the second with Dudley Senanayake

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<sup>21</sup> Brian Levy, *Foreign Aid in the Making of Economic Policy in Sri Lanka, 1977 – 1983*, 22 *Policy Sciences* 437, 449 (1989).

<sup>22</sup> Herring, *supra* note 20, at 145 (quoting Sri Lanka, Ministry of Plan Implementation, *Performance* (1980)).

<sup>23</sup> Levy, *supra* note 21.

<sup>24</sup> Herring, *supra* note 20.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.* at 152.

<sup>26</sup> Gunaratne, *supra* note 12, at 32.

<sup>27</sup> Muggah, *supra* note 9, at 88.

<sup>28</sup> Trincomalee Under Siege, *supra* note 15, at 10.

<sup>29</sup> See Peebles, *supra* note 5; Tennekoon, *supra* note 5.

<sup>30</sup> Muggah, *supra* note 9, at 84.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.* at 80.

<sup>32</sup> A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *S.J.V Chelvanayakam and the Crisis of Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism, 1947-1977: A Political Biography* 33 (1994).

(1965). It was also the basis of an informal agreement with a third Prime Minister, Srimavo Bandaranaike's government in 1960. In all three instances, Sinhala leaders accepted Tamil demands for a cessation of state-aided colonization in the Tamil-speaking areas, but these agreements came to nothing as Sinhala leaders unilaterally abrogated them when circumstances changed.<sup>33</sup>

By the early 1980s, when the accelerated Mahaweli scheme got underway, the ethnic conflict had transformed into an armed conflict. The Tamil militant movement began in the early 1970s as it became apparent that Tamil leaders' attempts to use electoral politics and civil disobedience to win Tamil rights had been an utter failure. In 1971, the freshly-elected government inaugurated a new constitution that enshrined the foremost place of Buddhism alongside the unitary nature of the state and state power. In the subsequent year, it also introduced regulations to make it harder for Tamil students to secure places to study in the highly sought-after medical and engineering faculties. In 1977, a coalition of Tamil parties swept the polls on a platform calling for an independent state of Tamil Eelam, abandoning the previous demand for federal autonomy.<sup>34</sup>

The years between 1977 and 1983 were marked by incessant anti-Tamil violence through pogroms and intensifying state repression.<sup>35</sup> Tamil militancy, still nascent at that time, surged dramatically in the aftermath of the 1983 "Black July" pogroms, which left over 3,000 Tamils dead and destroyed residential and commercial property valued at the time at US\$ 300 million.<sup>36</sup> The violence also became internationalized. Sri Lanka's military turned to its Western allies and friends to expand its military capacity and strength, while the Indian government started covertly backing the Tamil militants as a means of restraining Sri Lanka's westward turn.<sup>37</sup>

The Mahaweli scheme, trumpeted as the world's largest foreign aid project at the time, became an important site of this escalating conflict on and over land.<sup>38</sup> The massive influx of donor funding opened the possibility of large-scale Sinhala settlements in the Tamil-speaking areas.<sup>39</sup> The government was insistent that the Mahaweli scheme would settle people according to the national ethnic ratio, rather than regional ones, meaning that settlements in the North-East would have large majorities of Sinhalese.<sup>40</sup> The atmosphere of the early 1980s was one of heightened ethnic polarization. The escalating anti-Tamil violence was met with counterattacks by Tamil militants against the Sri Lankan armed forces, and the Tamil polity became increasingly mobilized on the demand for independence. Amidst these tensions, a

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<sup>33</sup> *Id.* at 83-84. For a full description of these negotiations by a key participant, see V. Navaratnam, *The Fall and Rise of the Tamil Nation* (1994).

<sup>34</sup> For a discussion and description of these events, see Madurika Rasaratnam, *Tamils and the Nation: India and Sri Lanka Compared* 133-165 (2016). See also A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism: Its Origins and Development in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (2000).

<sup>35</sup> Rasaratnam, *supra* note 34, at 170-172.

<sup>36</sup> PEARL, *Black July: A Tamil Genocide* (last visited May 15, 2025), <https://pearlaction.org/black-july-a-tamil-genocide>.

<sup>37</sup> Rasaratnam, *supra* note 34, at 165-173.

<sup>38</sup> Herring, *supra* note 20, at 149. Herring argues that the "civil war cannot be properly understood without attention to external development flows." *Id.* at 142.

<sup>39</sup> Levy, *supra* note 21, at 438.

<sup>40</sup> Herring, *supra* note 20, at 151.

closed group of Sinhala nationalist officials in the Mahaweli Authority saw in their work the possibilities of once and for all destroying Tamil claims to a homeland through a massive, strategic, and militarized demographic change.<sup>41</sup> They worked with members of the Buddhist clergy and the military to mobilize, inspire, and arm Sinhalese settlers who would form a civilian militia in the battle against Tamil separatists.<sup>42</sup>

The Mahaweli authority became the centre of a network connecting bureaucrats, senior political leaders, the Buddhist clergy, private business interests, the military, and other government agencies dedicated to securing Sinhala settlement of Tamil lands. Their plans were focussed on two specific areas. The first of these was the right bank of the Maduru Oya river, in what was known as System B of the Mahaweli project (the area in which Mayilathamadhu Madhavanai is located). The second set of settlements is in System L of the Mahaweli project, an area on the borders of both the Northern and Eastern provinces and the place where the territorial contiguity of the Tamil-speaking areas could be broken with fortified Sinhala settlements. This was no longer just about reclaiming a Sinhala-Buddhist birthright and recreating ancient glory; it was also about actively and violently creating “facts on the ground” to once and for all destroy the Tamil campaign for territorial autonomy. The memoirs of Malinga H. Gunaratne, a well-connected senior official at the Mahaweli authority in the early 1980s, provide an insight into the thinking underpinning these plans:

*“Eelam, or the proposed state, depended on the availability of a contiguous land mass inhabited by Tamil people. To puncture Eelam with a mixed settlement of people was our objective. We also knew that the Tamils were pushing the boundaries in their attempt to maintain their contiguity. The Tamil separatist and the unseen few of us were grappling with the Vital issue – LAND.”*<sup>43</sup>

From 1983 onwards, the Mahaweli Authority pursued the “settlement and resettlement of Systems B & L” both “aggressively and at times covertly.”<sup>44</sup> They began with a plan to establish large Sinhala settlements in System B, Batticaloa. In the weeks after the Black July pogroms, a small and dedicated group of Mahaweli officials and a Buddhist monk named Ven. Seelalankara, working with the blessing of the minister Gamini Dissanayake, mobilized landless Sinhala people to forcibly occupy land in the Batticaloa district that was part of Mahaweli’s system B. This land was due to benefit from planned irrigation work on the Maduru Oya river.<sup>45</sup> The resources for the campaign came from the Mahaweli Authority itself. The officials and monk were prompted to act by concerns that Tamils were already starting to encroach “illegally” and squat on the land. According to local Batticaloa officials, however, the people there were legally settled and were Hill Country or Malayaga Tamils displaced by the anti-Tamil violence of the 1970s.<sup>46</sup>

Ven. Seelalankara sent notices through the Sinhala press, encouraging people to travel to the area, stating that land would be given for free. This prompted a mass movement, and by early

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<sup>41</sup> Gunaratne, *supra* note 12, at 6-30.

<sup>42</sup> *Id.* at 230-270.

<sup>43</sup> *Id.* at 61-62.

<sup>44</sup> Muggah, *supra* note 9, at 117.

<sup>45</sup> Gunaratne, *supra* note 12, at 60-62.

<sup>46</sup> *Id.* at 95.



September, approximately 40,000 Sinhala settlers had taken over the area and had set up camp. The officials from the Mahaweli worked through their contacts to settle former military personnel among the new settlers. They were there to provide military training to the settlers in the context of rising Tamil militancy. The monk used vehicles collected from Sinhala businesspeople in the neighbouring Polonnaruwa district to lead the army of settlers. He roused and inspired the settlers by telling them they were working to secure the borders of the nation-state. A senior official involved in the campaign described it in mythical terms: “For the first time since the days of King Dutugemunnu, the Sinhala people are marching towards the plains and nothing will stop this march.”<sup>47</sup>

The campaign was ultimately dismantled on President Jeyawardene’s orders. It had caught untoward press and political attention from India and from the Western states that were funding the project. Tamil political leaders in Sri Lanka and the growing diaspora also lobbied the international community on the dangers of coercive state-sponsored ethnic settlements. As a result of these efforts, Canada, one of the major donors, eventually pulled out. The government was dependent on donor funding to continue with the project and was therefore compelled to act. The Mahaweli officials who masterminded the plan were angry and disappointed but decided to shift their attention to the Mahaweli L scheme and thought of moving some of the settlers from the B scheme towards the North.<sup>48</sup>

The area that became Mahaweli L was known in Tamil as Manal Aru and contained 64 villages. In late 1983, the military ordered the villages to vacate their homes and farmlands within 48 hours or face eviction by force. An estimated 13,000 Tamils were cleared from the area, leaving behind homes and farmland, and they were explicitly excluded from resettlement in System L.<sup>49</sup> The Manal Aru area also had resettlement communities for displaced Malayaga Tamils established by a voluntary organization called the Gandhiyam Society. It was founded in the early 1970s by S. A. David, a retired Tamil Diaspora architect and town planner who returned to Sri Lanka, and Dr. S. Rajasundaram, a physician based in Vavuniya. Gandhiyam was a development organization, and its efforts were focussed on developing agricultural livelihoods. They secured aid from donors such as Oxfam, the World Council of Churches, the agency NOVIB, and the then-nascent Tamil diaspora; they were given land in the Manal Aru area by Tamil commercial organizations who had bought it on long leases. Gandhiyam worked to turn the land into thriving agricultural communities:

*“There were no roads, little water, and no health facilities when they began their project, but with the devoted help of a dedicated band of volunteers from many countries, they cleared the jungle, dug wells, and built roads. The soil proved fertile and large crops of manioc, cow-pea, chillies, and groundnuts were raised. Twelve model one-acre farms on Vavuniya, Trincomalee, and Batticaloa showed the villagers the simplest, safest, and quickest way to economic, social, and cultural revival.”*<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Id.* at 108.

<sup>48</sup> *Id.* at 102-113. See also Herring, *supra* note 20, at 152.

<sup>49</sup> Muggah, *supra* note 9, at 123. The areas affected were Kokilai, Kokkoduthoduvai, Karnadduk, Kerni, Kumulamunai East, Kumulamunai West, Maruthodai, Oottukulam, Kayadikulam and Koddai Kerni divisions. *Id.* at 257.

<sup>50</sup> E. M Thornton & R. Niththyananthan, Sri Lanka, Island of Terror: An Indictment 57 (1984).

