IS THE CURE WORSE THAN THE DISEASE?

Reflections on COVID Governance in Sri Lanka

EDITED BY

Pradeep Peiris

IS THE CURE WORSE THAN THE DISEASE?

REFLECTIONS ON COVID GOVERNANCE IN SRI LANKA

EDITED BY
PRADEEP PEIRIS

Publisher: Social Indicator, Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), Colombo, Sri Lanka

Editor: Pradeep Peiris

ISBN 978-624-5914-01-2

Bar Code: 9 786245 914012

Cover photo credits: Nazly Ahmed

The Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) is an independent, non-partisan organisation that focuses primarily on issues of governance and conflict resolution. Formed in 1996 in the firm belief that the vital contribution of civil society to the public policy debate is in need of strengthening, CPA is committed to programmes of research and advocacy through which public policy is critiqued, and alternatives identified and disseminated.

Social Indicator (SI) is the survey research unit of the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) and was established in September 1999, filling a longstanding vacuum for a permanent, professional, and independent polling facility in Sri Lanka on social and political issues. Driven by the strong belief that polling is an instrument that empowers democracy, SI has been conducting polls on a large range of socio-economic and political issues since its inception.

Printer: Karunaratne & Sons (Pvt) Ltd.
65 C, Thalgahawila Road
Midellamulahena
Horana, Sri Lanka

Contents

Contributors

Bhavani Fonseka is a Senior Researcher and Attorney at Law with the Centre for Policy Alternatives, with a focus on research, national and international advocacy and public interest litigation. She is presently on the editorial board of the *International Journal on Transitional Justice* and a visiting lecturer at University of Colombo. She was an adviser to the Consultation Taskforce appointed by the Government of Sri Lanka in 2016 and a member of the drafting committee to formulate the National Human Rights Action Plan for Sri Lanka for the period 2017-2021.

Kaushini Dammalage is with the Social Scientists' Association. Her primary research interests are in gender studies, democracy, electoral politics, and the history of leftist politics in Sri Lanka. She has conducted research on the gendered processes of labour mobilisation in the plantations, and the party organisational strategies of the traditional left in Sri Lanka.

Hasini Lecamwasam is lecturer in Political Science at the Department of Political Science, University of Peradeniya, and co-editor of *Polity*, the English language magazine of the Social Scientists' Association. Her research interests include the Political Sociology of identity construction, democratising of education, and spatial politics.

Nipunika O. Lecamwasam is lecturer in Political Science attached to the Political Science and Sociology programme at the Royal Thimphu College, Bhutan. Her research interests span anthropology of development, youth, peace, and democracy research.

Sakina Moinudeen is a Researcher at Social Indicator, the survey research arm of the Centre for Policy Alternatives, and has extensive experience in both quantitative and qualitative methods of research. Her research experience has led her to deal with public perceptions and expectations of democracy and governance, literacy and nutritional aspects of development, and issues of war and peace with particular relevance to post-war and conflict societies.

Pradeep Peiris is senior lecturer at the Department of Political Science and Public Policy, University of Colombo, and founder of Social Indicator, the survey arm of the Centre for Policy Alternatives. He has published on a range of subjects from the federal debate in Sri Lanka to the state of democracy in Sri Lanka. His research interests include conflict resolution, gender, political parties, local government, and the state of democracy in South Asia.

Kushmila Ranasinghe is a Researcher at the Centre for Policy Alternatives. She graduated from the Faculty of Law, University of Colombo with an LLB and also holds a BSc. (Hons) in International Relations from the University of London.

Shashik Silva counts more than 15 years of experience as a survey researcher, quantitative analyst, and qualitative researcher. He has previously worked with Social Indicator, the survey research arm of Centre for Policy Alternatives, and the Applied Research Unit of UNOPS. He is presently Researcher and Administrative Manager at the Social Scientists' Association of Sri Lanka. His main research interests are in deciphering the multiple narratives of reconciliation in Sri Lanka, understanding citizens' aspirations for justice, and issues of inclusion and exclusion in local governance. He is a member of the World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR), and has presented his research at annual conferences organised by WAPOR Asia since 2019.

Foreword

In the Sri Lankan context, the possible long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are particularly disturbing. What public satisfaction prevails with the government is based on the relatively low number of deaths and infections. The public has not seen beyond their immediate health concerns to consider the impact of the pandemic on the key question of governance. And it is here that there is cause for serious concern.

COVID-19 has provided the government the perfect excuse for effective Executive aggrandisement and militarisation. Parliament did not sit for some 03 months, and therefore there was no legislative oversight of public finance. Management of the pandemic is through the Presidential Task Force headed by Army Commander Shavendra Silva, aside a number of other Task Forces staffed by current or former military personnel in the main, to ensure a disciplined society and to look into archaeological sites in the Eastern Province. The latter does not reflect the multi-ethnicity and pluralism of the Province. Regulations have become the order of the day with the President declaring that his pronouncements constitute government policy. Furthermore, there was a rush to introduce legislation such as the Port City Commission Bill, which nevertheless was challenged by political parties and the civil society in the Supreme Court. The bill had to be amended, before being passed, as per the Court's decision.

Militarisation has fed into this aggrandisement of Executive power made possible by the passage of the 20th Amendment removing checks and balances on the exercise of Executive power and authority. Apart from the Task Forces, military personnel with wide ranging powers have been appointed to the 25 districts as chief coordinators to facilitate quarantine requirements. Air-force drones

as well as "Sri Lanka Army Quick Reaction Riders Team" are used to apprehend those who violate quarantine regulations. Alongside this, the shrinking of the space for civil society, the harassment and intimidation of civil society actors in the North and East in particular, and the use of the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) continue. As with the experience of Emergency rule, the danger is that the practices and procedures adopted to combat the pandemic will come to be seen as normal, before it is too late.

This volume raises these questions in relation to a host of issues currently in society concerning democratic institutions, governance, welfare impact of the pandemic, ethnic relations, free education, migrant workers, and political patronage. I trust the volume will encourage discussion and debate on these issues, and thereby constitute a contribution to better governance and government in Sri Lanka.

Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu
Executive Director
Centre for Policy Alternatives

Preface and acknowledgements

Pandemics go far beyond mere public health crises, leaving an indelible mark on the contemporary social fabric. The tangible and intangible transformations emanating from pandemics that societies experience require intense probing. In the final analysis, the evanescent quality of human memory demands these events be critically chronicled to benefit future generations, not least to avoid the quicksand shores on which we find ourselves.

Is the Cure Worse than the Disease? Reflection on COVID Governance in Sri Lanka is the result of an initiative of Social Indicator (SI), the survey research arm of the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA). The 'Socio-Economic Index In the Face of COVID-19', an island wide opinion poll conducted from February-March 2021 by SI, aimed to capture the experiences and perceptions of Sri Lankans through the first and second waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings derived from this survey compelled a more in-depth consideration of many of the themes therein, leading to the idea of a research volume germinating in the minds of the project team.

Stemming from this context, this volume examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the political, economic, and social life of Sri Lankan society, and its' transformative effect, if any on the political culture of the country: How have the strategies and policies adopted by the government to fight the pandemic impacted society? More particularly, how have such strategies and policies impacted on delivering governance, health, and education fairly across all communities? Chapters of the volume are a quest for answers to these questions focusing on different sectors of society, their experience of the pandemic, and the implications of such experience on their future trajectory.

The survey and this edited volume were both made possible by the generous support of the Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation (GIJTR), to whom I would like to express my sincere appreciation on behalf of SI. I am also fortunate to have had the support of the SI team comprising M. Krishnamoorthy, Hasantha Gamage, and Sakina Moinudeen throughout the writing process. It would be unforgivably remiss of me not to extend my gratitude to Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, Executive Director of CPA, and Bhavani Fonseka, Senior Researcher at CPA for their contribution in making this volume possible.

The different chapters in the volume have all benefited from frequent and lively dialogue between my collaborators. I wish to make special mention of their team spirit and commitment to genuine scholarship that went a long way towards making this book project a meaningful intervention at this crucial juncture we find ourselves at. It would be an unforgivable mistake on my part if I fail to acknowledge the contribution of Hasini Lecamwasam in singularly coordinating the content and design of this volume. I also wish to extend my sincere thanks to Ammaarah Nilafdeen for her research assistance in bringing this work to completion.

Ishan Amaraweera, the layout editor, provided his expertise and professional opinion to see this volume to fruition. The diligent teamwork of those at Karunaratne and Sons, our printer, that went into this volume made this production see the light of day. I am thankful to both of them for their cooperation, and perhaps more importantly, their willingness to produce results at such short notice.

I am sufficiently recompensed if the scholarship within these pages piques the interest of our peers and the wider public and nudges them towards further exploration, public debate, and social engineering ventures.

1

Introduction
Reflections on COVID governance in Sri Lanka

Pradeep Peiris

Is the cure worse than the disease? Even at the highest echelons of global governance, alarm seems to be a common reaction to conclusions about the potential damage caused by the COVID responses of various states. For instance, UN Secretary General Antonio Gueterres warned in April 2020 that the coronavirus crisis was "fast becoming a human rights crisis", with the risk that it could "provide a pretext to adopt repressive measures for purposes unrelated to the pandemic" (Choukroune, 2020). International civil society organisations have also expressed their concerns that the pandemic has fueled a crisis of democracy across the world. For example, Freedom House, in its special report of 2020, notes that "since the coronavirus outbreak began, the condition of democracy and human rights has grown worse in 80 countries." (*Democracy under Lockdown,* 2020) It is this growing concern about the adverse impact of the pandemic response that constitutes the central focus of this volume. Through its 7 chapters, the book attempts to examine – from various angles – how the COVID response of the current Sri Lankan government is impacting the democratic fabric of society and politics.

COVID-19 has brought the entire world down to its knees. It is not only considered as one of the largest public health crises of the past 100 years, but it also has triggered 'unprecedented' government responses (Cheibub et al, 2020). Developed or otherwise, states have employed stringent regulations sometimes disproportionate to the health crisis. Although the magnitude of the health crisis is apparent, the world is yet to comprehend the real impact of the pandemic response of governments around the world. There is already a rich corpus of knowledge on the subject, focusing on such facets of the issue as restrictions placed on fundamental civil liberties (Coppedge et al, 2011), and how the separation of powers and rule of law have become notable casualties of the world's COVID response, thus restricting possibilities of checking the actions of states and guaranteeing horizontal accountability (Zwitter, 2012).

The climate of panic, fueled by the media and authorities, has facilitated ready consent among a majority of the people regarding the limiting of their rights and freedoms. Based on data from 14 countries, Chen et al show that public approval for their respective government's COVID response is highly correlated to a country's infection and death rates, rather than to the sort of policies initiated by the government (Chen et al, 2021). It is clear, then, that the slow but sure shrinking of democratic space is hardly noticed by citizens who fear the health aspect of the pandemic far more than they fear the repercussions of the measures introduced to 'preserve health'. As Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) argue in their famous *How Democracies Die*, since the 1970s democracies have only rarely disappeared through armed coups, but much more often have eroded and died slow deaths. The pandemic seems to be rendering the conditions conducive for this, through its normalisation of protracted states of exception. It is in this backdrop that this volume examines how the Sri Lankan public perceives their government's pandemic response, and what implications the 'cure' of the pandemic has had on the country's democracy.

In order to understand the nuanced and deeply troubling political implications of the COVID response, the volume draws on certain conceptual categories that provide a useful toolkit to dissect

and discuss the procedures, rules, and rationalities by means of which governance has unfolded through the pandemic, which are fleshed out below.

Pandemic governmentality

French philosopher Michel Foucault coined the term governmentality to refer to the conduct that is meant to shape, guide, or affect the conduct of people or regulation of behaviour (Li, 2007). Governmentality as Foucault defined it is:

> The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analysis and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, its principle form of knowledge, political economy, as its essential technological means apparatuses of security. (as cited in Burchell et al, 1991, p. 102)

For him, the government is more than simply political structures and the management of states; rather, it directs the conduct of individuals or groups. Foucault argues, therefore, that "to govern is to control the possible field of action of others" (Foucault, 2002, p. 336). The purpose of government is to secure the "welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, et cetera" (Burchell et al, 1991, p. 100). However, as governments cannot coerce every individual personally, it sets conditions "arranging things so that people, following only their own self-interest, will do as they ought" (Scott, 1995, p. 202). As such, modern governance is enacted through a complex web of procedures, rules, and rationalities. As Li (2007, p. 275) argues, "when power operates at a distance, people are not necessarily aware of how their conduct is being conducted or why, so the question of consent does not arise."

In the pandemic situation, the subtle logic of governmentality has found new force in the urgency of the crisis, because individual self-interest (of preserving one's health) is very much tied to following social distancing regulations at whatever cost. As such, the political implications of increased government control over, and surveillance

of, daily life are rarely pondered upon, sometimes even actively endorsed, normalising this state of affairs, which speaks to the next theme.

State of exception, the pandemic, and authoritarian rule

States across the world reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic with responses such as border closures, lockdowns, unprecedented economic stimulus packages, and the invention of digital tracking devices that enable authorities to monitor infection rates and the movements of infected individuals. Some leaders declared a 'state of exception' and attempted to convince their populations that emergency measures during the pandemic are for their own good. "State of exception" is a concept that Italian philosopher Georgio Agamben coined to describe the increase of powers by governments during supposed times of crisis (Agamben, 2005). He argues that this unusual extension of power, or the "state of exception", has historically been an underexamined and powerful strategy that has the potential to transform democracies into totalitarian states. Commenting about the Italian government's disproportionate COVID response, Agamben notes that it has been laden with frantic, irrational, and absolutely unwarranted emergency measures (Agamben, 2020). In his view, this disproportionate response aims to use the state of exception as a normal governing paradigm and introduce real militarisation through Executive decree. Many rulers – including Donald Trump, the former US President - likened the pandemic to a war and mobilised support to promote the implementation of shock policies, exception measures, and other security-intensive initiatives. Dias and Deluchey (2020) argue that the "danger" constituted by the narrative of fighting the pandemic has served to impose security apparatuses and exception measures, as well as deepen the "structural reforms" that neoliberal governments consider as their sole task to carry out (p. 3). "With the spreading of the COVID-19 "invisible enemy", the governed are once again urged to adhere to a governmentality that promotes obedience and voluntary servitude. It is this war that seeks to be both brought about and made invisible by the governmental strategies." (Ibid)

Governments, irrespective of where they fall on the spectrum of democracies – whether merely procedural, substantive, strong or weak – have opted to justify disproportionate responses to the health crisis in order to stop the spread of the virus. The measures that are effective in slowing down the spread of the virus are often measures that curtail fundamental civil liberties, which are protected in democracies and can only be restricted under very specific circumstances (Coppedge et al, 2011). In addition, and as mentioned previously, "the urgency to react quickly conflicts with the principle of separation of powers and the rule of law that usually oversees the actions of the state and guarantees horizontal accountability." (Zwitter, 2012, p. 100) Therefore, the COVID response has justified the Executive assuming law-making powers that normally belong to the Legislature (Engler et al, 2021). Jan Hinrichesen (2020) cautions that we need to be aware of how the pandemic is being "used for the reorganisation and resurrection of nationalist logics, the revitalisation (in many dimensions of this term) of the authoritarian art of government, and the swaying of public opinion into acceptance of the state of exception as a normal governing paradigm." (Hinrichesen, 2020)

Pandemic and neoliberalism

Even though liberalism in all its incarnations theoretically appeals for less government involvement in citizen life, its 'neo' variant paradoxically relies on strong arm rule to force through the necessary structural changes particularly in developing societies, but also elsewhere. In a context of the gradual withdrawal of the state and weakening of state institutions resulted by these developments, the pandemic proved to be a storm that hit it under the belly. Alfredo Saad-Filho in his essay on 'Covid to end of neoliberalism' states

> The pandemic hit after four decades of neoliberalism had depleted state capacities in the name of the 'superior efficiency' of the market, fostered deindustrialization through the 'globalization' of production and built fragile financial structures secured by magical thinking and state guarantees, all in the name of short-term profitability. (2020, p. 478)

While neo-liberal policies "let our public services deplete, turned our education and healthcare into profit-driven businesses, hoarded profits at the expense of undervalued and underpaid workers, favoured profitability of a militarised world over human security and well-being, and aggravated inequalities between people and countries" (Isakovic, 2020), the pandemic served by and large to perpetuate this state of affairs, quite contrary to the "great equaliser" narrative, as many scholars have endeavoured to show (Bowleg, 2020; Marmot and Allen, 2020). Isakovic (2020) argues that the ability to adhere to quarantine regulations, live under pandemic conditions, and recover from the financial and psychological impact depend on socio-economic factors such as age, gender, class, geography etc. This argument lends itself to the next theme invoked in various chapters of this volume, which is that of 'disposability', i.e. who counts more than whom, encapsulated by the concept 'necropolitics'.