By 1983, Gandhiyam had resettled over 85,000 Malayaga Tamils across its different sites that included mobile health clinics and schools. This included settlements in Manal Aru, in areas known as the Kent and Dollar farms. From the Tamil perspective, the Gandhiyam settlements were a grassroots and voluntary development effort to resettle displaced Tamils by establishing them with homes and livelihoods in lands that had historically been Tamil-speaking areas. Sinhala nationalist officials at the Mahaweli authority and the military saw things very differently. The military saw them as “terrorist training centres” and from “time to time the army invaded the settlements in strength, driving their armoured cars across the new crops to harass the settlers.”<sup>51</sup> Likewise, Mahaweli officials who reported on the Gandhiyam settlements at the Kent and Dollar farms in the Manal Aru area saw them as a “threat to national security.” The settlements, they explained, sitting at the junction of Mullaitivu and the Eastern coast, would support the “consolidation of certain parts of this country by this ethnic community and would definitely pave the way for effective achievement of the cry for separation.”<sup>52</sup>

In April 1984, the police, acting on the advice of Mahaweli officials, forcibly cleared the Tamils settled at the Gandhiyam sites at Kent and Dollar farms. The land and infrastructure that had been developed and built by Gandhiyam volunteers and the Tamil communities they supported were given over to released Sinhala prisoners from Anuradhapura and their families.<sup>53</sup> The ethnic cleansing of Manal Aru was not an isolated event. There were similar attacks on Tamil communities living in areas that were also politically important for the Sinhalization project. The Trincomalee district, which had been a site of Sinhalization from the 1940s, was particularly hard hit. Tamil communities in Thennaimaravadi, China Bay, and Kavathikuda were also forcibly evacuated from their homes and lands by armed Sinhala settlers, often with the help of the military.<sup>54</sup>

The intensification of the ethnic violence was driven by its internationalization, and land was central to this vortex. In 1984, President J. R. Jayewardene was invited to the White House for an official visit, just a year after the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983.<sup>55</sup> Sri Lanka’s strengthening links to the US and allied Western states, such as the UK, facilitated a massive expansion of its military capacities.<sup>56</sup> The allies of the US also supported the Sinhalization project. Sri Lanka’s relations with Israel improved from the late 1970s as the Jayewardene administration sought Israeli support to combat Tamil militancy. Israeli advice may have also prompted the decision to accelerate the Mahaweli project as a means of generating power and to settle Sinhalese

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<sup>51</sup> *Id.*

<sup>52</sup> Gunaratne, *supra* note 12, at 119-120.

<sup>53</sup> *Id.* at 208-209.

<sup>54</sup> The Long Shadow of War, *supra* note 14, at 21.

<sup>55</sup> See *Toasts of President Reagan and President J.R. Jayewardene of Sri Lanka at the State Dinner* (June 18, 1984), The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/toasts-president-reagan-and-president-jr-jayewardene-sri-lanka-the-state-dinner> (last visited May 21, 2025).

<sup>56</sup> See Brian Blodgett, *Sri Lanka’s Military: The Search for a Mission* (2004). See also Phil Miller, International Human Rights Association, *Britain’s Dirty War against Tamil People, 1979-2009* (June 2014), [https://www.tamilnet.com/img/publish/2014/07/britains\\_dirty\\_war.pdf](https://www.tamilnet.com/img/publish/2014/07/britains_dirty_war.pdf).

farmers in the Dry Zone.<sup>57</sup> Ravi Jayewardene, the President's son, a former army officer and an advocate of closer Israeli ties, visited Israel in June-July 1984. He took a particular interest in the settlements in the West Bank:

*"One is struck by Ravi Jayewardene's interest in visiting 'all' the border towns of Israel. The notable ones lying in the West Bank were planted amidst Palestinian habitations, and have since been protected by armed civilian paramilitary units. However, at that time of June 1984 not a single Sinhalese village had been attacked by Tamil militants. There were no attacks on old Sinhalese villages until nearly a year later in May 1985. There is little room to doubt that Ravi Jayewardene was then looking into setting up armed Sinhalese colonies in the North-East. He was moreover very much alive to the West-Bank type of retaliatory violence the move was bound to provoke. The foremost of these settlements resulted in the first massacre of Sinhalese in November 1984."*<sup>58</sup>

In November and December 1984, Tamil militants attacked the Sinhala settlements in Kent and Dollar farms as well as those in Kokilai, killing 62 civilians and terrifying the others into fleeing.<sup>59</sup> The counter-attack consolidated the policy of arming Sinhalese settlers. Ravi Jayewardene swung into action. He used his skills and contacts to train and arm batches of settlers, starting with the settlers at Padaviya.<sup>60</sup>

This eventually became a formal policy, and in 1985, Lalith Athulathmudali, the then-National Security Minister, formed the Home Guards, a lightly-armed force drawn from Sinhala and Muslim villagers living on the border of areas controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). There were initially 5,000 volunteers, but over time, they were paid a salary, and by 2009, this amounted to Rs 20,000 a month. The Home Guards soon became an important source of employment, and by 2009, in some border villages, fifty percent of all households had one or more members working as Home Guards or as regular members of the security services. In Manal Aru or System L, the area that became known as Weli Oya, nineteen percent of the male workforce was employed in the security forces, and three-quarters of these men were in the Home Guards.<sup>61</sup> The rationale for the Home Guards was to protect Sinhala villages from Tamil militant attacks, but they were also involved in atrocity crimes against Tamil civilians, including the 2006 massacre of 17 aid workers in Trincomalee.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Punsara Amarasinghe, The Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies, *The Israeli-Sri Lankan Relationship* (Mar. 12, 2021), <https://besacenter.org/israel-sri-lanka-relationship>.

<sup>58</sup> *Enter Mossad and Ravi Jayewardene*, Colombo Telegraph (Oct. 18, 2014), <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/enter-mossad-and-ravi-jayewardene/> (quoting Rajan Hoole, *Sri Lanka: The Arrogance of Power: Myths, Decadence & Murder* (2001)).

<sup>59</sup> The Long Shadow of War, *supra* note 14, at 21. See also Muggah, *supra* note 9, at 123-124.

<sup>60</sup> Gunaratne, *supra* note 12, at 230-270. The author recalls the inspiration they took from the Israeli model: "I recall having handed over to Ravi Jayawardene a book during our early meetings. The book titled 'The Making of the Israeli Army' was written by world famous commander Yigal Allon. In Israel, every civilian is a soldier, who just happens to be on leave when his services are no longer required by the state." *Id.* at 255.

<sup>61</sup> See Dharsha Jegatheeswaran, Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research, *Civil Security Department: The Deep Militarisation of the Vanni*, at 3 (Sept. 2017), <https://adayaalam.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/ACPR-Report-Civil-Security-Department-The-Deep-Militarisation-of-the-Vanni-.pdf>; Kalinga Tudor Silva, *Home Guards in Sri Lanka: Guardians of Peace or Threat to Human Security?*, 45 *Economic & Political Weekly* 31, 31-33 (2010).

<sup>62</sup> Jegatheeswaran, *supra* note 61, at 4.

Sri Lanka's deepening ties with the US-led West caught India's geopolitical attention. In the context of the Cold War and India-US tensions, India was focussed on containing Sri Lanka's westward shift. The result of these efforts was the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord.<sup>63</sup> Land and the ethnic conflict were important components of this bilateral agreement, which Sri Lanka reluctantly signed. The Accord recognized the North-East as the "historic homelands of the Tamil-speaking peoples," whilst acknowledging that others had also always lived there. This is consistent with Tamil nationalist demands, which have opposed coercive state-sponsored colonization schemes but not the normal and voluntary movement of people to different parts of the island. The Accord called for a Referendum to determine the merging of the Northern and Eastern provinces into a single unit and the decentralization of state power through a system of provincial councils, which were granted authority over land and policing.<sup>64</sup> The changes required by the accord were incorporated into Sri Lanka's constitution through the 13th Amendment, adopted later in 1987.

The provisions of the Accord were never fully implemented, and the blame for this has generally been directed at the LTTE, particularly by Indian officials. The LTTE refused to disarm, as required by the Accord, when it became clear that the Sri Lankan government would also refuse to abide by its commitments: to release all political prisoners, halt state-sponsored colonization in Tamil areas, and reduce the military presence in Tamil areas. An armed conflict then ensued between the LTTE and the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), which had been deployed to implement the Accord. The IPKF's counterinsurgency was brutal, and its atrocities soon rivalled those of the Sri Lankan state. In 1989, having failed to crush the LTTE, the Indian Army withdrew at the request of the Sri Lankan government. In May 1991, the LTTE assassinated Rajiv Gandhi, and the Indian government proscribed the LTTE. From that point onwards, the Indian government actively supported Sri Lanka in its campaign against the LTTE.<sup>65</sup>

The Accord nevertheless remains in place as a bilateral agreement and one which Sri Lanka has not formally abdicated. The 13th Amendment has also been part of Sri Lanka's constitution for three and a half decades. Yet Sinhalization processes have also continued apace. This is in part because the 13th Amendment itself leaves considerable land and police powers in the hands of the central government and so effectively undermines the purpose of decentralization as a means of providing autonomy over land and preventing coercive Sinhalization.<sup>66</sup> There was a further weakening of the 13th Amendment's provisions in 2016 when Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), a leftist Sinhala nationalist party, (whose National People's Power (NPP) coalition is currently in government)

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<sup>63</sup> For an overview of these events, see Rasaratnam, *supra* note 34, at 169-173.

<sup>64</sup> *Indo-Lanka Accord*, Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs (July 29, 1987), <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/LegalTreatiesDoc/LK87B1078.pdf>.

<sup>65</sup> See Rasaratnam, *supra* note 34, at 169-173.

<sup>66</sup> For a list of the land powers that remain with the central government, see The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, sched. 9, app. II, <https://www.parliament.lk/files/pdf/constitution.pdf> (last visited May 21, 2025).

, successfully petitioned the Supreme Court to de-merge the Northern and Eastern provinces.<sup>67</sup> The Accord's recognition of the contiguous North-East as historically Tamil-speaking areas was thereby undone.

The rapid escalation of the conflict from the mid-1980s onwards also forced a hiatus in the establishment of new state-sponsored colonies in the Tamil-speaking areas. Large parts of the Tamil-speaking areas came progressively under the control of the LTTE, which became the dominant Tamil nationalist actor in the late 1980s.<sup>68</sup> Through the three decades of armed struggle, the LTTE sought to use its de facto control of Tamil territory to secure Tamil autonomy by gaining international recognition for Tamil demands and forcing the Sri Lankan state into making concessions.<sup>69</sup> The LTTE's final and most significant attempt was through the Norwegian Process (2001-2006). This began after the LTTE inflicted massive military reversals on the Sri Lankan military and used its position of strength to call for an internationally mediated ceasefire and negotiations to first normalize conditions for civilians in the North-East and then to address the core political issues of the ethnic conflict.<sup>70</sup>

The Norwegian Peace process was broken on the rocks of a resurgent Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. Mahinda Rajapaksa was at the helm of this movement, and he won the presidential election in 2005 by bringing together a wide-ranging coalition of Sinhala-Buddhist parties and movements.<sup>71</sup> The movement was implacably opposed to the peace process, seeing it as an unacceptable appeasement of "terrorism" and the entirely illegitimate Tamil demands for self-rule. The notion of the Sinhala-Buddhist heritage of the North-East, a key tenet of the Sinhala-Buddhist mythos and central to Sinhalization processes since independence, was renewed and reaffirmed in this mobilization against the peace process.<sup>72</sup>

The ethos of the resistance to the Norwegian Peace Process was to unapologetically reaffirm Sinhala-Buddhist suzerainty over the whole island and to insist that the only possible "solution" to the ethnic conflict was one where Tamils and Muslims learned to peaceably live with this reality.<sup>73</sup> The coalition successfully worked to block international humanitarian aid from reaching the Tamil-speaking areas after the 2004 tsunami<sup>74</sup> and then was able to secure the demerger of the Northern and Eastern provinces, in contravention of the Indo-Lanka

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<sup>67</sup> *Northeast merger deemed 'null and void'*, Tamil Guardian (Oct. 18, 2006), <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/northeast-merger-deemed-null-and-void>.