Necropolitics and disposable lives

The pandemic has also served to expose the cruelty of neoliberal governmentality that assigns differential importance to different groups of people. In this system of thought and practice, some lives matter less than others, and hence are considered more 'disposable'. Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics constitutes an important framework in this regard (2003). In Mbembe's understanding, the closer one is to dominant power, the more their life is worth (Vagehese, 2021). The vulnerabilities of ethnic and religious minorities and marginalised economic groups take new meaning when viewed through this lens, arming us with one more conceptual tool to comprehend the logic underpinning pandemic governmentality in Sri Lanka.

The broader social inequalities such as working conditions, living conditions, and social worlds, long structured by racial inequalities in addition to pre-existing health conditions, determine the severity of the impact of the pandemic (Sandset, 2020). The Institute of Employment Rights, a UK-based Think Tank, notes that "Black, Asian and Middle Eastern women are twice as likely to be in low-paid work and occupations that expose them to a high risk of

Covid-19 infection." (*BAME women 'at twice the risk' of both Covid-19 and low pay, research shows,* 2020) Therefore, certain racialised forms of discrimination and economic impoverishment tend to expose communities to neglect and inaction, placing them at a higher risk of COVID-19 infection (Sandset, 2020). Judith Butler's reflections are instructive in this regard: "there are ways of distributing vulnerability, differential forms of allocation that make some populations more subject to arbitrary violence than others." (Butler, 2006, p. xii) Sandset (2020) argues that the relationship between the pandemic and pervasive disparities in health and the economy exemplifies how the necropolitical outcomes of COVID-19 are not just the result of a 'state of exception', but rather also of a 'state of acceptance'. Hence the danger is that people tend to ignore the effect of very real structural violence and readily accept that some lives are more precarious and that the vulnerability that they experience in the face of COVID is indeed a naturalised 'fact' (Sandset, 2020).

All governments, democratic or otherwise, have employed extraordinary measures that severely curtail civil liberties, in order to stop the spread of virus. COVID-19 has legitimised this state of exception, under which not only the citizen's freedoms and rights are suppressed, but also rulers concentrate power with no vertical or horizontal accountability. Under the war rhetoric against the pandemic, in many states, governance has come under the increasing control of the military and surveillance has become normal. These new authoritarian tendencies are not only used to battle the virus, but also exploited in many countries to suppress dissent against accelerated neoliberal structural changes. Finally, given that the 'state of exception' normalised by pandemic governmentality has produced a 'state of acceptance', the current undemocratic methods of governance have the ability to survive beyond the pandemic. This troubling political quagmire is what motivated this study and its quest to undertake an examination of the impact of Sri Lanka's COVID response on its politics and society.

Sri Lanka's immediate pre-pandemic governmentality

Sri Lanka painted a promising picture at the dawn of independence, with a high proportion of the population literate, a strong welfare foundation particularly in the areas of health and education (Jayasuriya, 2004), and a fairly cosmopolitan tradition of Parliamentary democracy to complement these (DeVotta, 2010). However, 70 years post-independence, Sri Lankan democracy under the rule of the Rajapaksa family is fast descending into a despotic ethnocracy (DeVotta, 2021). Since the war victory against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009, the Rajapaksa family started consolidating their leadership in Sri Lankan politics. Unlike any other political force, the Rajapaksa's managed to rally the support of the Sinhala-Buddhist community and emerge as their protector from all enemies of the nation. Despite being electorally defeated in 2015 at the hands of a broader democratic coalition, the Rajapaksas returned to power more strongly in 2019 just before the pandemic hit the country. The failure of the 'Good Governance' coalition to live up to its promises, corruption, internal rivalry and factionalism, and finally its failure to prevent the Easter Attack paved the way for return of the Rajapaksas. As Uyangoda (2020) describes:

> This failure also gave the SLPP one of its most effective electoral slogans with potentially lasting and far-reaching political consequences – a radically new political alternative for Sri Lanka with a strong leader, a strong government, a strong administration with military participation, with just one strong centre of power with no checks and balances.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa's campaign emphasised national security and articulated his image largely in terms of meritocracy, expertise, and efficiency. With the ascent of Gotabaya Rajapaksa, DeVotta states, "what stands to follow is the consolidation of a Sinhalese Buddhist ethnocracy and the further vitiation of whatever reserves of pluralism and liberalism are left on the island." (2021, p. 96)

Under the rule of the Rajapaksas (both Mahinda and Gotabaya), the role of military has continued to expand in the affairs of the state. As Ahilan Kadirgarmar observes, in post-war

Sri Lanka, the military have been deployed largely for development purposes (Kadirgarmar, 2013). In addition, since getting elected to office, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa appointed many retired and serving military officers to various government institutes (Fonseka and Dissanayake, 2021). Right from the outset, it was clear that he preferred authoritarian style rule that imposes no checks on his authority and does away with opposition and criticism. He made no effort to hide that he trusts the military and professionals who joined Parliament outside of traditional party politics more than the political elites, including those who worked for his electoral victory.

In addition to militant nationalism, the expansion of a neoliberal economic order also continues with the Rajapaksa bothers at the helm. Not only because of his association with the urban business classes who supported his presidential bid, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa also seems to be intrinsically convinced of the promise of neoliberal ideology. This ideological commitment is clearly reflected in his policy agenda since assuming power, including his vision of transforming Colombo city into a modern global city, advocating education reforms to suit the needs of the market, and partnering with global capital to manage state properties, to name but a few.

It could be persuasively argued that for most of the post-independence period, Sri Lankan democracy has functioned in a 'state of exception' than a 'state of peace', to borrow the language of Georgio Agamben (2005). Sri Lanka has taken recourse to the emergency mode of operation – and counterterrorism laws since the emergence of youth militant groups in the North – on many occasions in its post-independence history. Starting with 1953, the country had declared states of emergency on 20 occasions up until 2006 (Manoharan, 2006, p. 24), and continued to operate in this mode until the end of armed hostilities with the LTTE in May, 2009. While these measures were introduced to supplement security measures on the ground, such as maintaining high-security zones, increasing the number of checkpoints, cordoning off active combat areas as civilian no-go zones, etc. it is noticeable that the conditions that made such laws necessary were only ever viewed as matters of law, order, and

security, rather than those that warrant structural reform (Uyangoda, 2000). As such, many Acts and special laws – such as the Criminal Procedure (Special Provisions) Law No. 15 of 1978, Proscription of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and Similar Organisations Act of 1978, and the Criminal Procedure (Special Provisions) Act of the same year (Manoharan, 2006) – were introduced with the aim of curbing unrest, and specifically militancy, the most draconian of which arguably is the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) of 1979.

The PTA makes provision for the search, arrest, prolonged detention, and trial without preliminary inquiry of any person, among other things (Sections 4-16), immunity of law enforcement personnel from prosecution (Section 26), and for the Act to prevail over any other existing law (Section 28). It deserves special mention here as it continues to be invoked at present, ostensibly to quell the rise of religious extremism, as was evidenced by the March 2021 amendment made to the Act, titled Prevention of Terrorism (De-radicalization from holding violent extremist religious ideology) Regulations No. 01 of 2021 (*Concerns Relating to the Recent Regulations Issued Under the Prevention of Terrorism Act*, 2021). It is widely known, however, that the Act and its regulations are used to generally suppress dissent and discourage opponents of the government, as much as for curbing the rights and freedoms of minority communities (ibid; *Sri Lanka's draft Counter Terrorism Act: a license for continued state oppression, intimidation and torture*, 2017).

Pandemic governmentality, then, has not triggered a state of exception anew, but instead has extended the state of exception that the country's democracy has been functioning in for the past several decades. What this volume presents in 7 chapters will yield fresh and unique insights into the relationship between pandemic governmentality and democracy in Sri Lanka, within this historical context.

The study

The present volume evolved from a survey of a much broader research project. Since the country announced the pandemic situation, focus has mainly been on the health crisis and sustaining life under quarantine regulations. Except media coverage, there has not been a systematic inquiry into the adverse impact of pandemic governance on society. It is in this context that Social Indicator, the survey research arm of the Centre for Policy Alternatives, ventured into a survey to capture public opinion on the government's COVID response. By design, however, quantitative research can only provide an understanding of the broader picture. Therefore, the research team decided to expand the study through a series of case studies to understand the implications of the pandemic governmentality of the Rajapaksa regime. While deepening the investigation with the evidence gathered through multiple methods, the scope of the inquiry was limited to a few selected areas; the government's policies to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, and how the government's COVID response impacted on livelihoods, education, minorities, and local socio-political networks. Each team member initially produced an essay based on the knowledge gathered through multiple methods and sources. Upon further discussion and deliberation, these essays were then developed into many of the chapters that make up this book. While this study does not seek to provide an exhaustive analysis of Sri Lanka's COVID response, it does contribute valuable insights into the systematic decaying of Sri Lanka's welfare democracy.

Chapter outlines

Bhavani Fonseka and Kushmila Ranasinghe highlight the much needed institutional aspect of pandemic governance, laying out in intricate detail the many regulations instituted and task forces established during this time. In addition, they discuss two pieces of highly questionable legislation rushed through the blur of pandemic-related activity, namely the 20th Amendment and the Colombo Port City Economic Bill. Fonseka and Ranasinghe visit the question

of the implications of these institutional measures for substantive democracy in general, and Human Rights, accountability, and social inequalities more particularly.

In my chapter, I examine the function of pandemic governmentality, or the procedures, technologies, and rationalities of the Gotabaya Rajapaksa regime during the COVID-19 pandemic, arguing that it is reflective of the rule that those currently in power aspire to have. I argue that the pandemic response is primarily founded on and for the President's political vision – an efficient system of governance with the participation of the military, an obedient and disciplined society, and the rule of the technocratic Rajapaksa coalition. Further, I observe that this approach, particularly in the pandemic context, has contributed to reproducing inequalities and marginalities in society, and set a precedent to normalising extensive surveillance in the march towards disciplining society, the antithesis of a substantive democracy.

Nipunika O. Lecamwasam looks at the economic impact of pandemic policy making on Sri Lanka's social security regime and welfare commitments in that regard. She argues that the supposed trade-off between lives and livelihoods need not be so, if mediated satisfactorily by welfare provisions and that Sri Lanka's steady erosion of the welfare state, corruption, and mismanagement have combined in the pandemic situation to result in a 'hollow state' that leaves it to the citizens to see themselves through external shocks such as COVID-19.

Sakina Moinudeen focuses on the highly ethnicised nature of the pandemic response in Sri Lanka, and how the stigmatised representation of those who contract the virus has further fed into these destructive communal tendencies. Using developments concerning the Muslim minority through the pandemic to buttress her claims, Moinudeen argues that the health crisis has created the perfect backdrop for the government to continue its ethnocentric, anti-democratic system of governance with impunity. She also reflects on the implications of these occurrences for substantive democracy in Sri Lanka, noting that the arbitrary and selective application of laws, along with excessive powers vested in the Executive, signal a deeper erosion of the democratic foundations of Sri Lankan society.

Hasini Lecamwasam examines the implications of pandemic-time educational policy for Sri Lanka's system of free education, and argues that free education may no longer even be itself given how access to its online delivery is now mediated by individual spending capacity rather than institutional provision. Through a critique of the state's increasing withdrawal from its welfare obligations in the educational sector, she highlights how the neo-liberalising state gradually individualises responsibility, whose effects are trickling down to the individual mindset in the form of an all engulfing neo-liberal ethos that valorises such tendencies as 'independence' and 'self-sufficiency'.

In her chapter on migrant women workers of Sri Lanka's Free Trade Zones (FTZs), Kaushini Dammalage looks at the extremely discriminatory pandemic policies of the state and their corrosive effect on this group of citizens. Her specific focus in the chapter is on how pandemic-related policy making and other pandemic-time developments have come to bear on the capital-labour nexus, and the state's mediatory function in the equation. Dammalage argues that the continued exploitation of FTZ workers is in the interest of both capital – that benefits out of widening profit margins facilitated by low production costs – as well as the state that benefits out of the revenue generated by capital owners. During the pandemic, circumstances permitted the further intensification of such exploitation by both capital and the state, as Dammalage posits.

In his chapter, Shashik Silva dissects the role of informal contacts and networks in accessing COVID-19 related services. He notes how, despite the prevalence of official institutions and mechanisms for service delivery related to the pandemic, the entire process is de facto organised around politicians who act as the central nodes of distribution of such services, affording a more efficient service for those who circumvent the official apparatus and instead opt for such informal channels. Silva argues that even healthcare professionals who have emerged as important mediators in this network are ultimately dependent upon politicians. While acknowledging the role of patronage-based, informal networks in affording those in the margins access to services in a way they would otherwise not have, Silva nonetheless concludes the chapter

cautioning about the propensity for such networks to give rise to new inequalities and strengthen existing ones, thus undermining the spirit of democracy.

References

Agamben, G. (2005) *State of exception*. Illinois: University of Chicago Press.

Agamben, G. (2020) '*The state of exception provoked by an unmotivated emergency*' *praxis*. Available at: https://positionspolitics.org/giorgio-agamben-the-state-of-exception-provoked-by-an-unmotivated-emergency/ (Accessed: 07 July 2021).

BAME women 'at twice the risk' of both Covid-19 and low pay, research shows (2020) *Institute of Employment Rights*. Available at: https://www.ier.org.uk/news/bame-women-at-twice-the-risk-of-both-covid-19-and-low-pay-research-shows/ (Accessed: 17 June 2021).

Bowleg, L. (2020) 'We're not all in this together: On COVID-19, intersectionality, and structural inequality', *American Journal of Public Health*, 110(7), p. 917.

Burchell, G. Gordon, C. and Miller, P. (1991) 'Governmentality' in Burchell, G. Gordon, C. and Miller, P. (Eds.) *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality*. Illinois: University of Chicago Press, pp. 87-104.

Butler, J. (2006) *Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence*. London: Verso Books.

Cheibub, J.A., Ji Y.J., Hong, and Adam Przeworski (2020) 'Rights and Deaths: Government Reactions to the Pandemic', *SSRN* Working Paper.

Chen et al. (2021) 'What factors drive the satisfaction of citizens with governments' responses to COVID-19?', *International Journal of Infectious Diseases*, 102, pp. 327-331.

Choukroune, L. (2020) 'When the state of exception becomes the norm, democracy is on a tightrope', *The Conversation*, 27

April. Available at: https://theconversation.com/when-the-state-of-exception-becomes-the-norm-democracy-is-on-a-tightrope-135369 (Accessed: 02 July 2020).

Concerns Relating to the Recent Regulations Issued Under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (2021) *Centre for Policy Alternatives*. Available at: https://www.cpalanka.org/concerns-relating-to-the-recent-regulations-issued-under-the-prevention-of-terrorism-act/ (Accessed: 03 July 2021).

Coppedge, M., et al. (2011) 'Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: A New Approach', *Perspectives on Politics*, 9(2), pp. 247–67.

Democracy under Lockdown (2020) *Freedom House*. Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2020/democracy-under-lockdown (Accessed: 15 June 2020).

DeVotta, N. (2010) *Politics and governance in post-independence Sri Lanka*. London and elsewhere: Routledge.

DeVotta, N. (2021) 'Sri Lanka: Returning to Ethnocracy', *Journal of Democracy*, 32(1), pp. 96-110.

Dias, B. and Deluchey, J. (2020) 'The "Total Continuous War" and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Neoliberal Governmentality, Disposable Bodies and Protected Lives', *Law, Culture and the Humanities*, pp. 1 -18.

Engler, S. Brunner, P. Loviat, R. Abou-Chadi, T. Leemann, L. Glaser, A. and Kübler, D. (2021) 'Democracy in times of the pandemic: explaining the variation of COVID-19 policies across European democracies', *West European Politics*, 44(5-6), pp. 1077-1102.

Fonseka, B. and Dissanayake, U. (2021) 'Sri Lanka's Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour: A Critique of Promises Made and Present Trends', *Centre for Policy Alternatives*. Available at: https://www.cpalanka.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Sri-Lankas-Vistas-of-Prosperity-and-Splendour-A-Critique-of-Promises-Made-and-Present-Trends.pdf (Accessed: 22 July 2021).

Foucault, M. (2002) 'The Subject and Power' in M Foucault, *Power: Volume 3: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984* (J Faubion, ed; R Hurley, trs). London: Penguin, pp. 326-341.

Hinrichesen, J. (2020) 'Conditions of Life: A Comment on Giorgio Agamben's Reading of the Corona Pandemic' *The Hedgehog Review*, 20 April 2020. Available at: https://hedgehogreview.com/web-features/thr/posts/conditions-of-life (Accessed: 16 June 2021).

Isakovic, N. (2020) 'What has COVID-19 Taught Us About Neoliberalism?' *WILPF Newsbrief*. Available at: http://wilpf.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/WILPF-nieuwsbrief-lente-2020.pdf (Accessed: 13 July 2021).

Jayasuriya, L. (2004) 'The Colonial Lineages of the Welfare State', in Kelegama, S. (ed.) *Economic Policy in Sri Lanka: Issues and Debates*. First edition. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Pvt. Ltd, pp. 403–425.

Kadirgamar, A. (2013).'The Question of Militarisation in Post-war Sri Lanka', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48(7), pp. 42-46.

Levitsky, S. and Daniel, Z. (2018) *How Democracies Die*. New York: Crown.

Li, T.M. (2007) 'Governmentality', *Anthropologica*, 49(2), pp. 275–281.

Manoharan, N. (2006) *Counterterrorism Legislation in Sri Lanka: Evaluating Efficacy*. Washington: East-West Center.

Marmot, M., & Allen, J. (2020) 'COVID-19: Exposing and amplifying inequalities', *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 74(9), pp. 681–682.

Mbembe, A. (2003) 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture*, 15(1), pp.11-40.

Saad-Filho, A. (2020) *Critical Sociology*, 46(4-5), pp. 477-485.

Sandset, T. (2020) 'The necropolitics of COVID-19: Race, class and slow death in an ongoing pandemic', *Global Public Health*. DOI: 10.1080/17441692.2021.1906927.

Scott, D. (1995) 'Colonial Governmentality', *Social Text*, 43, pp. 191-220.

Solty, I. (2020) 'The bio-economic pandemic and the western working classes', *SP: The Bullet*, March 24. Available at: https://socialistproject.ca/2020/03/bioeconomic-pandemic-and-western-working-classes/ (Accessed: 05 July 2021).

'Socio-Economic Index in the face of COVID-19' (2021) *Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 30 June. Available at: https://www.cpalanka.org/socio-economic-index-in-the-face-of-covid-19/ (Accessed: 30 June 2021).

Sri Lanka's draft Counter Terrorism Act: a license for continued state oppression, intimidation and torture (2017) *Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace and Justice*. Available at: https://www.srilankacampaign.org/sri-lankas-draft-counter-terrorism-act-license-continued-state-oppression-intimidation-torture/ (Accessed: 05 July 2021).

Uyangoda, J. (2020) 'A Major Shift in Sri Lanka's Politics', *Ground Views,* 08 August. Available at: https://groundviews.org/2020/08/08/a-major-shift-in-sri-lankas-politics/ (Accessed 20 July 2021).

Uyangoda, Jayadeva. (2000) 'A State of Desire? Some Reflections on the Unreformability of Sri Lanka's Post-colonial Polity', in S.T. Hettige & Markus Mayer (Eds.) *Sri Lanka at Crossroads – Dilemmas and Prospects after 50 Years of Independence.* Delhi: McMillan India.

Vagehese, N. (2021) 'What is Necropolitics? The Political Calculation of Life and Death' *Teen Vogue,* 10 March 2021. Available at: https://www.teenvogue.com/story/what-is-necropolitics (Accessed: 17 July 2021).

Zwitter, A. (2012). 'The Rule of Law in Times of Crisis', *Archiv f€ur Rechtsund Sozialphilosophie*, 98(1), pp. 95–111.

2

Sri Lanka's accelerated democratic decay amidst a pandemic

Bhavani Fonseka and Kushmila Ranasinghe

Introduction

The health and other challenges spawned by COVID-19 have engulfed Sri Lanka since 2020, raising with them multiple issues related to rights, governance, and reconciliation (Fonseka, Ganeshathasan, and Welikala, 2021). The present challenges must also be examined in the context of what was promised in 2019. In the heels of the devastating Easter Sunday attacks and chaotic governance model of the Yahapalanaya government, calls for a strong leader emanated. The Presidential election in November 2019 witnessed Gotabaya Rajapaksa elected President on the platform of technocratic governance, security, stability, and discipline. The 'Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour' encompassing ambitious reform proposals was presented as the answer to Sri Lanka's present challenges. Instead of prosperity and splendour, Sri Lanka is now confronted with unprecedented health and economic challenges, heightened militarisation, rising inequalities and rights violations, policy incoherence, and blatant disregard for the rule of law (Fonseka and Dissanayake, 2021).

This chapter examines the legality and constitutionality of the mechanisms that the Sri Lankan government has introduced since the onset of COVID-19. In this connection, it looks at structures established ostensibly to manage the health crisis, as well as the legal framework governing various restrictions imposed during several stages of the pandemic response. The chapter also provides a brief account of legislation rushed through in the haze of the pandemic frenzy, and worrying trends of increased authoritarian rule and militarisation. The chapter's specific focus is on how the amalgamation of these mechanisms and policies serves to undermine accountability and transparency in governance, with serious implications for Sri Lanka's constitutional democracy.

Structures

Since the onset of COVID-19 in March 2020, several Presidential Task Forces have been established to address various COVID-19 related issues ('Structures to Deal with COVID-19 in Sri Lanka: A Brief Comment on the Presidential Task Force', 2020; also see 'Q and A on Regulations Issued under the Quarantine and Prevention of Diseases Ordinance & how this impacts the COVID-19 response in Sri Lanka', 2020). These task forces were established under Article 33 of the Constitution which sets out the duties and powers of the President. While the Gazettes refer to Article 33 in general, it is assumed that Article 33(2)(h)[1] in particular has been invoked to establish the task forces.

The mandates of these task forces are ambiguous, as are the scope of their authority and their relationship with existing structures ('Pandemic Crisis and Democratic Governance in Sri Lanka', 2021). Another point of contention is the inclusion of former and present military, and law and order officials within the composition of these

1 Article 33 (2) of the Constitution of Sri Lanka. 'In addition to the powers, duties and functions expressly conferred or imposed on, or assigned to the President by the Constitution or other written law, the President shall have the power...(h) to do all such acts and things, not inconsistent with the provisions of the Constitution or written law, as by international law, custom or usage the President is authorised or required to do.'

task forces. The emergence of ad hoc structures consisting of military personnel is viewed as a manifestation of the increasing militarisation of civilian spaces and functions. Despite assurances of professionalism and efficiency ('Structures to Deal with COVID-19 in Sri Lanka: A Brief Comment on the Presidential Task Force', 2020), the present upsurge in COVID-19 cases shows that these new structures and ad hoc procedures underscored by a militarised approach have been unable to contain the crisis ('An Update on the Legal Framework to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic in Sri Lanka', 2021). What follows is a brief overview of the entities established since March 2020.

As an immediate response to the crisis, the 'National Operation Centre for Prevention of COVID-19 Outbreak' (NOCPCO) helmed by Army Commander General Shavendra Silva ('No decision taken to declare a complete lockdown', 2021) was established by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to "coordinate preventive and management measures to ensure that healthcare and other services are well geared to serve the general public." (President's Media Division, 2020)

On 26 March 2020, more than a week after the establishment of the NOCPCO, a Presidential Task Force ('Structures to Deal with COVID-19 in Sri Lanka: A Brief Comment on the Presidential Task Force', 2020) was established by way of Gazette Extraordinary No. 2168/8 to "direct, coordinate and monitor the delivery of continuous services for the sustenance of overall community life, including the supply of food provisions produced in rural areas and producers direct to consumers giving priority to the Districts of Colombo, Kalutara, Gampaha, Puttalam, Jaffna, Mannar, Kilinochchi, Vavuniya and Mullaitivu which have greater vulnerability in the eradication of coronavirus in Sri Lanka", and perform 12 related tasks.

The vague and expansive descriptions of tasks assigned to the Task Force are compounded by the lack of oversight, transparency, and accountability relating to their implementation. Further, there is an absence of established procedures to scrutinise and hold these task forces accountable, as they are both appointed by and answerable to the President.

The overbroad mandate of the above Task Force may also serve to undermine the independence and expertise of the civil administration in responding to the health crisis. According to the mandate of the Task Force, all public officers and other persons to whom the Task Force may issue instructions or from whom assistance for the provision of services may be requested, are required to comply with the instructions, render assistance, and furnish information as is required. Further, the Task Force is mandated to report to the President all cases of delay or default on the part of any public officer in the discharge of their duties and responsibilities ('Structures to Deal with COVID-19 in Sri Lanka: A Brief Comment on the Presidential Task Force', 2020).

On 27 April 2020, another Presidential Task Force was established by way of Gazette Extraordinary No. 2173/4 to study and provide instructions on measures to be taken by all armed forces to prevent Coronavirus infection among members of the tri-forces, and its remit was later expanded to include those addicted to drugs now under rehabilitation as well as inmates of the Prisons.[2]

More recently, the Presidential Task Force for National Deployment and Vaccination Plan for COVID-19 Vaccine was established by Gazette Extraordinary No. 2208/33 of 31 December 2020. Chief among the tasks assigned to the Task Force is the identification of "a safe and efficacious COVID-19 vaccine that is most appropriate for Sri Lanka in consultation with technical experts and on available evidence", and establishing appropriate and streamlined regulatory and administrative procedures for emergency approval and procurement in order to facilitate timely access to vaccines.

Among other structures established during the pandemic were the task forces to implement the policy of 'Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour.' The Task Force for Economic Revival and Poverty Alleviation was established by way of Gazette Extraordinary No. 2172/9 on 22 April 2020. This was followed by the Presidential Task Force to build a Secure Country, Disciplined, Virtuous and Lawful

2 *Gazette (Extraordinary) No. 2185/41 of 21 July 2020*. Available at: http://www.documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2020/7/2185-41_E.pdf (Accessed: 14 June 2021).

Society (established by Gazette Extraordinary No. 2178/18) and the Presidential Task Force for Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province (established by Gazette Extraordinary No. 2178/17), both established on 2 June 2020 ('The Appointment of the Two Presidential Task Forces', 2020). These task forces were appointed during the absence of a functioning Parliament, where checks and balances were skewed in favour of the Executive.

Noteworthy is the fact that there are a number of existing legal and institutional frameworks, such as the Disaster Management Act No. 13 of 2005, which can facilitate the response to the crisis, raising questions about the need to resort to ad hoc measures such as task forces in the first place.

For instance, the National Council for Disaster Management established under the Disaster Management Act is required to formulate a National Disaster Management Plan which can facilitate the emergency response and relief, and recommend the allocation of funds for disaster management.[3] The Disaster Management Centre (DMC) appointed by the Council is assigned several functions including the issuance of instructions and guidelines to appropriate organisations, non-governmental organisations, and district and divisional secretaries on activities relating to disaster management, and the implementation of coordinated work programmes with these organisations.[4] In May 2005, the first National Disaster Management Council was established, and the Disaster Management Centre was subsequently appointed with offices in all districts to oversee disaster preparedness, early warning, and relief work in response to the Tsunami ('Sri Lanka, the tsunami and the evolution of disaster response', 2014).

Moreover, in the event that the counter-measures to respond to a disaster are beyond the resources or means normally available to the administration, the Act empowers the President to declare a state of disaster by Proclamation on the President's own motion or on

3 Section 4 of the *Disaster Management Act No. 13 of 2005*.

4 Section 8(2)(e) of the *Disaster Management Act No. 13 of 2005*.

the advice of the Council.[5] Since epidemics are included within the definition of a disaster under the Act[6] it can be reasonably inferred that the provisions detailed above can facilitate an efficient and expeditious government response to an unprecedented health crisis with sufficient oversight and accountability ('Structures to Deal with COVID-19 in Sri Lanka: A Brief Comment on the Presidential Task Force', 2020). Despite this, the government is yet to resort to implementing the Act and instead resorted to rule by task forces and other entities.

In addition to the task forces, several expert committees were appointed to provide recommendations and guidelines on COVID-19 related issues. Notable among these was the expert committee set up by the Ministry of Health on 24 December 2020 to study the controversial mandatory cremation regulations. ('Cremation Vs. Burial: Expert Panel Revises Recommendation To Include Both Cremation And Burial Of COVID-19 Dead Bodies', 2021) These arbitrary and discriminatory regulations, which lacked scientific merit and were contrary to the guidelines issued by the World Health Organisation (Saroor and de Soysa, 2020), prevented the Muslim community from practising their religious burial rites (*Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,* 2021). Submitting its recommendations, the expert committee stated that it has "...revised the recommendations on disposal of bodies to include both cremation and burial, while adhering to the specified safety precautions." ('Cremation Vs. Burial...', 2021) In February 2021, in response to sustained criticism by minorities in the country as well as national and international rights groups, the regulations were amended ('An Update on the Legal Framework to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic in Sri Lanka', 2021).

More recently, the Health Minister appointed another expert committee to study the international production of drugs and treatment to control COVID-19 ('Expert Committee to keep tab on new COVID therapies, vaccines', 2021) There were news reports of

5 Section 11 of the *Disaster Management Act No. 13 of 2005*.

6 Section 25k of the *Disaster Management Act No. 13 of 2005*.

similar bodies appointed to look into vaccination, such as the expert committee to recommend what age groups ought to receive the Sinopharm vaccine (Jayasinghe, 2021).

Despite the multiple entities created in 2020 and 2021, limited to no information is publicly available as to the functioning of these bodies.

Legal framework

The imposition of quarantine, curfew, police curfew, and the more recent travel restrictions since 2020 has generated confusion, due to a lack of clarity and information available in the public domain regarding their legal basis. These restrictions are often announced through press releases without citing the specific legal provisions to justify the curtailment of the right of free movement. Despite legal ambiguities, record numbers of arrests continue to be made due to alleged violations of these restrictions (Ranasinghe, 2021). Whilst the need to restrict free movement to contain the spread of the COVID-19 is not disputed, the confusion generated by the lack of an established legal framework provides leeway for the arbitrary and selective application of these restrictions, as the public loses confidence in the actions taken by the government to mitigate the effects of the health crisis.

Quarantine

From the very outset, the operation of quarantine regulations under the outdated Quarantine and Prevention of Diseases Ordinance, which was first introduced by the British on 9 February 1897 and last amended in 1952, (Gunasekara, 2020) has been a cause for concern.

The Ordinance does not provide the legal basis for the imposition of curfew (*HRCSL Recommendations on Regularizing the Imposition of Curfew*, 2020). While Section 2 of the Ordinance provides that "[T]he Minister may, from time to time, make... revoke or vary, such regulations as may seem necessary or expedient

for the purpose of preventing the introduction into Sri Lanka of any disease, and also preventing the spread of any disease in and outside Sri Lanka"[7], matters in respect of which regulations may be made as listed under Section 3 make no mention of the power to impose a curfew.

Despite these concerns, several regulations were issued under the Quarantine and Prevention of Diseases Ordinance in recent months. These include:

1. Gazette Extraordinary No. 2167/18 - Friday, March 20, 2020 declaring COVID-19 a quarantinable disease for the purposes of the existing Quarantine Regulations passed under the Ordinance in 1925 and 1960, making these regulations applicable to procedures taken in relation to COVID-19.
2. Gazette Extraordinary No. 2168/6 of Wednesday, March 25, 2020 defining the proper authority and a diseased locality.
3. Gazette Extraordinary No. 2170/8 of Saturday, April 11, 2020 on mandatory cremation of persons who die of COVID-19.
4. Gazette Extraordinary No. 2197/25 of Thursday, October 15, 2020 on restriction of movement and guidelines to be followed in public places.
5. Gazette Extraordinary No. 2216/38 of Thursday, February 25, 2021 on cremation or burial of persons who die of COVID-19.

Concerns have been raised about the institutions and actors authorised to carry out the quarantine process. Regulations issued in October 2020 pertaining to the restriction of movement stipulated that a Proper Authority is accorded with the authority to remove any person diseased or suspected to be diseased in any house or place to be removed to a public hospital or other place provided for the

7 Section 2 of *Quarantine and Prevention of Diseases Ordinance No. 3 of 1897.*

purpose, or direct them to self-quarantine. Therefore, the Military or law enforcement involvement in the quarantine process contravenes these Regulations since neither is identified as a Proper Authority ('Q and A on Regulations Issued under the Quarantine and Prevention of Diseases Ordinance & how this impacts the COVID-19 response in Sri Lanka', 2020).

The legal basis for the continued arrests made due to alleged violations of quarantine regulations remains unclear as limited information is available in the public domain. In a letter to the Inspector General of Police (IGP) in May 2021, the Human Rights Commission drew attention to the importance of ensuring legality and non-discrimination with regards to these arrests (*IGP responds to HRCSL in respect to the arrest of persons violating quarantine rules*, 2021).

Sections 4(1)[8] and 5(1)[9] of the Quarantine and Prevention of Diseases Ordinance contain provisions that may authorise these arrests. Alternatively, sections 262[10] and 264[11] of the Penal Code may also provide the basis for arrests ('An Update on the Legal Framework to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic in Sri Lanka', 2021).

---

8 Section 4(1) of the *Quarantine and Prevention of Diseases Ordinance No. 3 of 1897*. 'If any person, without lawful authority or excuse (proof whereof shall lie on him), contravenes any regulation made under this Ordinance, or does or omits to do anything which under the provisions of this Ordinance or of any regulations made thereunder he ought not to do or omit, or if he obstructs or impedes or assists in obstructing or impeding any inspector or other officer appointed under this Ordinance, or any police officer in the execution of any provision of this Ordinance or of any regulation made thereunder, he shall be guilty of an offence against this Ordinance.'

9 Section 5(1) of the *Quarantine and Prevention of Diseases Ordinance No. 3 of 1897*. 'If any person is guilty of an offence against this Ordinance, he shall be liable on conviction before a Magistrate to imprisonment of either description for a term not exceeding six months or to a fine not less than two thousand rupees and not exceeding ten thousand rupees, or to both.'