<sup>68</sup> See Mario Arulthas & Kate Cronin-Furman, *How the Tigers Got Their Stripes: A Case Study of the LTTE's Rise to Power*, 47 *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 1006 (2021), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2021.2013753>.

<sup>69</sup> See Anton Balasingham, *War and Peace: Armed Struggle and Peace Efforts of Liberation Tigers* (2004).

<sup>70</sup> *Id.* at 341-465.

<sup>71</sup> Neil De Votta, East-West Center Washington, *Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalist Ideology: Implications for Politics and Conflict Resolution in Sri Lanka*, at 78 (2007), <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/45634/ps040.pdf>.

<sup>72</sup> See Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, *'History' After the War: Historical Consciousness in the Collective Sinhala-Buddhist Psyche in Post-war Sri Lanka* (July 2013), <https://www.ices.lk/publications-1/history-after-the-war%3A-historical-consciousness-in-the-collective-sinhala-buddhist-psyche-in-post-war>.

<sup>73</sup> See Neil De Votta, *supra* note 71.

<sup>74</sup> *Interim order against P-TOMS*, BBC Sinhala (July 15, 2005), [https://www.bbc.com/sinhala/news/story/2005/07/050715\\_courts\\_ptoms](https://www.bbc.com/sinhala/news/story/2005/07/050715_courts_ptoms).

Accord.<sup>75</sup> The Rajapaksa government then ramped up the “shadow war” of targeted assassinations against Tamil leaders and civil society activists, and successfully lobbied for further international proscriptions of the LTTE, such as by Canada and the EU in 2006. The government unilaterally abrogated the ceasefire in 2006 and launched successive operations to first recapture LTTE-controlled areas in the East and then the North.<sup>76 77</sup>

### *The third (current) wave*

The military, massively rearmed and expanded during the peace process, defeated and destroyed the LTTE and recaptured all its territory between July 2006 and May 2009. The campaign was brutal and crossed many thresholds of criminality and intentional brutality; it has been subject to three UN investigations.<sup>78</sup> The UN and other sources estimate that between 40,000 – 169,796 civilians were killed and over 70,000 remain unaccounted for.<sup>79</sup> In 2024, PEARL released a legal briefing which showed that Sri Lanka committed genocide against the Tamil population between January and May 2009.<sup>80</sup> This third and current wave of Sinhalization was launched in the aftermath of this devastation and amidst the de facto occupation of the Tamil-speaking areas by an overwhelmingly ethnically Sinhalese military.

The idea that the Tamil-speaking North-East had an original Sinhala-Buddhist heritage that had been destroyed by Tamil invasions was an important element of the post-war jubilation in the Sinhala-speaking South.<sup>81</sup> These ideas had been circulating since the early 1980s. For example, a key Mahaweli official who participated in the clandestine Sinhalization efforts of that era recounts claims that historical structures built by Sinhala kings in the North-East give “lie to the statement that these were the traditional homelands of the Tamils alone.”<sup>82</sup> It became a common practice to rename Tamil places with Sinhala names; Manal Aru became System L and then Weli Oya,<sup>83</sup> and Jaffna, or *Yalpaanam* in Tamil, was proclaimed as Yapa

<sup>75</sup> *Northeast merger deemed ‘null and void’*, Tamil Guardian (Oct. 18, 2006), <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/northeast-merger-deemed-null-and-void>.

<sup>76</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Return to War: Human Rights Under Siege* (Aug. 5, 2007), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/08/05/return-war/human-rights-under-siege>.

<sup>77</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Recurring Nightmare: State Responsibility for “Disappearances” and Abductions in Sri Lanka*, at 17 (Mar. 2008), <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2008/srilanka0308/srilanka0308web.pdf>.

<sup>78</sup> *Sri Lanka profile - Timeline*, BBC News (Nov. 18, 2019), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12004081>

<sup>79</sup> United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General’s Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka*, at 41, (Mar. 31, 2011), <https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/unsecgen/2011/en/78961>; Charles Petrie, *Report of the Secretary-General’s Internal Review Panel on United Nations Action in Sri Lanka* at 14 (Nov. 2012), [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/737299/files/The\\_Internal\\_Review\\_Panel\\_report\\_on\\_Sri\\_Lanka.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/737299/files/The_Internal_Review_Panel_report_on_Sri_Lanka.pdf); International Truth and Justice Project (ITJP), *Death Toll in the Sri Lankan Conflict*, at 2 (Feb. 2021), [https://itjpsl.com/assets/ITJP\\_death\\_toll\\_A4\\_v6.pdf](https://itjpsl.com/assets/ITJP_death_toll_A4_v6.pdf) See also Jeevethan Selvachandran, *Remembering Bishop Rayappu Joseph: A Tireless Campaigner for Justice in Sri Lanka*, *The Diplomat* (Apr. 23, 2021), <https://thediplomat.com/2021/04/remembering-bishop-rayappu-joseph-a-tireless-campaigner-for-justice-in-sri-lanka/>;

<sup>80</sup> PEARL, *Justice for Genocide: Sri Lanka’s Responsibility for Genocide against the Tamil People in 2009* (Sept. 2024), <https://pearlaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Justice-for-Genocide-Sri-Lankas-Responsibility-for-Genocide-Against-the-Tamil-People-in-2009.pdf>.

<sup>81</sup> Dewasiri, *supra* note 72, at 8.

<sup>82</sup> Gunaratne, *supra* note 12, at 136.

<sup>83</sup> Muggah, *supra* note 9, at 124.

Patuna when it was captured by the Sri Lankan military in 1995.<sup>84</sup> The defeat of the LTTE opened the Tamil-speaking areas in their entirety to state power and the possibility of dismantling claims of a Tamil homeland once and for all.

Sinhalization was a central albeit covert aspect of the government's post-war strategy in the Northern province.<sup>85</sup> The strategy had to be covert because key international actors engaged in Sri Lanka would have opposed such a plan and could have withdrawn vital financial and diplomatic assistance. Mahinda Rajapaksa's government won international support for its renewed offensive against the LTTE on the premise that having inflicted a military defeat on the allegedly recalcitrant LTTE, they would sue for peace and reconciliation on more favourable terms. As the appalling brutality of the government's offensive became clear in the early months of 2009, international actors became alarmed and started suing for a ceasefire.<sup>86</sup> At the end of the war, the Sri Lankan government had to publicly reaffirm its commitment to resolving the Tamil question through a political solution, specifically the implementation of the 13th Amendment.<sup>87</sup> The realities on the ground belied these international commitments, but international constraints nevertheless made an overt and internationally subsidized strategy of Sinhalization impossible.

The task of rehabilitation and reconstruction after the war was enormous. This was particularly so in the war-affected regions of the Northern province that are in an area known colloquially as the Vanni. The 300,000 Tamils who survived the military's final onslaught were initially forcibly detained in government-run internment camps and only released in late 2009 after intense international pressure.<sup>88</sup> Almost all civilian infrastructure — homes, schools, hospitals, and commercial buildings — in the war-affected areas of the Vanni was destroyed and the Sri Lankan military also engaged in extensive post-war looting of whatever remained. The survivors who entered the camps were only permitted 5kg of belongings per person, and so any belongings they had managed to keep were taken off them or simply left on the beach.<sup>89</sup> This was a population made destitute and traumatized by a campaign of military punishment.

The government used the language of reconstruction and rehabilitation to call for and receive international financial assistance, but the actual outcomes for Tamil survivors were largely impoverishment and dispossession. An International Crisis Group (ICG) report of 2012 noted that "hundreds of millions of dollars have poured into the province [since 2009], but the local populations, mostly left destitute by the conflict, have seen only slight improvements in their

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<sup>84</sup> *President Kumaratunga 'conquers' Jaffna – and holds a medieval victory ceremony*, Tamil Nation, <https://tamilnation.org/indictment/genocide95/gen95032.html> (last visited May 22, 2025).

<sup>85</sup> International Crisis Group, *Sri Lanka's North I: The Denial of Minority Rights*, at i, 20 (Mar. 16, 2012), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/219-sri-lanka-s-north-i-the-denial-of-minority-rights.pdf>. See also Kelegama & Korf, *supra* note 5, at 2003.

<sup>86</sup> See Rasaratnam, *supra* note 34, at 193-198.

<sup>87</sup> Press Release, Secretary-General, Joint Statement by United Nations Secretary-General, Government of Sri Lanka, U.N. Doc. SG/2151 (May 26, 2009), <https://press.un.org/en/2009/sg2151.doc.htm>.

<sup>88</sup> International Crisis Group, *Sri Lanka's North II: Rebuilding Under the Military*, at 2 (Mar. 16, 2012), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/220-sri-lanka-s-north-ii-rebuilding-under-the-military.pdf>. Gethin Chamberlain, *Sri Lanka vows to free 130,000 Tamil refugees*, *The Guardian* (Nov. 21, 2009), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/nov/22/sri-lanka-frees-tamil-refugees>.

<sup>89</sup> *Sri Lanka's North I: The Denial of Minority Rights*, *supra* note 85, at 4-5.

lives.” By late 2012, the government claimed to have resettled almost ninety-five percent of those held in camps,<sup>90</sup> but most returnees “remain in makeshift and inadequate shelters” made of “tarpaulins and jungle poles” with “few jobs or economic opportunities” and few “schools and medical centres” had been rebuilt.<sup>91</sup>

The government in Colombo and the military were the key decision-making agencies on reconstruction priorities in the aftermath of the war.<sup>92</sup> They refused to allow an independent and empirically rigorous needs assessment survey and instead prioritized maintaining strict control over the reconstruction process and gatekeeping access to the war-affected regions.<sup>93</sup> There was a clear bias in favour of large infrastructure projects, particularly roads, over housing, social infrastructure, and livelihoods.<sup>94</sup> The government also refused to release a clear roadmap of its plans for the North-East and whilst it never overtly proclaimed its intention to advance the Sinhalization project, the evidence was apparent everywhere.

*“The almost entirely Tamil-speaking north is now dotted with Sinhala signboards, streets newly renamed in Sinhala, monuments to Sinhala war heroes, and even a war museum and battlefields that are open only to Sinhalese. Sinhala fishermen and businessmen are regularly given advantages not accorded to Tamils. The slow but steady movement of Sinhala settlers along the southern edges of the province, often with military and central government support and sometimes onto land previously farmed or occupied by Tamils, is particularly worrying. These developments are consistent with a strategy – known to be supported by important officials and advisers to the president – to change “the facts on the ground”, as has already happened in the east, and make it impossible to claim the north as a Tamil-majority area deserving of self-governance.”<sup>95</sup> - International Crisis Group, 2012*

There was also a spate of Buddhist temple construction, and by 2020, 131 new temples had been built in the Northern province.<sup>96</sup> In short, the Mahinda Rajapaksa government sought to leverage the devastation of the war to secure aid, but used the aid to pursue Sinhalization. The military played an important role in these processes. According to calculations from 2020, the military-to-civilian ratio in the Northern province was one soldier for every twelve civilians.<sup>97</sup> This is extremely high, even when compared to active conflict zones. The ratio in Kashmir, for example, which remains a site of more active domestic and international conflict, is one soldier

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<sup>90</sup> *Sri Lanka’s North II: Rebuilding Under the Military*, *supra* note 88, at 4. However, “up to 138,336 were still displaced, often living with families and in camps.” *Id.* at 5.

<sup>91</sup> *Id.* at i, 7.

<sup>92</sup> *Sri Lanka’s North I: The Denial of Minority Rights*, *supra* note 85, at i, 8-9, 24.

<sup>93</sup> *Sri Lanka’s North II: Rebuilding Under the Military*, *supra* note 88, at 13-14.