10 Section 262 of the *Penal Code of Sri Lanka*. 'Whoever unlawfully and negligently does any act which is, and which he knows or has reason to believe to be, likely to spread the infection of any disease dangerous to life, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to six months, or with fine, or with both.'

11 Section 264 of the *Penal Code of Sri Lanka*. 'Whoever knowingly disobeys any rule made and promulgated by Government for... regulating the intercourse between places where an infectious disease prevails and other places, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to six months, or with fine, or with both.'

Curfew

The Government has consistently failed to make reference to the relevant legal provisions authorising the imposition of 'curfew' ('Curfew in response to COVID-19: Legal Framework and Relevant Questions in Sri Lanka', 2020). In June 2020, the Human Rights Commission noted that curfew should be imposed in a manner that is compatible with relevant provisions of the Constitution and international human rights obligations of the state (*HRCSL Recommendations on Regularizing the Imposition of Curfew*, 2020). While several statutes contain provisions for the imposition of curfew, it is unclear whether the requirements stipulated by these statutes have been met.

The power of the President to impose curfew has been laid out in the Constitution and the Public Security Ordinance. However, the Ordinance was not cited in the various press releases announcing 'quarantine curfews', and the term is not referenced in any known law. The government has often used such terminology which lacks a legal basis.

Section 16 of the Public Security Ordinance provides that "the President may, by Order published in Gazette, prohibit persons in a specific area, to be in public places between such hours as may be specified, except under the authority of a written permit granted by such person as may be specified in the Order." However, two requirements need to be met for such Order to be legally valid. Firstly, the requirement of publishing the Order in the Gazette must be fulfilled. Secondly, the Order needs to be communicated to Parliament, in the same manner a Proclamation of State of Emergency has to be communicated to Parliament (*HRCSL Recommendations on Regularizing the Imposition of Curfew*, 2020).

Both the Constitution and the Public Security Ordinance empower the President to make Emergency Regulations, if he is of the opinion that such regulations are "necessary or expedient in the interests of public security."[12] These regulations also

12 Section 5 of the *Public Security Ordinance No. 25 of 1947.*

prevail over other laws[13], and may override, amend or suspend the operation of the provisions of any law, except Constitutional provisions.[14] They cannot be called in question in any court.[15] However, for these regulations to come into operation, a Proclamation needs to be made to bring in a State of Emergency,[16] with the approval of Parliament.

Police curfew

In several instances, 'police curfew' was imposed island-wide or in selected police jurisdictions (Foreign Ministry, Sri Lanka, 2020). There were no references to specific legal provisions which authorised the imposition of police curfews. Several provisions of the Penal Code relating to public nuisance read with the Police Ordinance may illustrate police officers' role in ensuring public safety, but these provisions do not provide sufficient legal basis for the imposition of what is termed 'police curfew'.

Sections 261[17] and 262[18] in the Penal Code on 'Public Nuisances' recognises the public right to safety. Additionally, Section 56 of the Police Ordinance provides that it is every police officer's duty to use his best endeavours and ability to prevent public nuisances. However, this Ordinance does not contain any provisions

13 Section 7 of the *Public Security Ordinance No. 25 of 1947*.

14 Article 155(2) of the Constitution.

15 Section 8 of the *Public Security Ordinance No. 25 of 1947*.

16 Article 155(3) of the Constitution.

17 Section 261 of the *Penal Code of Sri Lanka*. 'A person is guilty of a public nuisance who does any act, or is guilty of an illegal omission, which causes any common injury, danger, or annoyance to the public or to the people in general who dwell or occupy property in the vicinity, or which must necessarily cause injury, obstruction, danger, or annoyance to persons who may have occasion to use any public right. A public nuisance is not excused on the ground that it causes some convenience or advantage.'

18 Section 262 of the *Penal Code of Sri Lanka*. 'Whoever unlawfully or negligently does any act which is, and which he knows or has reason to believe to be, likely to spread the infection of any disease dangerous to life, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to six months, or with fine, or with both.'

authorising the police to impose curfews ('Curfew in response to COVID-19: Legal Framework and Relevant Questions in Sri Lanka', 2020).

Legislation rushed through during the pandemic

While there was an urgent need to have laws that could be used to respond to the rapidly evolving health crisis, the priority of the government was to rush through other laws that further consolidated executive power and weakened Parliament. The 20th Amendment to the Constitution and the Colombo Port City Economic Commission Act are two examples of legislation rushed through amidst a pandemic. In contrast, there is yet to be a genuine effort by the government to introduce relevant laws to address the evolving health crisis. This is despite the private member Bill submitted by MP Sumanthiran on 19 October 2020 which, among other things, aimed to provide the legal basis for Parliament to declare a state of public health emergency and to adopt special measures in the interest of public health (Indrajith, 2020).

20th Amendment

The 20th Amendment to the Constitution was passed into law on 22 October following a mere two-day debate (*Sri Lanka: newly adopted 20th Amendment to the Constitution is blow to the rule of law*, 2020).

The principal changes made by the 20th Amendment sought to remove the checks and balances on the Executive Presidency. It abolished the limitations on Presidential powers in relation to key appointments to independent institutions through the Constitutional Council, which was replaced by the toothless Parliamentary Council, with the effect of providing unfettered discretion to the President to make appointments and compromise the independence of these institutions ('Statement on the Twentieth Amendment', 2020).

A particularly problematic procedural issue was the introduction of several new provisions at the Committee Stage, such as the increase of the number of superior court judges, which were absent in the gazetted Bill of the Amendment. Against the backdrop of the pandemic, introducing such provisions at the last stage of the constitutional amendment process to circumvent the requirement for judicial review and public engagement was antithetical to basic democratic principles (*Sri Lanka: newly adopted 20th Amendment to the Constitution is blow to the rule of law*, 2020).

Colombo Port City

19 petitions challenging several clauses of the Colombo Port City Economic Bill were filed in the Supreme Court. Among the petitioners were the Opposition and civil society groups[19] who raised concerns about the potential implications of the bill on sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the rule of law. The Supreme Court in its determination suggested 25 amendments, which were promptly accepted by the government to pre-empt the requirement for a two-thirds majority in Parliament or a referendum to pass the Bill (Srinivasan, 2021).

Other concerns raised by critics included the limited opportunity given for public consultation and review during the legislative process. The day after the Supreme Court determination was announced, the Bill was hastily debated and passed within the span of the next two days.('Transparency International Sri Lanka continues to have serious concerns about new Colombo Port City Law', 2021)

The undue haste with which these bills were passed in Parliament during the pandemic is a cause for concern, especially since the legislation has long term implications for the rule of law, sovereignty, and the fundamental rights of citizens.

19 'The Centre for Policy Alternatives (Guarantee) Limited and Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu vs. The Attorney General (SC SD 4/ 2021) (in re the Colombo Port City Economic Commission Bill)', 2021.

Governance and rights issues

Politicised and militarised response

From the outset, the ability of those in the frontline to respond to and deal with the emergency, and the wealth of skill and expertise within the civil administration that can play a role in mitigating the crisis were apparent ('Structures to Deal with COVID-19 in Sri Lanka: A Brief Comment on the Presidential Task Force', 2020). However, prominence was given in the emergency response to military personnel and technocrats aligned to the President, at the expense of side-lining experienced civil service with expertise in health and other relevant subjects (Fonseka, 2020).

Militarisation has continued to permeate various aspects and levels of the pandemic response, as oft-repeated references to discipline and efficiency are made to allay concerns about its adverse effects. For instance, former and present military officials were appointed to positions in government including the post of Secretary to the Ministry of Health and the Director General of the Disaster Management Centre. Moreover, the composition of the task forces appointed in response to the pandemic included several members with a military background ('Technocratic Populism and the Pandemic State', 2020). In January 2021, senior army officers were entrusted with the coordination of COVID-19 prevention measures and overseeing the quarantine process at the district level. The appointments of these officers were made on the recommendations of Army Commander Shavendra Silva ('Army officers to coordinate COVID-19 prevention measures', 2021). As head of the NOCPCO, he has become the public face of the response, as key decisions and announcements linked to the health crisis continue to be communicated by him (Fonseka, 2020).

At the ground level, the heavily militarised nature of the pandemic response could be witnessed in relation to contact tracing, manning checkpoints (*Sri Lanka: Increasing Suppression of Dissent*, 2020), and administering vaccines, (Jayawardana, 2021) in addition to the forcible transportation of persons to quarantine centres (*Sri*

Lanka: vulnerable groups pay the price for militarization of COVID-19 response, 2020b) and the usage of drones to monitor isolated areas (Charindra, 2020).

The entrenchment of militarisation is also exemplified by the framing of the pandemic in security jargon, with the response to the pandemic being termed as a 'war on the pandemic' and a 'national security challenge' rather than being treated as a health crisis (Fonseka, 2020). The pandemic provides a convenient justification for an expansive military and security sector, and serves to legitimise and normalise certain practices implemented under the guise of the emergency response. While the military has a role to play during an emergency, it does not justify the current level of military involvement in public office and civilian space, which may have long-term implications for Sri Lanka's constitutional democracy.

In addition, several key appointments related to the newly established ad hoc structures and public institutions exemplify the politicisation of the pandemic response. Prominent among these appointments are several task forces chaired by Basil Rajapaksa, including the Presidential Task Force on Continuous Supply, Operation and Coordination of Essential Services. This appointment gave rise to the accusation that government supporters were being prioritised in the distribution chain. Moreover, the distribution of Rs. 5,000 to selected households was mired in controversy, since the selection of households was made by local government authorities with minimal oversight (Colombage, 2020a). Additionally, the appointment of a number of retired and currently serving military officials to key positions in the public sector highlighted the politicisation inherent even in the militarisation of public institutions amidst the ongoing public health crisis.

Repression

The health crisis has also been used as a pretext to quell dissent. In April 2020, senior lawyer and activist Hejaaz Hizbullah was arrested by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) following a call from the Ministry of Health cautioning him to remain at home

(Ruwanpathirana, 2020). United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet expressed alarm at the clampdown on freedom of expression during the COVID-19 pandemic (*Asia: Bachelet alarmed by clampdown on freedom of expression during COVID-19*, 2020), as reports emerged of arbitrary arrest and intimidation of those who allegedly criticise the government.

The Acting Inspector General of Police had previously warned that legal action would be taken against those who publish posts on social media criticising government officials while highlighting minor shortcomings ('Strict action against those criticise state officials on social media', 2020). In a letter to the Acting IGP, the Human Rights Commission observed that the arrest of individuals for the mere criticism of public officials or policies would be unconstitutional (*Limiting Freedom of Expression in a Democracy: The Need to Strike a Lawful Balance*, 2020).

The recently formed special CID team is set to take action against the dissemination of 'fake news' on social media platforms, especially since it has allegedly created "various issues in respect of public movements and the prevention programmes for dengue and COVID-19." (Nathaniel, 2021)

Laws and regulations invoked to ostensibly manage the health crisis are also instrumental in significantly curtailing fundamental rights of speech, association, and personal liberty. The climate of repression exacerbated by the militarised response to the health crisis may also have a lasting impact on substantive democracy. The measures implemented to quell dissent have the effect of shrinking the space for civic engagement in political processes, and citizens may be reluctant to express views in online and offline spaces due to fear of arrest or reprisal.

Effects on marginalised and vulnerable groups

The COVID-19 crisis has revealed existing societal fault lines and exacerbated structural inequalities in society, as marginalised and vulnerable groups such as daily wage earners, Free Trade Zone (FTZ) workers, migrant workers, and the estate community continue to

bear the brunt of the crisis ('Socio-Economic Index in the face of COVID-19', 2021). Curfews and lockdowns to contain the spread of COVID-19 has impacted millions of daily wage earners ('Partial shutdown sinks small businesses, daily wage earners', 2020), and many migrant workers remain stranded mostly in the Gulf States, without accommodation or access to repatriation flights (Hamza, 2021).

Of particular concern at present is the spread of COVID-19 among FTZ workers, who were recently prioritised in the vaccination plan (Gunawardana and Padmasiri, 2021). Overcrowding in prisons is also a concern in light of the health crisis which, in one instance, culminated in a riot in Mahara prison where 11 inmates were killed as a result (Srinivasan, 2020). While existing frameworks and newly implemented ad hoc structures do prevail to address these concerns, the persistence of these issues reveals gaps in implementation that need to be rectified.

The surge in domestic violence cases during the lockdown is yet another troubling trend that requires attention. Restrictions on movement in addition to economic and social stresses triggered by the health crisis (UNICEF, 2020) have exacerbated the effects of several risk factors related to domestic violence and limited access to law enforcement authorities and support networks for those at risk (Fonseka, 2021). The gaps in the implementation of the existing legal framework set in place to mitigate these pressing issues need to be addressed.

The effects of the COVID-19 response on the Muslim community were widely criticised, as the marginalisation and stigmatisation of the minority community, which predates the onset of the pandemic, was exacerbated as a result of discriminatory regulations and practices (Fonseka and Dissanayake, 2021). In particular, the Regulations issued by Gazette Extraordinary No. 2170/8 of 11 April 2020 made it mandatory to cremate the body of a person who has died or is suspected to have died of COVID-19 ('Q and A on Regulations Issued under the Quarantine and Prevention of Diseases Ordinance & how this impacts the COVID-19 response in Sri Lanka', 2020). The United Nations human rights experts

noted that the mandatory cremation policy amounts to a human rights violation, since "[T]here has been no established medical or scientific evidence in Sri Lanka or other countries that burial of dead bodies leads to increased risk of spreading communicable diseases such as COVID-19." (*Sri Lanka: Compulsory cremation of COVID-19 bodies cannot continue, say UN experts*, 2021) In the face of widespread criticism, these regulations were amended to include burial in addition to cremation ('An Update on the Legal Framework to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic in Sri Lanka', 2021).

The Muslim community was also targeted as a result of unethical reporting on COVID-19 cases which highlighted the ethnicity of Muslim patients, in an attempt to insinuate that Muslims were to blame for the first wave of the COVID-19 crisis (Ganeshathasan, 2021). Concerns raised by national and international rights groups about these reports were left largely unaddressed.

Irregularities in the vaccine rollout

The vaccine rollout in Sri Lanka began on 29 January 2021. While many on the frontlines of the COVID-19 response including health sector workers received the first dose, the General Secretary of the All Ceylon Nurses Union claimed that nurses are yet to receive the vaccine ('Nurses yet to receive COVID-19 vaccines; union claims', 2021), raising concerns about the applicable criteria for risk prioritisation. Current information available on the island-wide deployment of the vaccine is inadequate and unreliable, as the attention has largely been focused on the vaccine drive in the Western province ('An Update on the Legal Framework to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic in Sri Lanka', 2021). In addition to these challenges, allegations were made against several politicians for interfering with the vaccination process (Sangakkara, 2021), and influencing health workers at vaccination centres to disregard priority lists and registrations in administering the vaccine (Dewasiri, 2021).

The inadequacies in planning, prioritisation, and risk communication ('Sri Lanka's vaccination drive in disarray - College of Community Physicians highlights six key issues', 2021) added to

the fear and uncertainty surrounding the ongoing vaccine rollout amidst the recently imposed travel restrictions, signalling the need for effective decision-making and a consolidated public campaign to provide information to the public on the rollout process. At present, there is a need to clarify the leadership, organisational structure, and lines of responsibility on decisions with regards to COVID-19 measures ('Let's talk about the vaccine: the need for strategy, clarity and equality', 2021), particularly in relation to the vaccine rollout.

Effects on transparency and accountability

Dissolution of Parliament

The absence of a functioning Parliament during the early stages of the public health crisis had significant implications for the pandemic response and contributed to the already prevalent trend of executive aggrandisement. On 2 March 2020, prior to the COVID-19 outbreak in Sri Lanka, Parliament was dissolved by the President.[20] On 19 March, upon the conclusion of the period for nominations, the Election Commission decided to postpone elections as the health crisis escalated. Concerns were raised about the effects of a dissolved Parliament during an emergency, as it would prevent the government from using several existing mechanisms set in place to deal with the emergency. Further, the dissolution of Parliament also provided the Executive with unfettered control over public finance with minimal oversight. It is notable that despite the need for a prompt and effective response at the early stages of the health crisis necessitating the use of these existing mechanisms, the Gazette dissolving Parliament was not revoked by the President. During the months in which the Parliament remained dissolved, the checks and balances were skewed in favour of the Executive as the President established ad hoc structures and issued regulations intended to manage the health crisis.

20 *Gazette (Extraordinary) No. 2165/8 of 2 March 2020.*

Public finance and the Itukama Fund

The economic dimension of the pandemic response, coupled with the need for transparent and accountable management of public finance and government-led fund-raising initiatives is another area worth exploring as the pandemic continues to have detrimental effects on the health of the national economy. It was hoped that the revival of the flagging economy hit by the pandemic would be the main focus of the Appropriation Bill of 2021.