<sup>94</sup> *Id.* at 13-14. See also Kanchana N. Ruwanpura et al., *Unsettled Peace? The Territorial Politics of Roadbuilding in Post-War Sri Lanka*, 76 *Political Geography* 1 (Jan. 2020).

<sup>95</sup> *Sri Lanka’s North I: The Denial of Minority Rights*, *supra* note 85, at i.

<sup>96</sup> The Oakland Institute, *Endless War: The Destroyed Land, Life and Identity of the Tamil People in Sri Lanka*, at 16 (2021), <https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/default/files/files-archive/endless-war-web.pdf> [hereinafter *Endless War*].

<sup>97</sup> *Endless War*, *supra* note 96, at 26.



for every thirty civilians.<sup>98</sup> In other words, the levels of militarization in the Northern province are slightly more than double those of Kashmir.

The military is a central protagonist of the post-war Sinhalization process, but it does not act alone. These other agencies involved are Forestry, Wildlife Conservation, Tourism, and Archaeology departments, the Mahaweli Authority, the Buddhist clergy, and private enterprises.<sup>99</sup> The Archaeology department's work has been facilitated by post-war enthusiasm for "recovering" historical Sinhala-Buddhist sites across the North-East that were allegedly seized and destroyed by past invasions from South India.<sup>100</sup> In June 2020, the then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa appointed a Presidential Task Force for Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern province that was tasked with identifying archaeological sites in the Eastern province and also to identify "land that should be allocated for such archaeological sites."<sup>101</sup> The Task Force gave presidential sanction to the importance of history and archaeology in the Sinhalization processes and codified an additional means of ceasing land. Although it is no longer functional, the Archaeology department and historical claims remain important in the Sinhalization process.<sup>102</sup>

The major sites of post-war Sinhalization follow the patterns of the 1980s Mahaweli projects. They are areas of economic value or areas where large-scale coercive Sinhala settlements would disrupt the territorial contiguity of the Tamil-speaking areas and thereby destroy the project of Tamil political autonomy. The most aggressive and far-reaching Sinhalization efforts have been in the Mullaitivu district of the Northern province and the Kuchchaveli Divisional Secretariat in the Trincomalee district of the Eastern province.<sup>103</sup> These two areas sit at the junction of the North-East, and ongoing Sinhalization efforts are intended to further disrupt the territorial integrity of the Tamil-speaking areas. Sinhalization efforts have also been renewed in the Muthur and Kinniya areas of the Trincomalee district and in the Mahaweli System B area of the Batticaloa district.<sup>104</sup> Finally, in Jaffna, Sinhalization efforts are focussed in and around the Valikammam North High Security Zone (HSZ), which contains valuable farming land, two important harbours, and an airport.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ifat Gazia, *In Kashmir, military lockdown and pandemic combined are one giant deadly threat*, The Conversation (July 20, 2020), <https://theconversation.com/in-kashmir-military-lockdown-and-pandemic-combined-are-one-giant-deadly-threat-142252>.

<sup>99</sup> See Endless War, *supra* note 96; Trincomalee Under Siege, *supra* note 15.

<sup>100</sup> Dewasiri, *supra* note 2, at 8.

<sup>101</sup> Sri Lanka Campaign, *Preserving Sri Lankan Heritage, or Entrenching Buddhist Supremacy?* (2021), <https://srilankacampaign.org/preserving-sri-lankan-heritage-or-entrenching-buddhist-supremacy/>

<sup>102</sup> See *infra* notes 136-137, 142-144 for discussion on Kurunthoormalai and the Neeraveeyadi Pillayar temple in Chemmalai.

<sup>103</sup> See Trincomalee Under Siege, *supra* note 15; Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research & PEARL, *Normalising the Abnormal: The Militarization of Mullaitivu* (Oct. 2017), <https://adayaalam.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Normalising-the-Abnormal-The-Militarisation-of-Mullaitivu.pdf> [hereinafter *Normalising the Abnormal*].

<sup>104</sup> See Endless War, *supra* note 96; Trincomalee Under Siege, *supra* note 15.

<sup>105</sup> The Valikammam North High Security Zone contains the Myliddy Harbour, the Kankesanthurai Harbour, the Jaffna International Airport and land that has a potential value of \$2 billion at 2017 prices. See *Satellite images show that the High Security Zone is not being used as intended*, Sri Lanka Campaign (Aug. 21, 2014), <https://srilankacampaign.org/satellite-images-show-that-the-high-security-zone-is-not-being-used-as-intended/>.

The scale of land seizures in Mullaitivu and Kuchchaveli is truly staggering. A report co-authored by the Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research and PEARL in 2017 concluded that it was credible to claim the military held approximately 30,000 acres of both private and state land in the district.<sup>106</sup> Approximately fifty-six per cent of the total land area of the district is taken up by forest reserves, leaving only 275,769 acres of land for civilian use.<sup>107</sup> Alongside the land acquired by the military, a further 28,000 acres of land were acquired by the departments of Wildlife and Archaeology, as well as the Mahaweli authority.<sup>108</sup> Therefore, just over twenty-one per cent of the total usable land in Mullaitivu district has been seized by state agencies since the end of the war.<sup>109</sup> In the neighbouring Kuchchaveli Divisional Secretariat of the Trincomalee district, at least 41,164 acres or approximately fifty per cent of the total land area has been seized since the end of the war by multiple state and non-state agencies.<sup>110</sup>

The military plays an important role in the Sinhalization of Mullaitivu. It has an overbearing presence in the region; in 2017, the military-to-civilian ratio was calculated as one soldier to every two civilians.<sup>111</sup> This has effectively precluded the normalization of civilian life. There were also restrictions on foreign investment in the Vanni region.<sup>112</sup> The Tamil diaspora, which supported rehabilitation efforts after the 2001 ceasefire and the 2004 tsunami, was also precluded from engaging with rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts by the hostility of successive Sri Lankan governments and the very real security concerns these governments generated for them.<sup>113</sup> The military therefore became the dominant economic actor amidst a population that was traumatized by the war and made destitute by the de facto occupation.

The military has undercut agricultural incomes by using the land it controls for farming and selling the produce from its farms at below market value.<sup>114</sup> When the military takes over and farms on private land, this has the double effect of depriving owners of their livelihoods, whilst transferring the value of that land to the military. In Keppapilavu, Mullaitivu, the military occupied large tracts of private and fertile land after the end of the war. It tried to make the Tamils who owned the land accept an alternative site that was less fertile and did

<sup>106</sup> Normalising the Abnormal, *supra* note 103, at 1.

<sup>107</sup> Hence, the total land area not allocated for forests is 1,116 square kilometres. *Id.* at 7. This translates to 275,679 acres.

<sup>108</sup> Endless War, *supra* note 96, at 5. The report also notes that 31,100 acres of land were taken by the Forest Department in this same period, but it is not clear if this is in addition to or included within the 1,412 square kilometres reported by Adayaalam & PEARL in 2017, so it has been left out of the calculation offered here.

<sup>109</sup> That is a total of 58,000 acres of a total 275,679 acres of available land that has been taken by state agencies since the end of the war.

<sup>110</sup> Trincomalee Under Siege, *supra* note 15, at 4.

<sup>111</sup> Normalising the Abnormal, *supra* note 103, at 4.

<sup>112</sup> Jegatheeswaran, *supra* note 61, at 13.

<sup>113</sup> For a discussion of the Sri Lankan government's post-war hostility to the Tamil Diaspora, see Suthaharan Nadarajah, *The Tamil Proscriptions: Identities, Legitimacies and Situated Practices*, 30 *Terrorism & Political Violence* 278 (2018), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09546553.2018.1432214>. One of the organizations proscribed by the government was the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO), which was linked to the LTTE and worked in formerly LTTE-controlled areas. In December 2009, the International Tamils Rehabilitation Organization called for a de-proscription of the TRO and detailed the involvement of the Tamil diaspora in rehabilitation efforts. Press Release, International Tamils Rehabilitation Organization, *Five Year Anniversary of the 2004 Tsunami* (Dec. 26, 2009), [https://sangam.org/2009/12/iTRO\\_5\\_year\\_tsunami.pdf?uid=3793](https://sangam.org/2009/12/iTRO_5_year_tsunami.pdf?uid=3793).

<sup>114</sup> *Sri Lanka's North II: Rebuilding Under the Military*, *supra* note 88, at 23; Normalising the Abnormal, *supra* note 103, at 19.

not have the same infrastructure. The military started to farm the land and harvest the coconuts, selling the produce at below market prices. After displaced Tamils started a protest, some but not all the land was released. When the Tamil owners returned to their land, they found that the military had cut down the coconut trees and destroyed the homes that were still left standing. The intentional destruction of economic assets, well after the end of the war, is indicative of an approach that seeks the economic dispossession of Tamils, rather than their economic development.<sup>115</sup> Alongside farming, the military has also used the land it controls to establish tourist resorts and retail outlets. It also engages in brick-making and yoghurt production.<sup>116</sup> These activities, which draw on the military's uniquely privileged access to capital, land, and labour, further entrench the military's power and prevent the emergence of a civilian-centred economy.

While undercutting agricultural livelihoods and inhibiting civilian-led rehabilitation and investment, the military and wider security forces have also used the Civil Security Department (CSD) to exert political control through employment.<sup>117</sup> The CSD was formed out of the Home Guards in 2006, and in 2012, the military launched a targeted campaign to recruit former LTTE cadres to join the CSD as pre-school teachers and agricultural workers. The salary for both jobs was LKR 30,000 a month; government pre-school teachers earn about LKR 4,000, and farming households in Mullaitivu earn LKR 5,877 while those in Kilinochchi earn LKR 2,341.<sup>118</sup>

The CSD operates as a form of political and military control whilst working to expand the military's economic dominance. The military actively pursued former LTTE cadres, and many who were reluctant to join because they did not want to associate with the military and would have preferred to work for Tamil organizations, eventually did so to avoid harassment and to escape poverty.<sup>119</sup> The CSD's high salaries effectively crowded out civilian providers, and when civilian alternatives did emerge, the CSD harassed them.<sup>120</sup> Meanwhile, the produce from CSD farms, sometimes from privately owned land, was sold at below market prices. Many farmers were also cautious about scaling up their production in case they were seen to be competing with the CSD.<sup>121</sup>

Pre-school teachers and students in CSD schools are given military uniforms, and the military attends all events. The teachers also must sign in at the local military camp every month. In January 2017, CSD farm employees were given a month's mandatory military training, but never with weapons and were provided with uniforms they had to wear at all public events. Furthermore, each CSD farm is allocated an officer from the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) who comes to check on the employees every month. These coercive practices, which separate CSD employees from the rest of the population and stigmatize them due to their association with the military, also make them pliant objects of military control.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Normalising the Abnormal, *supra* note 103, at 16-18.

<sup>116</sup> *Id.* at 20.

<sup>117</sup> See generally Jegatheeswaran, *supra* note 61.

<sup>118</sup> *Id.* at 9, 15.

<sup>119</sup> *Id.* at 6, 15.

<sup>120</sup> *Id.* at 14.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Id.* at 10-12, 19.