However, the health sector allocation for the central government was Rs. 235 billion (6.43% of government expenditure) compared to the Rs. 348 billion (9.55% of the government expenditure) allocated to the defence sector in the 2021 budget which was passed in Parliament on 10 December 2020 ('Public Report on the 2021 budget: assessment on whether the expenditure allocations and taxation policies are in line with the government's policy', 2020). Critics were equally baffled by the allocations made for certain arbitrarily selected infrastructure projects, such as urban townships, road construction, and walking paths (Colombage, 2020b). In April 2021, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa announced the allocation of an additional Rs. 18 billion for the expansion of health facilities (Ghosh, 2021).

It is in this context that the 'Itukama COVID-19 Healthcare and Social Security Fund' was established in March 2020 for the purpose of facilitating public donations to help mitigate the COVID-19 crisis and assist related welfare programmes. Whilst the Fund had reportedly accumulated a total of Rs. 1.7 billion, the lack of transparency and accountability with regards to the donations and their distribution has been a topic of public discussion due to its underutilisation amidst an escalating health crisis. On 10 May 2021, the President's Media Division (PMD) released a statement setting out the income and expenditures of the Fund since its establishment. According to the statement, only 23% of the Fund has been utilised to date. The remainder of the Fund is expected to be spent on the vaccination drive ('Remaining 'ITUKAMA' COVID–19 Fund for', 2021)

On 12 May, the Auditor General's Department stated that it had begun auditing the Fund upon the request of the Presidential Secretariat (Thomas, 2021). However, Deputy Auditor General P.L.K. Perera later clarified that the National Audit Office (NAO) does not possess the constitutional powers to audit the Fund directly, since it has not been passed in Parliament under a separate Act. Accordingly, the audit shall have to take place during the annual Presidential Secretariat Audit. The Deputy Auditor General further asserted that the NAO will commence the audit and complete it before the next budget is presented in Parliament (Mudugamuwa, 2021).

These institutional crises can be contextualised within existing social crises, while also having short-term and long-term socio-economic implications. On the one hand, the lack of institutional transparency and accountability and the increasingly centralised decision-making by the executive arm of the government may impede the successful containment of COVID-19 and recovery from the economic fallout, with the effect of further deepening socio-economic rifts (Fonseka, Ganeshathasan, and Welikala 2020). On the other, growing inequalities, marginalisation, and the pervasive culture of impunity are reflected at the institutional level and may lead to diminishing public trust and participation in institutional processes.

Conclusion

Pandemic governance in Sri Lanka is characterised by opaque and militarised structures, selectively applied regulations, and the disregard for existing institutions, mechanisms, and expertise in responding to the public health crisis. While the success in containing the first wave of COVID-19 is commendable, mismanagement and convoluted communication by the government at present may escalate the risks posed by the current upsurge in cases. Ongoing processes of politicisation, militarisation, executive aggrandisement, and the marginalisation of vulnerable communities may also have lasting effects on the rule of law, separation of powers, and the

rights of citizens, and contribute towards the trend of democratic backsliding that is currently underway (Fonseka and Dissanayake, 2021).

The pandemic has already provided a springboard for the curtailment of rights related to speech, association, and liberty, and the negation of democratic principles in favour of entrenching populist authoritarianism, contributing to the already prevalent climate of fear and intimidation. As such, it is imperative that swift action is taken to ensure transparency and accountability in and of the pandemic response, and measures are in place to prevent further democratic decay.

References

'An Update on the Legal Framework to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic in Sri Lanka' (2021) *Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 12 May. Available at: https://www.cpalanka.org/an-update-on-the-legal-framework-to-address-the-covid-19-pandemic-in-sri-lanka/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Appropriation Bill 2021. Available at: https://www.parliament.lk/uploads/bills/gbills/gazette/english/6202.pdf (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

'Army officers to coordinate COVID-19 prevention measures' (2021) *News First*, 1 January. Available at: https://www.newsfirst.lk/2021/01/01/army-officers-to-coordinate-covid-19-prevention-measures/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Asia: Bachelet alarmed by clampdown on freedom of expression during COVID-19 (2020) United Nations Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR). Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25920&LangID=E (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Centre for Policy Alternatives (2021) 'Pandemic Crisis and Democratic Governance in Sri Lanka' [ADRN Working Paper], *East Asia Institute*, 03 May. Available at: http://www.eai.or.kr/new/en/pub/view.asp?intSeq=20498&board=eng_workingpaper (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Charindra, (2020) 'Covid-19 ; Drones to monitor isolated areas', *The Morning*, 13 November. Available at: https://www.themorning.lk/covid-19-drones-to-monitor-isolated-areas/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Colombage, D. (2020) 'Politicisation of COVID-19', *DailyFT*, 9 December. Available at: https://www.ft.lk/columns/Politicisation-of-COVID-19/4-709928 (Accessed: 6 July 2021).

Colombage, S. (2020) 'Budget 2021 in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic', *DailyFT*, 24 November. Available at: https://www.ft.lk/columns/Budget-2021-in-the-context-of-the-COVID-19-pandemic/4-709287 (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

'Cremation Vs. Burial: Expert Panel Revises Recommendation To Include Both Cremation And Burial Of COVID-19 Dead Bodies' (2021) *Colombo Telegraph*, 2 January. Available at: https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/cremation-vs-burial-expert-panel-revises-recommendation-to-include-both-cremation-and-burial-of-covid-19-dead-bodies/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

'Curfew in response to COVID-19: Legal Framework and Relevant Questions in Sri Lanka' (2020) *Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 21 April. Available at: https://www.cpalanka.org/curfew-in-response-to-covid-19-legal-framework-and-relevant-questions-in-sri-lanka/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Dewasiri, H. (2021) 'Rosy Madam's list' under fire', *The Morning*, 23 February. Available at: https://www.themorning.lk/rosy-madams-list-under-fire/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Disaster Management Act No. 13 of 2005. Available at: https://www.parliament.lk/uploads/acts/gbills/english/5640.pdf. (Accessed: 15 June 2021)

'Expert Committee to keep tab on new COVID therapies, vaccines' (2021) *Daily News*, 21 May. Available at: http://www.dailynews.lk/2021/05/21/local/249855/expert-committee-keep-tab-new-covid-therapiesvaccines (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Fonseka, B. (2020) 'Uncomfortable Truths with the Pandemic Response in Sri Lanka', *Groundviews*, 11 May. Available at: https://groundviews.org/2020/11/05/uncomfortable-truths-with-the-pandemic-response-in-sri-lanka/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Fonseka, B. and Dissanayake, U. (2021) 'Sri Lanka's Vistas of Prosperity & Splendour: A Critique of Promises Made & Present Trends', *Centre for Policy Alternatives*, Available at: https://www.cpalanka.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Sri-Lankas-Vistas-of-Prosperity-and-Splendour-A-Critique-of-Promises-Made-and-Present-Trends.pdf (Accessed: 14 July 2021).

Fonseka, B., Ganeshathasan, L. and Welikala, A. (2021) 'Sri Lanka: Pandemic-Catalyzed Democratic Backsliding', in Ramraj, V. V. (ed.) *Covid-19 in Asia: Law and Policy Contexts*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 349 – 364.

Fonseka, P. (2021) 'Pandemic-related Domestic Violence: Victims don't often get the desired help', *Daily Mirror*, 11 June. Available at: https://www.dailymirror.lk/insight/Pandemic-related-Domestic-Violence-Victims-dont-often-get-the-desired-help/374-213849 (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Foreign Ministry, Sri Lanka (MFA) (2020) *Declaration of Police Curfew Island Wide*. Available at: https://mfa.gov.lk/declaration-of-police-curfew-island-wide/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Ganeshathasan, L. (2021) 'Sri Lanka's Legal Response to COVID-19: Past Trends and Future Prospects.' *VerfBlog*. Available at: https://verfassungsblog.de/sri-lankas-legal-response-to-covid-19-past-trends-and-future-prospects/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Gazette (Extraordinary) No. 2165/8 of 2 March 2020. Available at: www.presidentsoffice.gov.lk/wpcontent/uploads/2020/02/2165-08_E.pdf (Accessed: 14 June 2021).

Gazette (Extraordinary) No. 2168/8 of 26 March 2020. Available at: http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2020/3/2168-08_E.pdf (Accessed: 14 June 2021).

Gazette (Extraordinary) No. 2172/9 of 22 April 2020. Available at: http://www.documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2020/4/2172-09_E.pdf (Accessed: 14 June 2021).

Gazette (Extraordinary) No. 2173/4 of 27 April 2020. Available at: http://www.documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2020/4/2173-04_E.pdf (Accessed: 14 June 2021).

Gazette (Extraordinary) No. 2185/41 of 21 July 2020. Available at: http://www.documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2020/7/2185-41_E.pdf (Accessed: 14 June 2021).

Gazette (Extraordinary) No. 2208/33 of 31 December 2020. Available at: http://documents.gov.lk/files/egz/2020/12/2208-33_E.pdf (Accessed 14 June 2021).

Ghosh, P. (2021) 'Budget 2021: Rs 18Bn to be allocated for Maintaining Health Services', *Social Health Protection Network*, 13 April. Available at: https://p4h.world/en/news/budget-2021-rs-18bn-be-allocated-maintaining-health-services (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Gunasekara, T. (2020) '20th in the time of COVID: A grim tale', *DailyFT*, 9 October. Available at: https://www.ft.lk/columns/20th-in-the-time-of-COVID-A-grim-tale/4-707213 Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Gunawardana, S. and Padmasiri, B. (2021) 'Avoiding Necrocapitalism in Sri Lanka's Free Trade Zones', *Groundviews*, 13 June. Available at: https://groundviews.org/2021/06/13/avoiding-necrocapitalism-in-sri-lankas-free-trade-zones/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Hamza, M. (2021) 'Thousands of Migrant workers stranded in the Gulf States', *EconomyNext*, 15 March. Available at: https://economynext.com/thousands-of-migrant-workers-stranded-in-the-gulf-states-79779/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

HRCSL Recommendations on Regularizing the Imposition of Curfew (2020) Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL). Available at: https://www.hrcsl.lk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/curfew.HRCSL-recommendation-final.pdf (Accessed: 29 June 2021).

IGP responds to HRCSL in respect to the arrest of persons violating quarantine rules (2021) Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL). Available at: https://www.hrcsl.lk/igp-responds-to-hrcsl-in-respect-to-the-arrest-of-persons-violating-quarantine-rules/ (Accessed: 29 June 2021).

Indrajith, S. (2020) 'Sumanthiran moves private member's Bill to tackle health emergency', *The Island*, 21 October. Available at: https://island.lk/sumanthiran-moves-private-members-bill-to-tackle-health-emergency/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Jayasinghe, C. (2021) 'Expert committee to decide who in Sri Lanka should receive Sinopharm jab', *EconomyNext*, 2 April. Available at: https://economynext.com/expert-committee-to-decide-who-in-sri-lanka-should-receive-sinopharm-jab-80359/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Jayawardana, A. (2021) 'In Pictures: Army joins COVID vaccination drive', *Times Online*, 11 May. Available at: https://www.timesonline.lk/news-online/In-Pictures-Army-joins-COVID-vaccination-drive/2-1133268 (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Let's talk about the vaccine: the need for strategy, clarity and equality (2021) Law & Society Trust (LST). Available at: https://lstlanka.org/images/pdf/2021/Lets_talk_about_the_vaccine_English.pdf (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Limiting Freedom of Expression in a Democracy: The Need to Strike a Lawful Balance (2020) Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL). Available at: https://www.hrcsl.lk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Letter-to-IGP-Freedom-of-Expression.pdf (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Marasinghe, S. and Nathaniel, C. (2021) 'Port City Bill passed', *Daily News*, 21 May. Available at: http://www.dailynews.lk/2021/05/21/local/249850/port-city-bill-passed (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Mudugamuwa, M. (2021) 'Itukama Covid-19 Fund: Cannot be directly audited: Auditor General's Department', *The Morning*, 23 May. Available at: https://www.themorning.lk/

itukama-covid-19-fund-cannot-be-directly-audited-auditor-general-department/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Nathaniel, C. (2021) 'Sri Lanka to curb fake news on social media', *Daily News*, 7 June. Available at: http://www.dailynews.lk/2021/06/07/local/251037/sri-lanka-curb-fake-news-social-media (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

'No decision taken to declare a complete lockdown' (2021) *Daily News*, 10 May. Available at: http://www.dailynews.lk/2021/05/10/local/248889/no-decision-taken-declare-complete-lockdown (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

'Nurses yet to receive COVID-19 vaccines; union claims' (2021) *News First*, 3 May. Available at: https://www.newsfirst.lk/2021/05/03/nurses-yet-to-receive-covid-19-vaccines-union-claims/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021)

'Partial shutdown sinks small businesses, daily wage earners' (2020) *DailyFT*, 19 March. Available at: https://www.ft.lk/Front-Page/Partial-shutdown-sinks-small-businesses-daily-wage-earners/44-697783 (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Penal Code of Sri Lanka. Available at: https://www.lawnet.gov.lk/penal-code-consolidated-2/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

President's Media Division (2020) *Army Commander Shavendra Silva heads National Operation Center for Prevention of COVID- 19 Outbreak*. Available at: http://www.pmdnews.lk/army-commander-shavendra-silva-heads-national-operation-center-forprevention-of-covid-19-outbreak/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

'Public Report on the 2021 budget: assessment on whether the expenditure allocations and taxation policies are in line with the government's policy' (2020) *Verite Research*. Available at: https://www.veriteresearch.org/wpcontent/uploads/2021/05/VR_ENG_Research_Report_May2021_Public_Report_on_2021_Budget.pdf (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Public Security Ordinance No. 25 of 1947. Available at: https://www.lawnet.gov.lk/public-security-4/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

'Q and A on Regulations Issued under the Quarantine and Prevention of Diseases Ordinance & how this impacts the COVID-19 response in Sri Lanka' (2020) *Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 6 November. Available at: https://www.cpalanka.org/q-and-a-on-regulations-issued-under-the-quarantine-and-prevention-of-diseases-ordinance-how-this-impacts-the-covid-19-response-in-sri-lanka/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Quarantine and Prevention of Diseases Ordinance No. 3 of 1897. Available at: http://www.quarantine.health.gov.lk/images/pdf/act/quarantine_and_prevention_of_disease_act553.pdf (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Ranasinghe, I. (2021) 'Sri Lanka police arrest record numbers for COVID-19 quarantine violations', *EconomyNext*, 28 May. Available at: https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-police-arrest-record-numbers-for-covid-19-quarantine-violations-82520/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

'Remaining 'ITUKAMA' COVID–19 Fund for' (2021) *Ceylon Today*, 11 May. Available at: https://ceylontoday.lk/news/remaining-itukama-covid-19-fund-for (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2021) *Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)*. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session46/Documents/A_HRC_46_20_AEV.docx. (Accessed: 15 June 2021)

Ruwanpathirana, T. (2020) 'On Hejaaz Hizbullah: The latest victim of Sri Lanka's draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act', *Amnesty International*, 15 July 2020, Available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/07/sri-lanka-on-hejaaz-hizbullah-and-the-prevention-of-terrorism-act/ (Accessed: 7 July 2021).

Sangakkara, A. (2021) 'Vaccine Thieves of Sri Lanka', *Colombo Telegraph*, 20 May. Available at: https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/vaccine-thieves-of-sri-lanka/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Saroor, S. and de Soysa, M. (2020) 'Death in the Time of Corona: A Risky Business for Muslims', *Groundviews*, 11 December. Available at: https://groundviews.org/2020/11/12/death-in-the-time-of-corona-a-risky-business-for-muslims/ (Accessed: 29 June 2021).

'Socio-Economic Index in the face of COVID-19' (2021) *Centre for Policy Alternatives*. Available at: https://www.cpalanka.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/SOCIO-ECONOMIC-INDEX-for-Web-F-I-N-A-L.pdf (Accessed: 29 June 2021).

Sri Lanka: Compulsory cremation of COVID-19 bodies cannot continue, say UN experts (2021) United Nations Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR). Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26686&LangID=E (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Sri Lanka: Increasing Suppression of Dissent (2020) Human Rights Watch (HRW). Available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/08/sri-lanka-increasing-suppression-dissent (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Sri Lanka: newly adopted 20th Amendment to the Constitution is blow to the rule of law (2020) International Commission of Jurists (ICJ). Available at: https://www.icj.org/sri-lanka-newly-adopted-20th-amendment-to-the-constitution-is-blow-to-the-rule-of-law/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

'Sri Lanka, the tsunami and the evolution of disaster response' (2014) *ReliefWeb*, 24 December. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/sri-lanka/sri-lanka-tsunami-and-evolution-disaster-response (Accessed: 14 June 2021).

'Sri Lanka's vaccination drive in disarray - College of Community Physicians highlights six key issues' (2021) *Lanka Leader*, 23 May. Available at: https://english.theleader.lk/

news/1420-sri-lanka-s-vaccination-drive-in-disarray-college-of-community-physicians-highlights-six-key-issues (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Sri Lanka: vulnerable groups pay the price for militarization of COVID-19 response (2020) International Commission of Jurists (ICJ). Available at: https://www.icj.org/sri-lanka-vulnerable-groups-pay-the-price-for-militarization-of-covid-19-response/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Srinivasan, M. (2020) 'Following deadly riot, spotlight on Sri Lanka's prison conditions', *The Hindu*, 10 December. Available at: https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/following-deadly-riot-spotlight-on-sri-lankas-prison-conditions/article33302053.ece (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Srinivasan, M. (2021) 'Sri Lankan parliament passes controversial Bill on China-backed Port City', *The Hindu*, 20 May. Available at: https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/sri-lankan-parliament-passes-controversial-bill-on-china-backed-port-city/article34608185.ece (Accessed: 15 June 2021)

'Statement on the Twentieth Amendment' (2020) *Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 4 September. Available at: https://www.cpalanka.org/statement-on-the-twentieth-amendment-2/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

'Strict action against those criticise state officials on social media' (2020) *Daily Mirror*, 1 April. Available at: https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/Strict-action-against-those-criticise-state-officials-on-social-media/108-186028 (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

'Structures to Deal with COVID-19 in Sri Lanka: A Brief Comment on the Presidential Task Force' (2020) *Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 8 April. Available at: https://www.cpalanka.org/structures-to-deal-with-covid-19-in-sri-lanka-a-brief-comment-on-the-presidential-task-force/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

'Technocratic Populism and the Pandemic State' (2020) *Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 10 November. Available at: https://www.

cpalanka.org/technocratic-populism-and-the-pandemic-state/ (Accessed: 29 June 2021).

'The Appointment of the Two Presidential Task Forces' (2020) *Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 8 June. Available at: https://www.cpalanka.org/the-appointment-of-the-two-presidential-task-forces/ (Accessed: 14 June 2021).

'The Centre for Policy Alternatives (Guarantee) Limited and Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu vs. The Attorney General (SC SD 4/ 2021) (in re the Colombo Port City Economic Commission Bill)' (2021) *Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 17 April. Available at: https://www.cpalanka.org/the-centre-for-policy-alternatives-guarantee-limited-and-dr-paikiasothy-saravanamuttu-vs-the-attorney-general-sc-sd-4-2021-in-re-the-colombo-port-city-economic-commission-bill/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

The Constitution of Sri Lanka. Available at: https://www.parliament.lk/files/pdf/constitution.pdf (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Thomas, K. (2021) 'What Happened To The Itukama Fund?', *Roar Media*, 13 May. Available at: https://roar.media/english/life/current-affairs/what-happened-to-the-itukama-fund (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

'Transparency International Sri Lanka continues to have serious concerns about new Colombo Port City Law' (2021) *Colombo Page*, 26 May. Available at: http://www.colombopage.com/archive_21A/May26_1622045066CH.php (Accessed: 15 June 2021].

UNICEF and NCPA gravely concerned by increase in proportion of child cruelty cases reported to NCPA hotline since the start of the COVID-19 curfew (2020) UNICEF. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/srilanka/press-releases/unicef-and-ncpa-gravely-concerned-increase-proportion-child-cruelty-cases-reported (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

3

Healing the population by constructing subjects: Pandemic governmentality of Sri Lanka

Pradeep Peiris

Introduction

> Pandemics have shaped the course of human history, felling tottering empires, altering colonization patterns, and endowing populations with competitive advantages. Depending on the circumstances, they can also restructure labor markets, with potentially far-reaching consequences for inequality and social organization. (Gingerich and Vogler, 2021, p. 393)

The history of pandemics has taught one thing for sure; sooner or later they will go away, but their impact on society and politics will be felt over many generations. Gingerich and Vogler (2021) studying the deadliest pandemic of the last millennium, the Black Death (1347-1351), illustrate how it has made a lasting impact on the social and political landscape of Europe. A pandemic is hardly a product of human choice (unless it is developed as a biological weapon), but responses to it clearly are. As discussed in the introduction of this volume, in their fight against COVID-19, many governments across the globe have declared a state of exception

and imposed disproportionate regulations on the justification of necessity in tackling the health crisis. (Cheibub et al, 2020) In the guise of battling the pandemic, rulers have consolidated their powers, undermining checks and balances which are essential for democratic rule. Despite their tyrannical undertones, 'pandemic governmentality' – the procedures, technologies, and rationalities employed in governing populations during COVID-19 – is widely tolerated and sometimes even applauded by citizens due to fear of the virus. Michael J. Abramowitz, president of Freedom House, has opined that "[w]hat began as a worldwide health crisis has become part of the global crisis for democracy" (*Democracy under Lockdown*, 2020).

In this chapter, I examine how Sri Lanka's COVID governance is reflective of the vision of those in power as to the sort of rule they aspire to have. I have embarked on writing this chapter with two objectives in mind; i) to provide a brief account of the process of the government's pandemic response and ii) to examine the key political outcomes of the COVID response. This analysis is mainly founded on qualitative interviews and secondary information. In order to understand the rationality of the leadership through the pandemic response, a number of senior bureaucrats and military officers were interviewed. Media - print, electronic, and social – reports on the topic provided valuable insights into the public's perception of such.

The discussion in this chapter starts by inquiring into the public's opinion of COVID governance during the early stage of the pandemic. Next, I proceed to narrate the government's pandemic response under four larger themes: i) Militarisation of the COVID response, ii) inconsistencies and insensitivities of the pandemic response, iii) reproducing hierarchies, and iv) politics of the pandemic response. While it is not my intention to provide an exhaustive account of Sri Lanka's COVID response, I do wish to draw to attention the broader patterns emerging from within this context, that have serious ramifications for the democratic life of the Sri Lankan public.

Public opinion during the early stage of the COVID response

The findings of the survey reveal that people were fairly satisfied with the way the government managed the first and second waves of the pandemic. For example, 67% were satisfied with the way the government handled the situation until February 2020 (please refer table 41 in annexure 3). However, among those who live in Municipality areas, where the spread of the virus is relatively higher given the larger concentrations of population, four out of every ten persons expressed their dissatisfaction on this count. It should be noted that Sri Lanka was at this point doing fairly well compared to many developed countries that, at the time, were struggling with more than 2000 deaths a day, when Sri Lanka had reported only 316 deaths and 6682 COVID positive cases by January 31st, 2021 (*Sri Lanka Coronavirus – Worldometer*, 2021). This satisfaction towards the government's COVID response pattern mirrors the global trend. Analysing survey data from 14 countries, Chen and team show that people pay more attention to the results of their governments' battle against COVID-19 (number of confirmed cases and deaths per million population) rather than to what policies they initiate, when assessing their country's COVID response (Chen et al, 2021).

Assessing the role played by various sections of the executive branch of government, a majority expressed their satisfaction. Even though people were satisfied with the role played by the President in this regard, its level was slightly lower compared to the satisfaction that was extended to other officials such as PHIs, Grama Niladaris, the police, and the military. Interestingly, only one third of the community who participated in this survey has stated that they are satisfied with the involvement of the Parliamentarian of their area in the government's COVID response (please refer tables 5-10 in annexure 3). This speaks to the truth of politicians having little role to play in the larger pandemic response, a theme I will take up in the subsequent sections in relation to increasing militarisation and the President's demonstrable preference of 'experts' over career politicians.

Militarising the COVID response

Governments of all types – from dictatorships to democracies – looked to their armed forces to combat the threat of the pandemic. The fact that the military possesses an organised national command network, and a pool of disciplined manpower that can be mobilised on relatively short notice render it an asset to civilian frontline services during a national emergency. Therefore, many countries, though to varying degrees, sought assistance of their armed forces at a time when the pandemic has become a near universal-emergency (Graham, 2020). This support was extended by way of providing logistical supports such as transportation, construction of hospitals and other facilities, boarder controlling, enforcing quarantine regulations, providing medical assistances, running vaccination programmes, and so on. However, rather than as a supplement to the civilian authorities to combat the pandemic, some counties have brought the entire COVID response under the supervision of their military. As Euan Graham, a Shangri-la Dialogue senior fellow for Asia Pacific notes:

> In Southeast Asia, countries with a recent history of military intervention in politics, such as Myanmar and Indonesia, have seen the armed forces take on prominent advisory and decision-making roles. Thailand's government, over which the armed forces exert considerable influence, is reported to have largely excluded civilians from a panel responsible for directing responses to the pandemic. (Graham, 2020)

Furthermore, a constitutional democracy such as the UK also sought assistance of its ministry of defence for its COVID response. However, the role of the military was largely limited to logistical tasks mandated under the standing arrangement for Military Aid to Civilian Authorities (Graham, 2020). In Singapore, despite being a country less committed to liberal politics, the military has not taken on any obvious frontline roles, although national servicemen were used to pack masks for every household early on in the crisis (Graham, 2020).

The militarisation of the COVID response in Sri Lanka is perhaps unique amongst democratic regimes. Not only is the military engaged in providing logistical and operational assistance, it has been brought in to strategise and lead the government's COVID response. The President, who is a former Secretary of Defence and military officer, almost single-handedly led the government's COVID response with almost no checks and balances to his actions, appointing military officers to key positions. The government set up the National Operation Centre for the Prevention of COVID-19 Outbreak (NOCPCO) to prevent the spread of the disease. However, instead of appointing a medical professional or civil officer in charge of the Centre, General Shavendra Silva, commander of the Sri Lanka Army, was appointed. Therefore, it appears that in the mind of the Head of State, the battle against COVID is another military campaign more than a health crisis, in which the role of health professionals is to assist the security forces. This is not surprising given how the President seems to view the military as a panacea for all ills. For example, President Rajapaksa has also appointed retired and currently serving military officials to other key public sector positions including as the Secretary of the Ministry of Health, Director General of the Disaster Management Centre, and Director General of Sri Lanka Customs (Perera, 2020). A retired military official oversees the COVID-19 relief fund as well, and one-fifth of the members of the presidential task force in the post-COVID economic response are from the armed forces (*Militarisation of COVID response, the looming refugee crisis, and Nepal's PM under pressure,* 2020).

Understandably, fighting a pandemic requires swift responses and demands significant engagement of resources and capabilities. Experts believe that the health infrastructure in Sri Lanka has proven to be resilient to such crises, and point to the public health system's track record — "Sri Lanka was declared Malaria-free in 2016 — and its strengths particularly in preventive community medicine are proving valuable at this time." (Srinivasan, 2020a) However, instead of strengthening the existing capacities of the health sector, the government's COVID response has produced a parallel structure made up largely of military personnel.

It should be noted that military engineers have done a commendable job in building the physical infrastructures needed to accommodate the mounting number of COVID infected persons in the country. The private sector has also come forward to collaborate with the military in this task. For example, a leading garment manufacturer in the country collaborated with the Army to construct a 1200-bed hospital with state-of-the-art health facilities by converting one of its factories (*Sri Lanka Army constructs 1200-bed hospital in Seeduwa for COVID-19 patients*, 2021). However, unlike in the case of providing logistical support, activities such as enforcing pandemic quarantine regulations have put the military in direct charge of civilian affairs. Commenting on the deployment of armed forces for civilian duties in situations like a pandemic, Euan Graham says:

> While an overlap exists, specialised military skills do not automatically 'plug in' to civilian emergency-service competences. Given the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic, military commanders are likely to be particularly concerned about the force protection aspect, given the potential for personnel deployed in 'frontline' support roles becoming infected. (Graham, 2020)

Quarantining is one of the key strategies of pandemic control. The military was tasked to setup and manage the quarantine process that required significant human and material resources as well as the capacity to enforce strict rules. Describing their role in the COVID response, a senior Army officer said that a total of 54 quarantine centres with 10,430 beds, and 92 intermediate centres – for those who had come into contact with COVID patients – with 22,240 beds are managed under the Sri Lanka military[1]. Further, he explained how military style management helps maintain discipline within quarantine centres and ensures a continuous flow of man power needed to maintain such facilities.

When responding to a national emergency like a war, a terrorist attack, an environmental disaster, or a health crisis, it is expected that people may need to partially forego some of their

1 Discussion with a senior military officer in charge of a quarantine facility, 17 July 2021.

rights and freedoms. However, deployment of the military that has minimum or no training in civilian affairs could lead to outright violations of human rights. To reiterate an example from another chapter in this volume, the military engaged with Free Trade Zone workers in a heavy-handed manner, in order to enforce quarantine regulations. As a report by CPA illustrates:

> They were given only five to ten minutes to collect their belongings before being rounded up into crowded buses to be sent to quarantine centres where conditions were poor. The workers were not told where they were being sent and no PCR tests were conducted nor masks provided, thus increasing the likelihood of contracting COVID-19 in these crowded conditions. (Fonseka and Dissanayake, 2021, p. 23)

On the pretext of efficient control of the pandemic, the military also deployed its intelligence units to collect personal information, ostensibly for COVID-related surveillance purposes. In fact, even private mobile service companies collaborated with the military by providing details of their clients to support the battle against the pandemic (*Intelligence units to trace contacts of COVID – 19 patients*, 2020). Perera (2020) points to the lack of transparency as to the kind of information being collected, the duration of its retention, whether such information will be used beyond contact tracing, and which state agencies are sharing information (Perera, 2020). In this connection, Shahbaz and Funk (2020) argue that "Brick by brick, governments and companies responding to the public health crisis are laying a foundation for tomorrow's surveillance state."

In Sri Lanka, militarisation of civilian affairs had started well before the pandemic. However, the pandemic has justified this not only as a logical, but also welcome, step in the successful management of an emergency. Appreciating the pleasant experience at a vaccination centre, a teacher from Colombo said that thanks to the military she managed to avoid the usual bureaucratic hassles[2]. This is clearly a positive appraisal of the military for their hard work on pandemic prevention. At the same time, the comment also

2 Discussion with a secondary school teacher, 11 July 2021.

indicates the possibility of people preferring military delivery of governance over that of the bureaucracy. One needs to understand however, that the quality of service delivery, even if it is exceptional, should not be a justification for the use of the military in civilian affairs in a democracy.

Inconsistencies and insensitivities in the pandemic response

The main propaganda tag of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa is that he is a man of discipline and his word. His strong man persona and the distance he managed to maintain from traditional party politics earned him a rewarding reputation amongst his voter base, convincing them that he is different to traditional politicians. The decision to involve the military in his COVID response further boosted the expectation that there will be one rule for everyone. However, these myths were exposed by how the President actually governed the country during the pandemic. Pandemic governance under the leadership of President Rajapaksa is not only rife with inconsistencies, but also tainted by glaring insensitivity to the condition of some communities when implementing regulations. In the following discussion, I examine how these differentiations unfolded in relation to facemasks, social distancing, isolation, lockdowns, and quarantine regulations.

Wearing masks and social distancing

The health ministry guidelines advised people to wear a clean face mask when leaving home, wash hands always, cover their cough and sneeze using the elbow or to use a tissue and dispose of it properly, avoid shaking hands and hugging, avoid crowded places, and maintain at least one meter distance with others while in public. In addition, regulations were introduced either to limit or ban social events such as religious gatherings, weddings, parties, and sports and other recreational events, etc. Further, the government gazetted new COVID quarantine regulations, making masks and maintaining social distancing mandatory in public places (*Health guidelines made compulsory*, 2020). Violation of these regulations is

an offence punishable by six months of imprisonment or a fine of Rs. 10,000 (*Sri Lanka makes masks mandatory under new quarantine laws; to impose fine if rule violated,* 2020). Supermarkets, retail shops, public transport, and other such places of congregation are compelled to maintain a register of persons using them, according to the Gazette, in addition to introducing caps to the number of people who can use a premises at a given time, and means of measuring the temperature of those who enter. However, experiences reported since the beginning of the pandemic illustrate how these regulations were marred with corruption, mismanagement, and discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, and economic status. In addition, the military-styled implementation of quarantine regulations has led to repression especially of the vulnerable in society.

For instance, the Police Spokesman addressing the press on 7th May 2021, announced that over 5000 persons have been arrested for violating quarantine rules, further emphasising that "wearing masks alone was not helpful and that it was mandatory to wear face masks in accordance with proper hygiene practices and standards, otherwise the law regarding masks will be enforced." (*Police arrest 238 for not masking,* 2021) In implementation, however, the poor and minorities were subjected to markedly harsher treatment than the rich. Even International news channels reported how the Sri Lankan police were literally lifting people off the road for not wearing a mask (*Mask Police 'lift' people in Sri Lanka,* 2021). However, these instances also clearly show that such cruel treatment was meted out only to poor working class men and women. The media, more interested in ratings than news, sensationalised such tough implementation of COVID rules and portrayed a narrative in which the poor and maginalised were made to be seen as law breakers and criminals, while the rich and powerful roamed freely. For instance, the Minister in charge of the police department, Dr. Sarath Weerasekara, did not even issue an apology for participating in an official event without wearing a facemask, despite widespread criticism in the media (*Min. of Public Security goes 'without' facemask during official function, 2021*).