The military uses CSD employees to advance its own political agenda; for example, they were ordered to participate in protests in support of the military and against releasing privately owned land or against transferring the CSD to civilian control. CSD employees were also used to campaign for Mahinda Rajapaksa in the 2014 elections. At the same time, the conditions of their employment make them feel unable to autonomously pursue their own preferences. A female employee whose daughter was forcibly disappeared in 2009 stopped participating in protests after she became employed by the CSD and said of her predicament, “They want to control us so that there will never be a Tamil uprising again.”<sup>123</sup>

There have also been renewed Sinhala settlements in Mullaitivu as well as in other parts of the Vanni. In South-Eastern Mullaitivu, the villages Alampil to Kokkilai, which sit on a narrow strip of land between the Indian Ocean and the Kokkilai and Nayar lagoon, have been subject to intense Sinhalization. Militarization is an important element of this; there are seven army camps and five naval bases within the 15 kilometers from Alampil to Kokkilai.<sup>124</sup> There are large Sinhala settlements in Mukaththuvaram, on the southern tip of Kokkilai.<sup>125</sup> Tamil-owned land has also been given by the Mahaweli Authority and the Housing Authority to Sinhala settlers, despite a court order preventing this. Sinhala fishermen, Buddhist monks, and the police also harassed and intimidated Tamil fishermen, destroying their equipment and thereby depriving them of their livelihoods.<sup>126</sup>

The military and the Mahaweli authority have also worked to support renewed settlements in the Manal Aru/Weli Oya region. The area remains under restrictive military control and is difficult for outsiders to access. About 4,000 new settlers arrived between 2012 and 2017,<sup>127</sup> although the Mahaweli Authority had planned for more.<sup>128</sup> A further twenty-five families were settled in 2018 on newly appropriated land under the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government; the settlers included relatives of ministers.<sup>129</sup> A military officer working on the settlements set out their intentions in the following way: “We have a long-term plan here... With the war finished we have to make the Sinhala man the most present in all parts of the country.”<sup>130</sup> A new settler asserted the need to take back what is rightfully Sinhalese land: “What matters more to us is that we are where we belong in this land – us Sinhalese men should be taking more land further North and this is just the start.”<sup>131</sup>

Further settlements are taking place just outside the Weli Oya area along the Kivul Oya, where land has been deforested. An estimated 2,000 people had been settled in the Nedunkerny

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<sup>123</sup> *Id.* at 18.

<sup>124</sup> Endless War, *supra* note 96, at 5.

<sup>125</sup> PEARL, *Sinhalization of the North-East: Kokkilai*, at 10 (Sept. 2019), <https://pearlaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Sinhalization-of-the-North-East-Kokkilai.pdf>.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*; *Mullaitivu court rules against Fisheries Department and declares contested coastal land belongs to Tamil fishermen*, Tamil Guardian (Apr. 7, 2018), <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/mullaitivu-court-rules-against-fisheries-department-and-declares-contested-coastal-land>.

<sup>127</sup> Endless War, *supra* note 96, at 9.

<sup>128</sup> In 2010, the military declared that 25,000 families would be settled in System L. The Long Shadow of War, *supra* note 14, at 22.

<sup>129</sup> Endless War, *supra* note 96, at 8.

<sup>130</sup> Kelegama, *supra* note 5, at 2003.

<sup>131</sup> *Id.* at 2017.

divisional secretariat area in Vavuniya District, by 2020 with plans for more. Each family is being given 2.5 acres of land and an allowance of Rs. 800 a month.<sup>132</sup> The Mahaweli Authority has also revived plans of settlements in the Western Vanni along the Malwathu river. These settlements were first conceived by Mahaweli officials in the 1980s and were intended to work with the settlements in the Eastern borders of the Vanni as a double-pronged attack on the territorial contiguity of the Tamil-speaking regions. According to a Mahaweli official involved in the planning, the settlements would effectively encircle the Jaffna peninsula and the "insular Jaffna people who dislike their brother Sinhalese, would thus be contained by a twin fork driven deep into their dreamland."<sup>133</sup> In the aftermath of the war, the Mahaweli acquired 1,100 acres of land in the Cheddikulam division, close to the Malwathu river, and the existing community lives in constant fear of displacement.<sup>134</sup>

The Sinhalization of Mullativu has also included coercive processes of cultural dispossession, stripping Tamils of access to land and sites that have cultural meanings and attachments. An important example of this is the Athi Ayyanar temple on the Kurunthurmalai hill in Mullaitivu. The site is a long-established place of Hindu worship, but in 2018, Galgamuwa Shantha Bodhi, a militant Buddhist monk, led an invasion of the site by Sinhala-Buddhist activists. They arrived with construction materials and attempted to install a Buddha statue. Tamils resisted, including by taking the matter to court. The local Mullaitivu Magistrate ruled that any construction on the site would be illegal. Overriding these, in 2021, a Sri Lankan government minister led an event alongside the military and the archaeology department to install a Buddhist statue on the site, and since then, Tamils have not been able to access the site. Alongside this, a Buddhist monk has also (illegally) blocked Tamils in the village adjoining the hill from cultivating their fields. The Mullaitivu District Tamil judge who had issued orders based on the illegality of the Buddhist constructions was forced to flee the island in September 2023 because of threats to his life.<sup>135</sup>

The Neeraveeyadi Pillayar temple in Chemmalai has been subject to similar processes of coercive cultural dispossession.<sup>136</sup> At the end of the war, an army camp was established at the site of the temple. The commander of the 593 Brigade, working with a Buddhist monk, Medhalankara Thero, built a large Buddhist statue on the site of the temple. The monk invoked ideas associated with the "Sinhala-Buddhist heritage of the North-East" to claim that the temple had been built on top of a pre-existing Buddhist site. The military supported the monk's claims and built an archaeology museum opposite the temple, displaying artefacts which it claimed belonged to the Buddhist temple. Local Tamils took the matter to the Mullaitivu Magistrate's court, which ruled in favour of the temple, recognizing that the temple had indeed existed and allowing both Buddhist and Hindu worship. Yet, the site continues to be a target for aggressive Sinhalization efforts. When Kolamba Medhalankara Thero died in

<sup>132</sup> Endless War, *supra* note 96, at 9.

<sup>133</sup> Gunaratne, *supra* note 12, at 30.

<sup>134</sup> Endless War, *supra* note 96, at 12.

<sup>135</sup> *Tamil judge flees Sri Lanka amidst threats, highlighting grave human rights concerns - TGTE*, Tamil Guardian (Sept. 30, 2023),

<https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-judge-flees-sri-lanka-amidst-threats-highlighting-grave-human-rights-concerns-tgte>; *Mullaitivu District Judge flees country amidst death threats*, Tamil Guardian (Sept. 28, 2023), <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/mullaitivu-district-judge-flees-country-amidst-death-threats>.

<sup>136</sup> *Sinhalization of the North-East: Kokkilai*, *supra* note 125, at 8-9.

September 2019, he was cremated at the temple grounds despite the protests of the Tamil community who believe that dead bodies desecrate the purity of the temple. They had obtained a court injunction against the cremation, yet it went ahead with police protection and was led by the hardline Buddhist monk Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero of the Sinhala ultra-nationalist Bodu Bala Sena.<sup>137</sup>

The Kuchchaveli division of Trincomalee, that connects Mullaitivu to the Eastern province, has also been subject to sustained processes of Sinhalization; over 50 percent of the land area is now under the control of the state and state-backed agencies.<sup>138</sup> The largest proportion of this is the Forest Department, which has seized land under the guise of conservation. The Forest Department has in the past given over its land for Sinhala settlements.<sup>139</sup> Locals also report that the Forest Department land effectively becomes a resource that is exclusively available to Sinhalese: “The Sinhalese can go into the forest to cut down trees and take over the lands..” and while “no Sinhalese have been arrested and brought to court for cutting trees in the forest. But many Muslim people have been punished in court for this very reason.”<sup>140</sup> The Forestry Department’s acquisition of land accelerated when Gotabaya Rajapaksa was elected president, and by 2024, it held just under 30,000 acres in Kuchchaveli.<sup>141</sup>

Another element of the Sinhalization process in Kuchchaveli is the seizing of private and public land as well as Tamil religious sites for the construction of Buddhist temples or viharas. At least 26 new viharas have been constructed since the end of the war along with the seizure of approximately 3,887 acres of land.<sup>142</sup> A key figure in this is the Buddhist monk Panamure Thilakavansa (also known as Arismalai Bhikku) who was also a member of Gotabaya Rajapaksa’s Presidential Task Force for Archaeological Heritage Management in the North-East. Thilakavansa is the “driving force” pushing the construction of viharas in Kuchchaveli and the “Archaeology Department, Forest Department and even the security forces, function under his guidance and planning.”<sup>143</sup> In Thennaimaravadi and Sembimalai – as in Kurunthoormalai and Chemmalai in Mullaitivu - the viharas have been constructed on sites that were customarily Tamil Hindu places of worship. These sites have now been converted into Sinhala-Buddhist sites of worship and Tamil worship has been prohibited. Land surrounding the viharas is also routinely seized as part of the Sinhalization process. This has happened in places such as Thennaimaravadi, Pulmoddai, Thiriyai, Ilanthaikulam and Sembimalai, where agricultural lands have been seized from Tamil and Muslim communities in areas surrounding new viharas.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> *Extremist Buddhist monk leads funeral rites in Hindu temple grounds despite court injunction*, Tamil Guardian (Sept. 24, 2019), <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/extremist-buddhist-monk-leads-funeral-rites-hindu-temple-grounds-despite-court-injunction>; *SL Military wants to cremate remains of controversial monk inside temple premises*, TamilNet (Sept. 21, 2019), <https://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=39582>.

<sup>138</sup> Trincomalee Under Siege, *supra* note 15, at 4.

<sup>139</sup> *Id.* at 11.

<sup>140</sup> *Id.* at 18.

<sup>141</sup> *Id.* at 8.

<sup>142</sup> *Id.* at 12.

<sup>143</sup> *Id.* at 15.

<sup>144</sup> *Id.* at 12-20.

Sinhalization has also been advanced through commercial ventures in tourism and natural resource extraction. Lanka Mineral Sands mines for ilmenite in Pulmoddai and the Raigam Wayamba Sands acquired 1,800 acres of land in Kumburupiddi to establish the largest saltern on the island. The ilmenite mining has defoliated about 2,000 acres of land along the coast, but locals have not been provided any compensatory employment and instead Sinhalese workers are brought in from the South.<sup>145</sup> Meanwhile, the Kumburupiddi saltern displaced about 500 fishing families without providing an alternative source of income.<sup>146</sup> The Raigam company also contributes to other aspects of the Sinhalization process and has worked along with the Navy to help build the nine new viharas in Kumburupiddi village.<sup>147</sup> Finally, the expansion of tourism is also linked to state agencies and political leaders closely associated with the Sinhalization process. The army has been given 50 acres to build hotels in the Naavalcholai area<sup>148</sup> and the Jungle Beach Resort, between Kuchchaveli and Kumburupiddi, is linked to the Rajapaksa family and was built on land forcibly appropriated from Tamil cultivators.<sup>149</sup> In all these cases, the commercial exploitation of land and its resources has benefitted Sinhalese commercial interests and workers whilst dispossessing local communities of land, access to land and livelihoods.

The same multi-faceted and multi-agency Sinhalization processes have also been underway in other parts of the Trincomalee district targeting land, resources and cultural sites in areas such as Mutur, Kinnya and Verugal, which continue to have Tamil and Muslim majorities. Sinhalization efforts have also resumed in earnest in neighbouring Batticaloa, the only remaining district in the Eastern province that has a Tamil majority.<sup>150</sup> The Sinhalization efforts here have been focussed on the cattle farmers in Myilathumadhu Madhavani, an area within the Mahaweli System B.