Social distancing has been a key practice implemented across the world to battle the spread of virus. However, though social distancing is equally beneficial to all, its application is not equally

convenient for everyone given different economic realities. In certain instances, these regulations have also been discriminatory and illogical. For example, public transport services were asked to maintain a gap of one meter between passengers, and limit the number of passengers to 50% of their seating capacity. Taxi services, motor cars, and three-wheelers were to carry a maximum of two passengers (*COVID-19 BEST PRACTICE RESPONSE: PASSENGER TRANSPORT GUIDANCE IN SRI LANKA,* 2020). These regulations are not practical when taking into account the ground realities. Expressing his anger, an owner of a private bus service stated that:

> These new regulations are stupid as they are not practical for anyone to implement. We were making a bare minimum income even before the COVID spread started. It is not financially viable for us to take the vehicle to the road if we can only load 50% of the seating capacity. It is not practical to wait for one passenger to get down to let another in. That is not how private transports function and I'd rather keep my buses at home as I won't be able to cover even the operational cost of the bus if we are to function according to these regulations![3]

However, realising the impracticality of the regulations, government authorities have informally relaxed their implementation rather than changing them. Social distancing in public transportation was never a success ever during the pandemic, because it is simply impossible. This led to the social distancing policy at workplaces and educational institutes also becoming redundant. The purpose of maintaining social distancing inside the workplace or educational institute was defeated after having traveled in a jam-packed public mode of transport. This is by no means to suggest that the government could have provided perfect policy solutions to maintain social distancing, but rather to emphasise the illogical and ad-hoc nature of introducing and implementing COVID regulations.

3 Discussion with a bus owner from Matara, 10 November 2020.

The process of implementing regulations also highlighted interesting strategies. If the practicality of a particular regulation is in question, the government relaxes its implementation effort, but uses media stations loyal to it to fuel the perception that the given regulation is being implemented. For example, media channels showed how the military and police are raiding private buses that violate quarantine regulations, while the entire transport sector *de facto* functioned under relaxed regulations. Therefore, the COVID regulations of the regime were often better implemented ideologically, through the use of media, than practically on the ground.

Further, the government promised to ease the financial burdens of those involved in the transport sector. Acordingly, just before the 2020 Parliamentary election, the government provided Rs. 5000 each for all drivers and conductors (*Rs. 5,000 allowance for private bus drivers & conductors*, 2020). In addition, the Central Bank had instructed leasing companies to grant a grace period for bus owners to settle their leasing installments. However, this latter directive seems not to have been put to practice uniformly. According to the private bus service owner aforementioned, even though some had received this concession, the respective leasing companies had added an interest for the additional period taken to repay debts. Although the government introduced some reliefs to those involved in transportation, they were notoriously inadequate for the transport sector to operate in compliance with COVID regulations. This could well explain the decision of the COVID task force to relax the implementation of relevant regulations.

It is also noteworthy that the quarantine regulations that deprived average citizens of practicing rituals of significant cultural importance – such as funerals, weddings, and various religious functions – did not apply in the same way to ruling party politicians and their allies. This was particularly evident in the public funeral held for late Arumugam Thondaman in Thalawakale, with the participation of thousands of estate works (see Figure 1 below). Nor did the President seem too bothered about COVID regulations when, despite the imminent danger of an intensifying pandemic, he decided to hold the Parliamentary election to consolidate his power. He

further disregarded his own COVID regulations to have his 'Gama samaga pilisandarak' (a conversation with the village) programme where hundreds of villagers and state officials were brought into one place (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 1: The President visiting villages in Huldumulla (25th September 2020)

Source: *Make people living is a battle ...*, 2020.

Figure 2: Funeral procession of A. Thondaman, 29th May 2020

Source: *Curfew declared in Nuwara Eliya as Thondaman's funeral cavalcade enters town*, 2020.

COVID rules were bent not only for political elites but for their relatives and friends too. There were scores of news reports on ruling political elites and their friends hosting weddings and birthday parties at star class hotels in Colombo under the patronage of high officials responsible for battling the pandemic. However, authorities were strict when enforcing regulations on average citizens. To list one such example, on 30th June 2021, the Police Spokesperson announced they raided a wedding that was held in violation of COVID regulations where 20 attendees were subsequently quarantined in the same house (*The wedding that violated quarantine regulation,* 2021). It is clear, then, that the implementation of social distance regulations was marred by inconsistencies and favouritism.

Travel restrictions, lockdowns, and quarantine

In order to contain the aggressive spread of the virus, the government from time to time imposed relatively severe regulations like travel restrictions, lockdowns, and mandatory quarantine for

those exposed to, and may or may not have been infected with, the virus. During the early days of pandemic, travel restrictions were imposed to prevent people commuting between provinces, especially in and out of the Western Province where the spread was significantly high. Though the medical basis and necessity of such measures are unquestioned, the methods by which they were enforced have had adversary effects on sections of society, reproducing and intensifying the sting of already existing injustices and inequalities.

Two chapters in this volume exclusively focus on the experience of the migrant garment factory workers and Muslim community, in order to demonstrate the particular ways in which the pandemic has affected communities in the margins. I, therefore, focus here on the general patterns of experience faced by marginalised communities under lockdown and isolation regulations. It is well known that different social classes are dependent on social interaction to differing degrees for income generation. Therefore, lockdowns and isolations do not similarly affect all across the board. Many white-collar job holders managed to continue their employment activities over online platforms. Those who are in formal salaried jobs managed to retain their employment and a good part of their income despite having to stay home. The income avenues of those who are in the informal sector, especially those living in urban centres, however, were severely affected by isolation regulations[4]. The government's financial support to low-income families living in these conditions has been meagre at best (*Protest in Wanathamulla demanding more relief amidst COVID-19*, 2020). A resident of a low income high rise in Modara describing their dire financial situation stated:

> There is no method of supplying gas for everyone. They [the government] arranged a mechanism for us to access the shops in Block C through appointed officials, but we no longer have the money to purchase basic goods such as vegetables, fish or meat, medicine, and sanitary products for women at our own shops (Gunasekera, 2020).

4 Those who live in rural areas and are involved in agriculture-related work did not suffer from isolation as much as their urban counterparts.

Consequently, many poor communities came out to protest against the authorities for not taking measures to alleviate their suffering induced by the loss of livelihood, as well as against the preferential treatment of government officials in the distribution of government financial assistance and rations (*Protest in Wanathamulla demanding more relief amidst COVID-19* (2020) *News First*, 2020).

The lives of those living in areas with high population density were also adversely affected by isolation and lockdown regulations. Explaining their situation, another occupant of a low-income high-rise housing complex stated:

> [Our] houses occupy no more than 450 square feet, debunking the claims of 550 square feet of space per residence, which is only accurate if the corridor area is included. There are 927 houses and 870-880 occupied residences. While some households accommodate seven to eight residents, yet others do even more. We are imprisoned in order to protect everyone from corona, but the end result would be the creation of a cluster of individuals with severe mental and psychological problems (Gunasekera, 2020).

As mentioned before, the criminalisation of COVID patients through sensationalist reporting of the pandemic by media have resulted in these communities being further marginalised in society and being labelled as a 'threat'. The deployment of high-tech drones for surveillance of these areas has further fed into such perceptions. The Police Spokesperson, Deputy Inspector General Ajith Rohana said that they are planning to use drone footage to observe whether people are adhering to quarantine regulations in lock-down areas (*15 arrested from lock-down areas following drone monitoring op,* 2020).

Although Sri Lanka is not the first nor only country to deploy drones for the strict enforcement of quarantine regulations, the selective application of this policy has labelled these underprivileged communities varyingly as a nuisance, health hazard, or more seriously as criminals and a threat to society. Awanka Fernando observes in this relation that "[the] antagonistic scapegoating of certain communities has further reinforced their vulnerability." (Gunasekera, 2020) In addition, officers who were deployed to implement lockdown regulations took law into their hands and punished the violators

outside of the law, leading to the poor, weak, and marginalised further suffering due to pandemic-induced complications. Use of the war rhetoric in the battle against the pandemic by the government set the parameters for the front-line implementers to treat communities as potential threats than rights bearing citizens. The following two pictures demonstrate how the poor and the weak were subject to draconian regulations.

Figure 3: Those who stepped out during curfew made to kneel down on the road.

Source: Srinivasan, 2021.

Figure 4: Those who were caught playing carom during curfew chased away.

Source: Hiru News (screenshot).

Image 4 above that depicts a man (a young three wheel driver) holding a Carom Board was taken from a news clip of a private TV station loyal to President Rajapaksa. Image 3 depicts a similar situation where those who stepped out were made to kneel on the road. The caption of image 4 ('the marvelous punishments meted out to those who violated COVID regulations') indicates that the TV station hails the punishment given. This sort of biased media reporting, while justifying this questionable treatment of violators of quarantine laws, stayed mum about such violations by those in positions of power.

Reproducing social hierarchies

Even though the pandemic spreads indiscriminately across society, the effect of virus was felt differently by different groups in the society. For instance, excerpts reproduced above show that the poor who live in slums were more vulnerable to the virus than the rich from upscale housing schemes. More than the virus, however, the response to it has crystalised and reproduced extant social inequalities, as already explained in this chapter.

Like other countries, as the most immediate precautionary measure, Sri Lanka also imposed various foreign travel restrictions to stop the transmission of the virus into the country. First, airport authorities screened all arrivals without imposing complete travel restrictions. But, later the regulations were further tightened in response to the severity of the pandemic, making mandatory a quarantine period either at a designated hotel or centre maintained by the government. However, special tourists and arrivals such as VIPs continued to travel in travel bubbles, quite exempt from these requirements.

Even though inconveniences to regular travelers are to be expected with these additional measures in place, the manner in which policies and regulations were implemented intensified them. For example, during the early days of the pandemic, people did not have much of an option as to where they would quarantine, and had to go to a centre they were assigned to. Some were even taken to distant locations such as Batticaloa and Vavuniya. After having travelled many hours to reach Colombo, having to endure still more extensive travel to reach their quarantine facilities would, without a doubt, have been very taxing. Even though the private sector later stepped into facilitate fee levying quarantine stays, this benefit could only obviously be enjoyed by those who could afford it. During the early days, passengers who opted for quarantine at hotels had to bear its cost as part of the airline ticket. The arrangement, needless to say, made the return of poor migrant workers – such as house maids and various other labourers – further difficult. In addition to travel restrictions, the soaring costs of airline tickets and the added anticipation of further expenses related to private quarantine

facilities resulted in many migrant workers being stranded in their host countries during the initial stages of the pandemic. A senior Sri Lankan Airlines manager from a Middle Eastern station explained the dire situation of the migrant workers (during the early stages of the pandemic) as follows:

> The new regulations since the pandemic caused the increase of ticket prices, which further increased as our tickets had to cover quarantine related costs as well. Many workers were already out of jobs and they had no place to live or means to find food. Therefore, they could not afford to buy a ticket to return home even when the government opened the airport. Many Sri Lankans called or came to see me to find out whether Sri Lankan Airlines can help them as they could not get any assistance from the Sri Lankan embassy here.[5]

An overwhelming majority of the 1.2 million Sri Lankan expatriate community, despite being the main foreign income source and being one of the main support bases of the current government, suffered due to lack of attention of the government. Due to the sheer size of the workforce, it would admittedly have been a challenging task for the financially embattled Gotabaya Rajapaksa government to undertake their return single-handedly. However, given the considerable inflow of international aid to battle the pandemic and the government's own records accounting only for a fraction of it as already spent (please refer the chapter on Sri Lanka's social security provisions during the pandemic for a detailed account of such aid its utilisation), it is unacceptable that a scheme was not introduced to at least offset some of the cost of travel for this group of citizens to return to their country.

The income avenues of those who were employed in government jobs and formal salaried occupations were affected comparatively less compared to those engaged in the informal sector. In many countries, aid typically targets the poor or people working in the informal economy and are therefore unlikely to

5 Discussion with a senior Sri Lankan airline residential manager from a Middle Eastern country, 10 February 2021.

secure assistance through other programmes; or else conditioned on a person's job having been affected by shutdowns (*Coronavirus bailouts: Which country has the most generous deal*, 2020). Canada, for example, is providing CAD 2,000 (£1,150; $1,400) per month for up to four months to those who have lost income due to the pandemic, while Costa Rica is funding a monthly allowance of $220 (£177) for people who have lost their jobs due to the pandemic. However, the Sri Lankan government could not offer such national level systematic financial assistance families financially affected by COVID. Therefore, the financial suffering induced by the pandemic differed across income brackets, in the absence of state intervention which left individual families to bear the brunt of the misery.

The psychological campaign of the government hailed some professionals as warriors who brave the pandemic to keep society safe. Many bill boards were erected praising the role played by medical professionals, members of the military, police officers, and local level bureaucrats in this regard. However, the contribution of other professions that also made lockdown and isolation much more bearable such as the staff of delivery services, supermarkets, and taxi drivers has hardly been appreciated. In doing so, not only was their contribution undervalued, but also the danger to which they expose themselves was unacknowledged. The importance and urgency demonstrated in the vaccination of doctors and their family members was not extended to the blue-collar workers who also contributed to keeping society functional. In fact, despite teaching activities being completely conducted online, the government prioritised university teachers over taxi drivers or supermarket workers. As Achille Mbembe's (2003) *Necropoltics* illustrates, the government's COVID prevention strategy implicitly has established a social order based on which lives are worth saving and which, disposable.

Politicisation of the COVID response

The way the President responded to the pandemic clearly demonstrated that it was primarily a means to manage his politics. His pandemic response seemed to have broader political targets such as the consolidation of power, militarising the bureaucracy and

civilian affairs, and clearing the path for unhindered implementation of his economic and political vision. For one, despite the looming health crisis, President Rajapaksa decided to dissolve Parliament and call for an election. As Allen Keenan puts it:

> The Sri Lankan government has declared its intention to rule without parliamentary oversight for the first time in the country's modern history, potentially sparking a serious constitutional crisis. Elected in November and without a majority in parliament, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa seized his earliest opportunity to dissolve the legislature on 2 March and schedule a general election for 25 April. As the COVID-19 emergency grew serious in late March, the National Elections Commission (NEC) delayed the vote indefinitely. With the constitution stating that parliament can remain dissolved for only three months pending fresh elections, Sri Lanka will head into dangerously uncharted territory unless the president or courts take decisive action before the deadline expires on 2 June (Keenan, 2020).

President Rajapaksa continued to disregard the absence of Parliament and the legal validity of the regulations enacted to battle the pandemic (Sumanthiran, 2021). He not only sidelined Parliament, but also the politicians who contributed to his ascent to power. Speaking in Parliament, MP Sumanthiran for instance, slammed the President for not using the expertise even within his own party, such as that of pioneering virologist Prof. Vithana and community medicine specialist Dr. Frenandopulle, and on top of it appointing the Army Commander to lead the country's pandemic response (*MP Sumanthiran speech on the Parliament*, 2021). On top of all this, the rushing through of highly questionable legislation such as the 20th Amendment that envisages expansive powers and greater immunity for the Executive President (Srinivasan, 2020b) was also largely done hiding behind the rush of the crisis situation.

The President capitalised the relative success in controlling the first and second waves of the pandemic to legitimise his rule. Pro-regime newspapers featured sensationalised accounts of the achievement prior to the Parliamentary election, claiming that "Sri Lanka and its President Gotabaya Rajapaksa have been ranked 9th in the Global Response to Infectious Diseases (GRID) index."

(*SL ranked 9th in Global Response to Infectious Diseases (GRID) index*, 2020) However, this victorious narrative did not last long with the steady worsening of the situation with the third wave of the pandemic. In addition, in the backdrop of an ever deepening financial crisis, the President came under scrutiny for his policies and conduct, leading to widespread protests across the country. Farmers protested demanding fertiliser; civil society organisations protested government-sponsored deforestation and the government's decision to sell resources to foreign countries; teachers, students, and various political organisations protested privatisation and militarisation of education, while teachers called for a countrywide strike by way of boycotting online teaching, demanding the resolution of their salary discrepancies.

However, the government directed the police to suppress rising dissent using quarantine regulations as an excuse. Social distancing regulations that were relaxed due to a slowdown of the spread of the virus were strictly imposed on the protesters. The Director General of Health Services, Dr. Asela Gunawardana instructed the Police to ban protests and public meetings until further notice, ostensibly to prevent the rapid spread of COVID-19. However, this has not stopped protesters from exercising their democratic rights. Many protesters were arrested, beaten, and even forcibly carted off to quarantine centres, even after receiving bail. Members of the teachers union, including its secretary Joseph Stalin were arrested for violating quarantine regulations and later sent to quarantine centres. Similarly, many protest campaigns were disrupted using health regulations which did not apply for Minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage and his supporters who marched in Nawalapitiya on 15th July 2021 disregarding the general quarantine law. The government's pandemic response, therefore, does not aim to manage the health crisis alone, but rather seeks to serve the larger political agenda of the President.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the dynamics of Sri Lanka's pandemic governmentality and its consequences for the democratic political life of the citizen. The government's COVID response is primarily founded on the governance rationality of the President instead of the expert advice of epidemiologists or virologists. The state of exception that is increasingly being normalised under the COVID pandemic has given new impetus to Gotabaya Rajapaksa's aspiration for authoritarian style rule by; a) concentrating powers of all three branches of government in the hands of the Executive President, b) clearing out any obstacles to his rule by freeing the Executive from any checks and balances, c) having a disciplined and obedient society instead of a democratic society predicated on criticism and dissent, and d) a government that focuses on macro outcomes and population than individual human needs and interests. Therefore, Sri Lanka's battle against the pandemic, which primarily functions *on and for* the President's political vision, can be seen as a political onslaught against the country's remaining democratic institutions.