In the Jaffna Peninsula, Sinhalization processes have been concentrated in and around the Valikamam North High Security Zone. The area contains two productive harbours, the Palaly airport and valuable agricultural land.<sup>151</sup> The HSZ was initially established in 1983 and at its height it took up over 6,000 acres of land, displacing 90,000 people.<sup>152</sup> In 2011, after much domestic and international campaigning, about 50,000 people were allowed to return, but at the same time, an additional 6,000 acres were taken.<sup>153</sup> The people who lost their lands to the

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<sup>145</sup> Built under Raigam Eastern Salt company's sister corporation, Eastern Salt Ltd. Raigam. Our Experience, Raigam Wayamba Salterns PLC, [https://www.wayambasalterns.lk/experience\\_detail.html](https://www.wayambasalterns.lk/experience_detail.html) (last visited August 2, 2024); N. Lohathayalan, Devastation in the Name of Development: Ilmenite Mining in Tamil Areas, Colombo Telegraph (Jan. 12, 2022), <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/devastation-in-the-name-of-development-ilmenite-mining-in-tamil-areas>.

<sup>146</sup> Trincomalee Under Siege, *supra* note 15, at 9.

<sup>147</sup> *Id.* at 20.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Id.* at 8. For more details about the "Jungle Beach Resort," see Endless War, *supra* note 96.

<sup>150</sup> See Figure 1 in the Appendix.

<sup>151</sup> *Satellite images show that the High Security Zone is not being used as intended*, Sri Lanka Campaign (Aug. 21, 2014), <https://srilankacampaign.org/satellite-images-show-that-the-high-security-zone-is-not-being-used-as-intended/>.

<sup>152</sup> PEARL, *Sinhalization of the North-East: Kankesanthurai*, <https://pearlaction.org/sinhalization-of-the-North-East-kankesanthurai/> (last visited May 23, 2025).

<sup>153</sup> The Long Shadow of War, *supra* note 14, at 15.

HSZ continue to live in cramped and squalid camps in Jaffna while the military is making commercial use of the land and resources it now controls. It farms the land and sells the produce at below market prices and has also established a tourist resort.<sup>154</sup> The Myliddy and Kankesanthurai harbours also fall within the HSZ. Myliddy used to produce one third of the island's total fishing before the war, but output has now dropped by ninety percent.<sup>155</sup> There are reports however that the military supports Sinhala fishermen from the South to make use of the harbour while blocking the access of Tamil fishermen.<sup>156</sup> Kankesanthurai was once a thriving port but its development was constrained by Sinhala nationalist opposition. The military's presence in and around the harbour began during the war but has since been entrenched. The military's presence has prevented the area from returning to normal civilian life but has supported processes of Sinhalization through the construction of Buddhist temples.<sup>157</sup>

The heavy military presence in the region prevents the development of these valuable economic assets in ways that would benefit Tamil communities. While the military seeks to appropriate and control the economic value that comes from the region, it has also been a key agent in the processes of destroying and appropriating Tamil cultural assets. In Myliddy, for example, the military destroyed a 400-year-old temple and a 200-year-old church to make way for accommodation for senior military officers.<sup>158</sup> Likewise, military-led Sinhalization efforts have also targeted the Maviddapuram temple and Thaiyiddi, where a Buddhist temple has been built on privately owned land despite the ongoing protests of the landowners.<sup>159</sup>

The election of the National People's Power (NPP) government in 2024 has not visibly constrained ongoing Sinhalization efforts across the North-East. On May 10, 2025, Galgamuwa Shantha Bodhi, the hardline monk who spearheaded the destruction of the Athi Ayyanar temple on Kurunthoormalai, along with officials from the archaeology department, threatened and harassed Tamil farmers who tried to cultivate their fields in the areas surrounding the temple. The police then arrested the farmers. Likewise, the government has failed to act on behalf of Tamil landowners in Thaiyiddi, whose property was illegally seized by the military to build a fortified vihara. The All Ceylon Buddhist Congress, emboldened by its success in overcoming Tamil resistance, has now written to the government demanding that it seize an additional eight acres of land to build an expanded Buddhist zone – with an educational facility, a monastery, a rest pavilion and landscaped gardens.<sup>160</sup> The ongoing momentum of these Sinhalization processes is a testament to their deep embeddedness and resilience. The following section shows how Sinhalization works as an anti-development machine, inhibiting development for the Tamil communities it impacts but also for Sinhalese communities as well.

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<sup>154</sup> *Id.* at 15-17.

<sup>155</sup> Endless War, *supra* note 96, at 5.

<sup>156</sup> Interview by PEARL with local officials [names withheld] (April 2025).

<sup>157</sup> Sinhalization of the North-East: Kankesanthurai, *supra* note 152.

<sup>158</sup> Endless War, *supra* note 96, at 23.

<sup>159</sup> Sinhalization of the North-East: Kankesanthurai, *supra* note 152.

<sup>160</sup> *What is the Tissa Vihara in Jaffna?*, Tamil Guardian (Feb. 13, 2025), <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/what-tissa-vihara-jaffna>.



## Section 2: The Anti-Development Machine

Beginning in the 1930s, successive Sinhala-nationalist governments have used state power and resources to pursue the Sinhalization of the North-East. They have often done so under the guise of development. The term development has multiple meanings. In the most basic form, development can mean an expansion of economic activity, measured as an increase in gross domestic product or more simply an economic return on investments. A fuller understanding of development would involve improvements in welfare and living standards measured by indicators such as the Human Development Index or the Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index. In its most complete form, development means genuine autonomy, that is the capacity to freely choose and pursue a fulfilling life plan.<sup>161</sup>

The pursuit of Sinhalization over the decades has not met any of these criteria of development and arguably it has had anti-development effects in that it has inhibited and obstructed actual processes of development. At the simplest level, the most resource-intensive Sinhalization processes, state-sponsored irrigation and Sinhala settlement schemes, have never produced returns on the considerable amounts of capital invested in them. In this sense, they have been a waste of public resources. Beyond this, Sinhalization also involves depriving Tamils of their land, economic resources or access to land, and in this way, Sinhalization reduces productive economic activity by dispossessing Tamils. The anti-developmental effects of Sinhalization on Tamils are easy to see: it is materially impoverishing, which impacts the well-being of communities. At a broader level, Sinhalization is also aimed at making Tamils economically subordinate or dependent while destroying the territorial basis of their claim for political autonomy. In this way, it makes development as autonomy impossible for Tamils within the Sinhala-Buddhist state.

Finally, Sinhalization also has anti-developmental effects on the Sinhalese communities directly affected by it but also more broadly for Sinhalese and Muslim peoples. First, there is the opportunity cost of the considerable resources that have been spent over the decades on state-sponsored colonization schemes that have consistently failed to provide returns on investment. These resources could have been better spent elsewhere that would have produced better material outcomes. Second, Sinhalization has fuelled ethnic enmity, polarization and conflict. The costs of this have been largely borne by Tamil people and lands but also by Sinhalese people and areas. There are the immediate costs of deaths and disruption from conflict-related violence and the broader costs of the constraints on economic activity and investment. At the conceptual level, the commitment to Sinhalization stems from an understanding of Tamils as a perpetual threat. This paranoia precludes other forms of conceiving development and the use of development resources, which could have produced expansions of material well-being without fuelling ethnic enmity and conflict. The failure to imagine other forms of development clearly impoverishes Tamils and the Tamil-speaking areas, but it also impoverishes everyone else.

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<sup>161</sup> Patricia Northover, *Development as freedom*, and Robert B. Potter, *Measuring development: From GDP to the HDI and wider approaches*, in *The Companion to Development Studies*, Third Edition (Vandana Desai & Robert B. Potter eds., 2014).

The failure of Sinhalization as development in the most basic form of expanding returns on investment is readily apparent in the state-sponsored colonization schemes. By 1947, there were already twelve major colonization schemes in place, and then soon after independence, in 1949, the government launched the Gal Oya Multi-Purpose project. The cost of these schemes was truly staggering. At a time when ninety-three per cent of the population earned below Rs. 100 a month, the pre-independence schemes cost a total of Rs. 30, 000 million for approximately 3,000 settlers, working out at Rs. 10,000 per settler.<sup>162</sup> Each settler therefore costs ten times more than the annual income of almost everyone on the island. The Gal Oya schemes cost just under Rs. 76,000 per settler family and were therefore slightly less expensive than the pre-independence schemes, but still amounted to several multiples of average income.<sup>163</sup> More importantly, the schemes also failed to produce a return on their investments. A 1970 evaluation of the Gal Oya scheme found that the “*ex post* benefit/cost ratio for the Project was 0.5, with discounted costs exceeding benefits by Rs. 277 million.” The evaluation noted further that “even if capital had been available at zero interest rate, the Project would not have paid its way.”<sup>164</sup>

The Mahaweli Project was also both costly and unproductive. In its day, it was the largest foreign aid project in the world.<sup>165</sup> Between 1979 and 1983, \$943 million was spent on Mahaweli projects, constituting just over a third of all of the project aid spent in that period.<sup>166</sup> This amounted to twelve percent of all government expenditure in the same period.<sup>167</sup> This sizable investment did not however yield the expected returns. The scheme was expected to redress overcrowding in the wet zone, redress Sinhala landlessness, achieve self-sufficiency in paddy production, produce electricity, and establish a productive and resilient society of Sinhala peasant proprietors.<sup>168</sup> It failed to achieve any of its objectives.<sup>169</sup> A Mahaweli study in 1993 found that the economic gains were far below expectations. A World Bank evaluation from 2004 also graded the outcomes of its Mahaweli loans as “highly unsatisfactory,” noting the “extremely limited” development outcomes of the schemes with the mean incomes of the settlers falling to below poverty levels.<sup>170</sup> Studies of household livelihood indicators between 1980 and 2001 likewise show “profound deteriorations” among “settlers and resettlers.”<sup>171</sup>

The Mahaweli Scheme, like the Gal Oya project and the previous settlement projects, failed to produce resilient and productive agricultural communities. Instead, the schemes acquired a “miserable reputation due to their lacklustre social amenities and line services, inefficient irrigation management and weak culture of community participation,” and became sites of

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<sup>162</sup> Satchi Ponnambalam, *Dependent Capitalism in Crisis: The Sri Lankan Economy, 1948-1980* 14 (1980).

<sup>163</sup> *Id.* at 22.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> Herring, *supra* note 20, at 149.

<sup>166</sup> See Levy, *supra* note 21, at 442.

<sup>167</sup> See Department of Census and Statistics, *Census of Ceylon 1946*, Vol. I, Part II: *Statistical Digest*. Colombo: Department of Census and Statistics. <http://www.repo.statistics.gov.lk/handle/1/413>

<sup>168</sup> Muggah, *supra* note 9, at 107.

<sup>169</sup> *Id.* at 90, 115.

<sup>170</sup> The World Bank, *Project Performance Reassessment Report - Sri Lanka: Third Mahaweli Ganga Development Project* (June 28, 2004), quoted in Rajesh Venugopal, *Nationalism, Development and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka* 91 (2018).

<sup>171</sup> Muggah, *supra* note 9, at 90.

“discontent, vice and poverty.”<sup>172</sup> The colonists were often reluctant settlers, moved by poverty or the absence of alternative opportunities.<sup>173</sup> Some were convicted criminals.<sup>174</sup> The absence of pre-existing social bonds among the colonists meant that leadership often went to “bullies and demagogues.”<sup>175</sup> There was also a culture of dependence on the government with the government seen as “the giver of all things.”<sup>176</sup> The conditions in the colonies are invariably quite poor, and government agencies provide incentives - in the form of rations, transfer payments and employment in the homeguards - to keep the colonists in place.<sup>177</sup> They also sometimes use coercion and intimidation.<sup>178</sup>

The state-sponsored colonization schemes have been Sri Lanka’s most resource-intensive forms of development. While they have been development failures, they have successfully advanced the Sinhalization project by moving “ethnically motivated Sinhala settlers into Tamil areas”<sup>179</sup> and radically transforming the demography of the Tamil-speaking areas, particularly the Eastern province.<sup>180</sup> The most immediate developmental losses of these schemes include the dispossession and displacement of Tamil-speaking communities and the destruction of their economic capacities and assets. There is also the loss of the substantial financial resources that were invested in these schemes without any return on investment. Despite almost a century of settlement schemes advanced under the guise of food self-sufficiency, Sri Lanka still needs to import essentials such as rice and coconuts.<sup>181</sup>

In addition to these costs, there is also the more substantial opportunity cost of the alternative forms and more productive forms of investment that were not taken because of the underlying commitment to Sinhalization. An expansion of agricultural output and productivity could have been pursued through a variety of other means that were less capital-intensive, including “improved farming techniques, better varieties of seed paddy, increased manuring, transplanting, and better organization of farmers and their fields.”<sup>182</sup> At the time of the Mahaweli project, the World Bank supported other agricultural projects that gave rates of return of between sixteen and thirty-two percent, well above the eleven percent that was then expected from the Mahaweli scheme.<sup>183</sup> Yet these projects were not pursued because they did not have the “arousal component of reestablishing the glory of Sinhala kings on Tamil territory.”<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> *Id.* at 80.

<sup>173</sup> Farmer, *supra* note 2, at 202; Muggah, *supra* note 9, at 85.

<sup>174</sup> Farmer, *supra* note 2, at 202. See also Muggah, *supra* note 9, at 108.

<sup>175</sup> Farmer, *supra* note 2, at 307.

<sup>176</sup> *Id.* at 288. See also Muggah, *supra* note 9, at 85.

<sup>177</sup> Muggah, *supra* note 9, at 126-127.

<sup>178</sup> Kelegama & Korf, *supra* note 5.

<sup>179</sup> Herring, *supra* note 20, at 150.

<sup>180</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>181</sup> *Dissanayake makes U-Turn on rice-import pledge*, Tamil Guardian (Nov. 23, 2024), <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/dissanayake-makes-u-turn-rice-import-pledge>. See also *Coconut chamber demands urgent import approval to avert dual crisis*, Daily Mirror Online (Jan. 22, 2025), <https://www.dailymirror.lk/business-main/Coconut-chamber-demands-urgent-import-approval-to-avert-dual-crisis/245-300632>.

<sup>182</sup> Ponnambalam, *supra* note 162, at 21.

<sup>183</sup> Levy, *supra* note 21, at 447.

<sup>184</sup> Herring, *supra* note 20, at 152.

Amidst Sri Lanka's recurrent balance of payments crises, with 2022 as the most severe, Sinhalization has been one of the most long-standing, resource-intensive and wasteful projects pursued by Sri Lankan state elites. At three significant moments when Sri Lanka experienced a much-needed inflow of investible resources, state elites used these resources to fund Sinhalization projects. The first such moment was in the early 1950s when Sri Lanka's exports were buoyant because of the Korean war boom, the second was the inflow of foreign aid during the peak Mahaweli era (1979-1983), and the third was the inflow of foreign aid for reconstruction and rehabilitation in the immediate post-war era, roughly 2009-12. At each of these moments, state elites have pursued Sinhalization more or less covertly under the guise of development. However, as shown above, Sinhalization actually works as an anti-development machine. It wastes valuable resources and produces ethnic dispossession leading to conflict and polarization whilst also preventing alternative forms of development that would increase material well-being and pacify ethnic relations.

In the post-2009 era, Sinhalization has been advanced by a nexus of state organizations, including the military, the Mahaweli authority, private interests, sections of the Buddhist clergy along with the Forestry, Wildlife Conservation, Tourism and Archaeology departments. In sites of active Sinhalization, this nexus operates almost as a state within a state, seemingly beyond both legal and political control. The new NPP government has not been able to rein in this nexus of actors. It has not made progress on removing the military's control of thousands of acres of valuable land and economic assets in Valikamam North. It has failed to return the land illegally taken by the Thaiyddy vihara back to its rightful owners and was seemingly caught off guard by its own officials' attempt in March 2025 to mass-confiscate land in the Tamil-speaking areas. The continuation of this powerful state-linked nexus committed to Sinhalization means that land in the Tamil-speaking areas will continue to be at risk of forcible dispossession. This is of course an immediate problem for the Tamils as it affects their prospects for future development. The experience of the past suggests that the next time Sri Lanka experiences an inflow of investible resources, this nexus of actors will actively seek to divert these resources towards Sinhalization and away from more productive ends. In this way, the Sinhalization project, and the powerful network of institutions that advances it, are also an impediment to development across the island. In other words, the Sinhalization machine is also an anti-development machine. The following section sets out recommendations for addressing Sinhalization and its harmful effects.

## Recommendations

### To the Sri Lankan Government

- Publicly commit to a time-bound process for releasing all private and public lands in the Tamil-speaking areas that are currently occupied by the military, and take concrete steps to fulfil that commitment.
- Publicly commit to a time-bound process for ending the military's presence in the Northern and Eastern provinces and take concrete steps to fulfil that commitment.
- End the use of government institutions such as the Department of Archaeology, Forest Department and Department of Wildlife Conservation and other state bodies as tools to appropriate and reclassify Tamil lands in the North-East under cultural or administrative pretexts. Publicly remand officials from these departments when they work to appropriate and reclassify Tamil lands in defiance of government policy.
- Ensure pledges on land return are time-bound, transparent, adequately reviewed and recorded, and publicly available.

### To Other States

- Recognize the distinction between Sinhalization and land disputes. Recognize Sinhalization as a state-backed coercive process intended to change ethnic demography that is distinct in its reliance on state power and political intentions from land disputes, which involve competing claims over land and land rights that are pursued by all claimants for purposes other than changing ethnic demography.
- Publicly rebuke instances of Sinhalization as a violation of rights and the rule of law and an impediment to development and to resolving the ethnic conflict. Publicly rebuke government agencies and officials engaged in Sinhalization.
- Prohibit government agencies and officials engaged in Sinhalization from accessing development aid, other forms of official financial assistance, and forms of official diplomatic recognition and support.
- Publicly demand that the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) release all private and public lands in the Tamil-speaking areas that are currently occupied by the military.
- Publicly demand that the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) reduce the military's presence in the Northern province to one that is comparable in scale (in terms of per capita military personnel, land footprint, etc.) to the mean levels across the other provinces of the island.

### International & Local Civil Society

- Recognize the distinction between Sinhalization and land disputes. Recognize Sinhalization as a state-backed coercive process intended to change ethnic demography that is distinct in its reliance on state power and political intentions from

land disputes, which involve competing claims over land and land rights that are pursued by all claimants for purposes other than changing ethnic demography.

- Publicly rebuke instances of Sinhalization as a violation of rights and the rule of law and an impediment to development and to resolving the ethnic conflict. Publicly rebuke government agencies and officials engaged in Sinhalization.
- Publicly demand that the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) release all private and public lands in the Tamil-speaking areas that are currently occupied by the military
- Publicly demand that the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) reduce the military's presence in the Northern province to one that is comparable in scale (in terms of per capita military personnel, land footprint, etc.) to the mean levels across the other provinces of the island.
- Engage the Sinhala public on the importance of a meaningful political solution for lasting peace in the country, including by challenging the dominant narrative of the war and the roots of the conflict.
- Engage the Sinhala public on the anti-developmental consequences of the Sinhalization project.

# Appendices

**Figure 1: Population by Ethnic Group and District (1981, 2001, 2012)**

**Source:** Sri Lanka Department of Census and Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing* (1981, 2001, 2012), Table 2.11: “Population by Ethnic Group and District” (Sinhala/Tamil/English).

වගුව 2.11: ජාතිය සහ දිස්ත්‍රික්ක අනුව ජනගහනය, සංගණන 1981, 2001, 2012  
 அட்டவணை 2.11 : 1981, 2001, 2012 ஆம் ஆண்டு தொகைமதிப்பில் இனத்தொகுதிப்படையும், மாவட்டப்படையும் சனத்தொகை

**Table 2.11: Population by Ethnic group and District, Census 1981, 2001, 2012**

(ගණන எண்ணிக்கை Number)

දිස්ත්‍රික්කය	மாவட்டம்	District	1981							
			එකතුව மொத்தம் Total	සිංහල சிங்களவர் Sinhalese	ශ්‍රී ලංකා දෙමළ இலங்கைத் தமிழர் Sri Lankan Tamil	ඉන්දියානු දෙමළ இந்தியத் தமிழர் Indian Tamil	ශ්‍රී ලංකා මුස්ලිම් இலங்கைச் சோனகர் Sri Lankan Moor	ලංසි புறங்கியர் Burgher	මලේ மலாயர் Malay	අනිකුත් ஏனையோர் Others
ශ්‍රී ලංකාව	இலங்கை	Sri Lanka	14,846,750	10,979,568	1,886,864	818,656	1,046,927	39,374	46,963	28,398
කොළඹ	கொழும்பு	Colombo	1,699,241	1,318,835	170,590	19,824	139,743	19,688	22,233	8,328
ගම්පහ	கம்பஹா	Gampaha	1,390,862	1,279,512	48,182	5,919	37,826	8,423	8,675	2,325
කළුතර	கலுத்தறை	Kalutara	829,704	723,483	9,744	33,659	61,159	431	762	466
කන්ඩු	கண்டி	Kandy	1,048,317	778,801	52,791	98,436	109,779	2,122	2,755	3,633
මාතලේ	மாதத்தளை	Matale	357,354	285,354	20,579	24,912	24,995	272	574	668
නුවර එළිය	நுவரெலியா	Nuwara - Eliya	603,577	254,375	76,449	257,478	12,163	696	1,136	1,280
ගාල්ල	காலி	Galle	814,531	769,343	7,271	11,056	25,678	288	186	709
මාතර	மாதத்தறை	Matara	643,786	608,516	4,683	13,875	16,122	205	79	306
හම්බන්තොට	அம்பாந்தோட்டை	Hambantota	424,344	412,055	2,500	284	4,899	82	4,445	79
යාපනය	யாழ்ப்பாணம்	Jaffna	830,552	6,659	790,385	19,980	12,958	383	72	115
මන්නාරම	மன்னார்	Mannar	106,235	8,683	54,474	13,850	27,717	36	35	1,440
වවුනියා	வவுனியா	Vavuniya	95,428	15,794	54,179	18,714	6,505	25	34	177
මුලතිව්	முல்லைத்தீவு	Mullaitivu	77,189	3,992	58,209	11,215	3,651	95	19	8
බට්ටකලපුව	மட்டக்களப்பு	Batticaloa	330,333	11,255	233,713	4,074	78,829	2,292	46	124
අම්පාර	அம்பாறை	Ampara	388,970	146,943	77,826	1,411	161,568	697	168	357
ත්‍රිකුණාමලය	திருகோணமலை	Trincomalee	255,948	85,503	87,760	5,372	75,039	1,169	831	274
කුරුණෑගල	கुरुணாகல்	Kurunegala	1,211,801	1,125,912	14,920	6,616	60,791	562	1,259	1,741
පුත්තලම	புத்தளம்	Puttalam	492,533	407,067	32,282	2,289	49,000	440	954	501
අනුරාධපුරය	அனுராதபுரம்	Anuradhapura	587,929	535,834	8,026	719	41,777	228	338	1,007
පොළොන්නරුව	பொலன்னுறை	Polonnaruwa	261,563	238,965	5,267	124	16,636	59	109	403
බදුල්ල	பதுளை	Badulla	640,952	443,024	37,520	129,498	26,600	613	1,419	2,278
මොණරාගල	மொனராகலை	Monaragala	273,570	253,572	5,346	8,859	5,312	70	193	218
රත්නපුරය	இரத்தினபுரி	Ratnapura	797,087	677,510	19,094	84,740	13,791	342	412	1,198
කෑගල්ල	கேகாலை	Kegalle	684,944	588,581	15,074	45,752	34,389	156	229	763

**2.11 වෙනි වගුව (සම්බන්ධයි ) අட்டවணை 2.11(தொடர்ச்சி) Table 2.11(Contd.)**

දිස්ත්‍රික්කය	மாவட்டம்	District	2001									
			එකතුව மொத்தம் Total	සිංහල சிங்களவர் Sinhalese	ශ්‍රී ලංකා දෙමළ இலங்கைத் தமிழர் Sri Lankan Tamil	ඉන්දියානු දෙමළ இந்தியத் தமிழர் Indian Tamil	ශ්‍රී ලංකා මුස්ලිම් இலங்கைச் சோனகர் Sri Lankan Moor	ලංසි புறங்கியர் Burgher	මලේ மலாயர் Malay	ශ්‍රී ලංකා චෙට්ටි இலங்கைச் செட்டி Sri Lanka Chetty	හාරත பரதர் Bharatha	අනිකුත් ஏனையோர் Others
ශ්‍රී ලංකාව	இலங்கை	Sri Lanka	18,797,257 <sup>(1)</sup>	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
කොළඹ	கொழும்பு	Colombo	2,251,274	1,724,459	247,739	24,821	202,731	15,703	21,778	1,499	767	11,777
ගම්පහ	கம்பஹா	Gampaha	2,063,684	1,877,545	65,302	7,621	78,705	11,093	13,683	6,361	780	2,594
කළුතර	கலுத்தறை	Kalutara	1,066,239	928,914	12,665	28,895	93,293	836	973	238	22	403
කන්ඩු	கண்டி	Kandy	1,279,028	947,900	52,052	103,622	168,049	2,128	2,668	349	49	2,211
මාතලේ	மாதத்தளை	Matale	441,328	353,579	24,320	23,493	38,462	402	523	101	4	444
නුවර එළිය	நுவரெலியா	Nuwara - Eliya	703,610	282,621	46,066	355,830	16,555	632	1,059	108	26	713
ගාල්ල	காலி	Galle	990,487	934,751	11,079	9,275	34,688	208	178	95	17	196
මාතර	மாதத்தறை	Matara	761,370	716,974	5,161	16,672	22,133	179	87	59	4	101
හම්බන්තොට	அம்பாந்தோட்டை	Hambantota	526,414	510,965	1,869	424	5,646	88	7,255	21	3	143
යාපනය	யாழ்ப்பாணம்	Jaffna	490,621 <sup>(1)</sup>	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
මන්නාරම	மன்னார்	Mannar	151,577 <sup>(1)</sup>	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
වවුනියා	வவுனியா	Vavuniya	149,835 <sup>(1)</sup>	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
මුලතිව්	முல்லைத்தீவு	Mullaitivu	121,667 <sup>(1)</sup>	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
කිලිනොච්චි	கிளிநொச்சி	Kilinochchi	127,263 <sup>(1)</sup>	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
බට්ටකලපුව	மட்டக்களப்பு	Batticaloa	486,447 <sup>(1)</sup>	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
අම්පාර	அம்பாறை	Ampara	592,997	236,583	109,188	715	244,620	1,184	225	136	19	327
ත්‍රිකුණාමලය	திருகோணமலை	Trincomalee	340,158 <sup>(1)</sup>	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
කුරුණෑගල	கुरुணாகல்	Kurunegala	1,460,215	1,341,237	17,585	2,972	94,544	613	2,150	221	67	826
පුත්තලම	புத்தளம்	Puttalam	709,677	523,116	48,072	2,227	133,134	735	1,214	674	34	471
අනුරාධපුරය	அனுராதபுரம்	Anuradhapura	745,693	676,073	5,073	443	61,989	179	279	329	7	1,321
පොළොන්නරුව	பொலன்னுறை	Polonnaruwa	358,984	324,403	7,034	194	27,075	62	48	65	1	102
බදුල්ල	பதுளை	Badulla	779,983	564,752	29,542	143,535	38,798	583	1,813	184	264	512
මොණරාගල	மொனராகலை	Monaragala	397,375	375,691	5,754	7,493	7,800	124	127	73	78	235
රත්නපුරය	இரத்தினபுரி	Ratnapura	1,015,807	882,017	28,740	82,591	20,690	343	444	102	8	872
කෑගල්ල	கேகாலை	Kegalle	785,524	674,665	14,908	44,202	50,419	191	278	172	15	674



2.11 වෙනි වගුව (සම්බන්ධයි) அட்டவணை 2.11(தொடர்ச்சி) Table 2.11(Contd.)

දිස්ත්‍රික්කය	மாவட்டம்	District	2012 <sup>(2)</sup>							
			එකතුව மொத்தம் Total	සිංහල சிங்களவர் Sinhalese	ශ්‍රී ලංකා දෙමළ இலங்கைத் தமிழர் Sri Lankan Tamil	ඉන්දියානු දෙමළ இந்தியத் தமிழர் Indian Tamil	ශ්‍රී ලංකා මුස්ලිම් இலங்கைச் சோனகர் Sri Lankan Moor	ලංසි புறங்கியர் Burgher	මලායා மலாயர் Malay	අනිකුත් ஏனையோர் Others
ශ්‍රී ලංකාව	இலங்கை	Sri Lanka	20,359,439	15,250,081	2,269,266	839,504	1,892,638	38,293	44,130	25,527
කොළඹ	கொழும்பு	Colombo	2,324,349	1,778,971	235,090	24,289	249,609	13,306	14,444	8,640
ගම්පහ	கம்பஹா	Gampaha	2,304,833	2,086,469	81,245	9,137	97,621	10,784	12,720	6,857
කළුතර	கலுத்தறை	Kalutara	1,221,948	1,060,107	23,035	23,217	113,320	1,188	689	392
මහනුවර	கண்டி	Kandy	1,375,382	1,023,488	69,210	85,111	191,570	2,384	2,444	1,175
මාතලේ	மாதத்தளை	Matale	484,531	391,305	24,279	23,238	44,786	386	392	145
නුවර එළිය	நுவரெலியா	Nuwara - Eliya	711,644	282,053	32,563	377,637	17,652	761	543	435
ලාල්ල	காலி	Galle	1,063,334	1,003,722	13,953	6,146	38,790	256	106	361
මාතර	மாதர	Matara	814,048	767,580	8,772	12,127	25,254	131	58	126
හම්බන්තොට	அம்பாந்தோட்டை	Hambantota	599,903	582,301	2,105	120	6,629	146	8,164	438
යාපනය	யாழ்ப்பாணம்	Jaffna	583,882	2,284	577,338	1,807	2,162	126	23	142
මන්නාරම	மன்னார்	Mannar	99,570	2,305	80,103	692	16,436	12	11	11
වවුනියාව	வவுனியா	Vavuniya	172,115	17,138	141,144	1,979	11,748	58	8	40
මුලතිව්	முல்லைத்தீவு	Mullaitivu	92,238	8,927	79,107	2,281	1,821	49	11	42
කිලිනොච්චි	கிளிநொச்சி	Kilinochchi	113,510	1,331	110,494	1,030	629	1	2	23
බැට්තලම	மட்டக்களப்பு	Batticaloa	526,567	6,797	380,930	2,078	133,854	2,814	28	66
අම්පාර	அம்பாறை	Ampara	649,402	252,458	112,457	846	281,702	1,036	187	716
ත්‍රිකුණාමලය	திருகோணமலை	Trincomalee	379,541	101,483	116,646	1,227	158,771	966	356	92
කුරුණෑගල	கුருணாகல்	Kurunegala	1,618,465	1,479,863	18,041	2,594	115,302	663	1,220	782
පුත්තලම	புத்தளம்	Puttalam	762,396	560,838	48,341	1,953	147,546	1,152	631	1,935
අනුරාධපුරය	அனுராதபுரம்	Anuradhapura	860,575	782,808	4,728	477	70,692	246	161	1,463
පොළොන්නරුව	பொலன்னறுவை	Polonnaruwa	406,088	368,197	7,301	161	30,177	88	46	118
බදුල්ල	பதுளை	Badulla	815,405	595,372	21,880	150,484	44,716	992	1,351	610
මොණරාගල	மொனராகலை	Monaragala	451,058	428,104	8,206	5,001	9,508	116	63	60
රත්නපුරය	இரத்தினபுரி	Ratnapura	1,088,007	947,811	54,437	62,124	22,346	405	288	596
කෑගල්ල	கேகாலை	Kegalle	840,648	718,369	17,861	43,748	59,997	227	184	262

(1) ඇස්තමේන්තු மதிப்பீடு செய்யப்பட்ட Estimates

(2) ජන හා නිවාස සංඛ්‍යාව, 2012 අවසන් වාර්තා ඇසුරෙනි

(2) குடிசன, வீட்டுவசதித் தொகைமதிப்பு 2012 இறுதி அறிக்கையை அடிப்படையாகக் கொண்டது.

(2) Based on Census of Population and housing, 2012 Final Report

මූලාශ්‍රය - ජනලේඛන හා සංඛ්‍යාලේඛන දෙපාර්තමේන්තුව

ஆதாரம்-தொகைமதிப்பு, புள்ளிவிபரத் திணைக்களம்

Source : Department of Census & Statistics



**Figure 2: Mahaweli expenditure as a proportion of total government expenditure**

	Total Expenditure on Mahaweli \$millions <sup>185</sup>	Total Government Expenditure, Rs Millions <sup>186</sup>	LKR to US\$ exchange rate <sup>187</sup>	Total Government Expenditure in US\$	Total Government Expenditure in US\$ millions
1979	225.2	21,521,000,000	15.6	1,379,551,282	1379.6
1980	117.9	30,343,000,000	16.2	1,873,024,691	1873.0
1981	376.4	31,094,000,000	19	1,636,526,316	1636.5
1982	161.4	37,900,000,000	20.8	1,822,115,385	1822.1
1983	67.5	46,772,000,000	23.5	1,990,297,872	1990.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>948.4</b>			<b>8,701,515,546</b>	<b>8701.5</b>

Mahaweli expenditure 1979-1983 as a proportion of total government expenditure: 10.9%

<sup>185</sup> Brian Levy, *Foreign Aid in the Making of Economic Policy in Sri Lanka, 1977 – 1983*, 22 Policy Sciences 437, 449 (1989).

<sup>186</sup> Central Bank of Ceylon, *Annual Report 1983* (Colombo: Central Bank of Ceylon, 1983), xiv, accessed August 2025, <https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/en/publications/economic-and-financial-reports/annual-reports/annual-report-1983>.

<sup>187</sup> Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, “U.S. Dollar to Sri Lankan Rupee Exchange Rate (EXSLUS),” monthly data; figures averaged by author, accessed August 2025, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/data/EXSLUS>.