The COVID response of the government has given a smooth passage for the military to intrude into civilian affairs. This new normal has great potential to last beyond the health crisis. The fact that the operations of the military is increasingly coming to embody a panacea for all the ills one may find in the civil service – corruption, mismanagement, and lethargy - people may find themselves becoming less and less uneasy about involving the military in civilian affairs.

The COVID governance approach in Sri Lanka mirrors the President's choice of alliances. Unlike his predecessors and quite unusual in the county's political practice, the President has by and large not involved political elites, including the ones who brought him to power, in addressing the COVID health crisis. He has clearly side-lined the traditional political elites of the senior Rajapaksa network by bringing new technocratic political classes closer to his reign. Irrespective of whether this chose is strategic or for sheer convenience, this new power constellation would upset the apple cart and its consequences will certainly last beyond the current health crisis.

Sri Lanka's COVID response, like in many other countries, has clearly focused on managing the health of the population. Hence statistics on death and infections, economic indicators, and the popularity of the rule have come to matter more than the actual victims and vulnerabilities in the pandemic situation. The government in this context is seen waging a war against its own people by labelling them as a threat to the population, rounding off and transporting them to quarantine centres. This has been particularly so with marginalised groups in society, thus reproducing and exacerbating hierarchies. Therefore, the governmentality of the COVID response has triggered the transformation of our society, not to a more democratic and egalitarian one where people enjoy a dignified life, but rather one that does not tolerate dissent or criticism, and functions on highly utilitarian principles and factional politics where the majority will live as subjects than rights bearing free citizens.

References

15 arrested from lock-down areas following drone monitoring op (2020) *News First.* Available at: https://www.newsfirst.lk/2020/11/12/15-arrested-from-lock-down-areas-following-drone-monitoring-op/ (Accessed: 02 July 2021).

Cheibub, J.A., Ji Y.J., Hong, and Adam Przeworski (2020) 'Rights and Deaths: Government Reactions to the Pandemic', *SSRN* Working Paper.

Chen et al. (2021) 'What factors drive the satisfaction of citizens with governments' responses to COVID-19?', *International Journal of Infectious Diseases*, 102, pp. 327-331.

Coronavirus bailouts: Which country has the most generous deal? (2020) *BBC News*. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/business-52450958 (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

COVID-19 BEST PRACTICE RESPONSE: PASSENGER TRANSPORT GUIDANCE IN SRI LANKA (2020) *The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport.* Available at: https://www.ciltinternational.org/news/covid-19-best-

practice-response-passenger-transport-guidance-in-sri-lanka/ (Accessed: 05 July 2021).

Curfew declared in Nuwara Eliya as Thondaman's funeral cavalcade enters town (2020) *Economy Next*. Available at: https://economynext.com/curfew-declared-in-nuwara-eliya-as-thondamans-funeral-cavalcade-enters-town-70497/ (Accessed: 30 July 2021).

Democracy under Lockdown (2020) *Freedom House*. Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2020/democracy-under-lockdown (Accessed: 15 June 2020).

Gingerich, D. and Vogler, J. (2021) 'Pandemics and Political Development: The Electoral Legacy of the Black Death in Germany', *World Politics*, 73(3), pp. 393-440

Fonseka, B. and Dissanayake, U. (2021) 'Sri Lanka's Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour: A Critique of Promises Made and Present Trends' *Centre for Policy Alternatives*. Available at: https://www.cpalanka.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Sri-Lankas-Vistas-of-Prosperity-and-Splendour-A-Critique-of-Promises-Made-and-Present-Trends.pdf (Accessed: 20 July 2021).

Graham, E. (2020) 'The armed forces and COVID-19', *IISS*, 08 April. Available at: https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2020/04/easia-armed-forces-and-covid-19 (Accessed: 23 June 2021).

Gunasekera, D. (2020) 'Life in high-rise buildings amidst isolation', *The Morning,* 06 December. Available at: https://www.themorning.lk/life-in-high-rise-buildings-amidst-isolation/?fbclid=IwAR2OmpzKYpYKbcii794d8n5iK5K8mKttKet9nYT3cRdI-fNQkN2KXtrinnY (Accessed: 27 June 2021).

Health guidelines made compulsory (2020) *Daily News*. Available at: https://www.dailynews.lk/2020/10/12/local/231231/health-guidelines-made-compulsory (Accessed: 15 July 2021).

Intelligence units to trace contacts of COVID – 19 patients (2020) *News First.* Available at: https://www.newsfirst.lk/2020/04/18/intelligence-units-to-trace-contacts-of-covid-19-patients/ (Accessed: 28 June 2021).

Keenan, A. (2020) 'Sri Lanka's Other COVID-19 Crisis: Is Parliamentary Democracy at Risk?', *Crisis Group*, 29 May. Available at: https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka/sri-lankas-other-covid-19-crisis-parliamentary-democracy-risk (Accessed: 17 June 2021).

Make people living is a battle, I undertake the responsibility of winning it-President says at inaugural "Discussion with Villagers" in Haldummulla (2020) *Presidential Secretariat*. Available at: https://www.presidentsoffice.gov.lk/index.php/2020/09/25/make-people-living-is-a-battle-i-undertake-the-responsibility-of-winning-it-president-says-at-inaugural-discussion-with-villagers-in-haldummulla/?lang=ti (Accessed: 30 July 2021).

Mask Police 'lift' people in Sri Lanka (2021) *Gravitas*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cwfvJ6NBb1I (Accessed: 30 June 2021).

Militarisation of COVID response, the looming refugee crisis, and Nepal's PM under pressure (2020) *Himal Southasian*. Available at: https://www.himalmag.com/southasiasphere-issue-4/ (Accessed: 05 July 2021).

Min. of Public Security goes 'without' facemask during official function (2021) *Newshub.lk*. Available at: https://newshub.lk/en/2021/05/10/min-of-public-security-goes-without-facemask-during-official-function/ (Accessed: 25 June 2021).

MP Sumanthiran speech on the Parliament (2021) *JK Lanka Tamil*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3A-Vqj2qctw (Accessed: 24 June 2021).

Perera, S. (2020) 'When the Pandemic is a Portal to Militarization', *Groundviews*, 30 May. Available at: https://groundviews.org/2020/05/30/when-the-pandemic-is-a-portal-to-militarization/ (Accessed: 17 July 2021).

Police arrest 238 for not masking (2021) *Daily News*. Available at: http://www.dailynews.lk/2021/05/07/law-order/248647/police-arrest-238-not-masking (Accessed: 05 July 2021).

Protest in Wanathamulla demanding more relief amidst COVID-19 (2020) *News First.* Available at: https://www.newsfirst.lk/2020/11/26/protest-in-wanathamulla-demanding-more-relief-amidst-covid-19/ (Accessed: 15 July 2021).

Rs. 5,000 allowance for private bus drivers & conductors (2020) *Ceylon Today*. Available at: https://archive.ceylontoday.lk/news-more/13721 (Accessed: 13 July 2021).

SL ranked 9th in Global Response to Infectious Diseases (GRID) index (2020) *The Morning*. Available at: https://www.themorning.lk/sl-ranked-9th-in-global-response-to-infectious-diseases-grid-index/ (Accessed: 20 July 2021).

Sri Lanka Army constructs 1200-bed hospital in Seeduwa for COVID-19 patients (2021) *Colombo Page.* Available at: http://www.colombopage.com/archive_21A/May08_1620487579CH.php (Accessed: 17 June 2021).

Sri Lanka Coronavirus – Worldometer (2021) *Worldometers*. Available at: https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/sri-lanka/ (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Sri Lanka makes masks mandatory under new quarantine laws; to impose fine if rule violated (2020) *The New Indian Express.* Available at: https://www.newindianexpress.com/world/2020/oct/16/sri-lanka-makes-masks-mandatory-under-new-quarantine-laws-to-impose-fine-if-rule-violated-2211071.html (Accessed: 22 June 2021).

Srinivasan, M. (2020a) 'COVID-19 Sri Lankan military is helping the country fight the pandemic', *The Hindu*, 15 April. Available at: https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/covid-19-sri-lankan-military-is-helping-the-country-fight-the-pandemic/article31350778.ece (Accessed: 27 June 2021).

Srinivasan, M. (2020b) 'Sri Lanka: Controversial 20th Amendment passed', *The Hindu*, 22 October. Available at: https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/sri-lanka-controversial-20th-amendment-passed/article32921800.ece (Accessed: 04 July 2021).

Srinivasan, M. (2021) 'Sri Lanka to probe 'army attack and humiliation' of Muslims', *The Hindu*, 20 June. Available at: https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/sri-lanka-to-probe-army-attack-and-humiliation-of-muslims/article34871262.ece (Accessed: 30 July 2020).

Sumanthiran, M.A. (2021) 'Covid-19, Old Laws & The Government's Mismanagement', *Colombo Telegraph*, 06 May. Available at: https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/covid-19-old-laws-the-governments-mismanagement/ (Accessed: 03 July 2021).

The wedding that violated quarantine regulation (2021) *Ada Derana*. Available at: http://www.adaderana.lk/news/75029/wedding-party-violating-health-protocols-raided-20-attendees-quarantined (Accessed: 10 July 2021).

4

Lives or livelihoods? The erosion of welfare in Sri Lanka's COVID-19 response

Nipunika O. Lecamwasam

Introduction

Dubbed as the greatest test since World War II by the United Nations, the COVID-19 epidemic that originated in Wuhan, China in the last quarter of 2019 has now become a global pandemic with crippling effects felt across multiple sectors. Many governments across the world have had to implement strict lockdowns and social distancing policies in order to curb the spread of the virus and to bring down the death tolls. While lockdowns have proven effective in limiting the rising death tolls, these have come with adverse economic consequences, in many instances boiling the situation down to a trade-off between lives and livelihoods. It has presented many governments with a difficult policy choice.

The most stringent of lockdowns as those implemented in China were highly successful in bringing down the infection rates, while lapses in the implementation of same have led to bleak stories such as those of India and Brazil. In Sri Lanka too the situation has not been very different. In the initial wave of the virus that started in March 2020, the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) was successful

in mitigating the health effects of the pandemic via the imposition of stringent lockdowns, zero tolerance of social gatherings, and also a proactive approach to working closely with the World Health Organisation (WHO) (Ranaraja, 2020). Two waves later, the situation at present in June 2021, is not reflective of any of these initial successes. The death toll is on the rise and so is the adverse economic impact felt by many sectors in the Sri Lankan society.

The purpose of this chapter is to present both quantitative and qualitative perspectives of people's perceptions regarding the government's service delivery mechanism in relation to providing economic relief. The overarching argument drawn from practice is that lives and livelihoods have a negative correlation, in that the more effective the containment measures prove to be, the more disrupted livelihoods are. While acknowledging the merit of this argument world over and specifically in Sri Lanka, this chapter seeks to argue that there need not necessarily be a trade-off between lives and livelihoods, if states prudently manoeuvre their welfare regimes so as to mediate between these dichotomies. Against the backdrop of a longstanding ideological commitment of the Sri Lankan state to welfarism that predates even independence (Jayasuriya, 2000; 2004), this chapter assesses if the social support policy initiatives of the current government have been able to sufficiently respond to pandemic-induced economic insecurities, through the experience of the people.

Using largely secondary data, the chapter first briefly evaluates the impact the pandemic has had on both global and local economies, with greater emphasis placed on national macro-level trends. Next, it discusses the lives and livelihoods nexus, first by focussing on micro experiences of affected populations captured through the findings of the top line survey, 'Socio-Economic Index In the Face of Covid-19', conducted during the first quarter of 2021, and then on national level debates regarding the government's conduct in relation to securing employment and providing support for those who lost employment. The account captures both the role of the state in responding to the pandemic and the subsequent inequalities the pandemic has given rise to. To this end, it draws on general perceptions of households

concerning the effects of the pandemic on their livelihoods, different economic realities created by the pandemic, coping strategies adopted by different segments of the population to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic, and the effectiveness of government welfare mechanisms as per people's perceptions captured through the survey.

Brief account of the economic impact of COVID-19: Global and local overviews

Global overview

The impact of COVID-19 on the global economy is projected to have serious long-term effects and the recovery is expected to be slow and uneven across regions (See *The Global Economic Prospects*, 2021). The pandemic has highlighted deficiencies in state capacity, labour markets, and fiscal policies the world over. In June 2020, The World Bank projected a 5.2% decline in the total global GDP for 2020 (The Global Economic Outlook, 2020), making it the worst global recession in decades. Economic growth in almost all regions of the world is expected to hit a considerable low. Predictions of recovery anticipate unevenness, pushing the developing and least developed regions into greater poverty, and reversing decades' worth of development progress these regions have made. The World Bank observes:

> This recovery is uneven and largely reflects sharp rebounds in some major economies—most notably the United States, owing to substantial fiscal support—amid highly unequal vaccine access. In many emerging market and developing economies (EMDEs), elevated COVID-19 caseloads, obstacles to vaccination, and a partial withdrawal of macroeconomic support are offsetting some of the benefits of strengthening external demand and elevated commodity prices. By 2022, global output will remain about 2 percent below prepandemic projections, and per capita income losses incurred last year will not be fully unwound in about two-thirds of EMDEs. (*The Global Economic Prospects*, 2021, p. xvii).

A report prepared by the Brookings Institution in June 2021 further predicts that "poor countries will ultimately face a larger cost" (Yeyati and Filippini, 2021, p. 5). The report identifies three key success factors for effective execution of government responses, namely existing social support infrastructure, strength of digital delivery, and real-time tracking[1] (ibid, p. 14). It acknowledges that these pre-conditions play an important role in the welfare impact of the pandemic, making government responses diverse across the globe and affecting developing countries more harshly (ibid). The report highlights that a higher percentage of jobs in developing economies requires the physical presence of employees, and the bias of COVID-19 containment measures against such low waged and high contact jobs have made the labour markets in developing countries particularly vulnerable to economic shocks induced by the pandemic. These economies are therefore in need of more consorted and effective welfare measures. Decerf et al. (2020, pp. 23-4) analysing the lives and livelihoods nexus state:

> For given infection rates, developed countries face mortality costs several times higher than those of developing countries, because their populations are considerably older, and because they have longer residual life-expectancies at given ages. For poverty, on the other hand, developing countries have a larger fraction of their population living on incomes close to the poverty lines we use. As a result, the welfare costs from increased poverty relative to those from increased mortality are much higher for poorer countries and tend to fall markedly with income per capita.

In the subsequent sections, this chapter will be looking at measures taken to contain poverty in these conditions, through the prism of the Sri Lankan example.

1 According to Yeyati and Filippini (2021), existing social support infrastructure is important since the nature of the pandemic necessitates quick responses from within existing entities and mechanisms. Digital delivery ensures relief reaches households during lockdowns, while real-time tracking using advanced analytics and data ensures governments are updated with the most accurate data at a given time. Real-time tracking is especially important in understanding the socio-economic situation of households (Yeyati and Filippini, 2021, p. 14).

National macro trends of the impact of COVID-19 on the Sri Lankan economy: A brief overview

In its Sri Lanka Development Update for 2021, the World Bank records a 3.6% decline in the Sri Lankan economy for 2020 (*Sri Lanka Development Update: Economic and Poverty Impact of COVID-19*, 2021). Providing a statistical overview of COVID-19 induced economic strains, the report goes on to state that the economic crunch is severe since it came against a backdrop of pre-existing weaknesses including a low growth rate of 3.1%, slow progress towards wider private sector participation, and export orientation (ibid). The industrial sector has suffered the most, with a 6.9% overall contraction, while services and agriculture have suffered contractions of 1.5% and 2.4% respectively (ibid, p. 11). Industrial job losses are typically suffered by those in the lower-middle range of the income distribution curve, with the private sector and own-account owners in the urban areas being hit the worst (ibid). The report also estimates that only 27% of Sri Lankans have tele-workable jobs (ibid, p. 31) and that these opportunities are highly concentrated among high-income earners from urban areas.

At the launch of its 'Sri Lanka: State of the Economy 2020' report (See *Sri Lanka: State of the Economy 2020 | Institute of policy studies Sri Lanka*, 2020), a panel of experts at the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) discussed how the pandemic has resulted in widening disparities, especially since the state lacks the macroeconomic stability to cushion the impact due to its increasing debt levels and the deteriorating fiscal profile. Against this backdrop, informal sector workers who constitute 68% of the total workforce are said to be experiencing severe economic strains such as exhausting their savings for survival and abstaining from certain investments made in education and health etc. (Nisha Arunatilake as reported by Weerasekera, 2020). Another IPS study discusses the precariousness of temporary employment (As of 2018, 60% of the 2.8 million private-sector employees were temporary workers) especially in the absence of job security and social security benefits (Jayawardena, 2020). It goes on to show how Sri Lanka does not provide labour market security as opposed to employment security, and does

not have an unemployment insurance, factors that exacerbate the precariousness of employment for this cohort of workers especially during a pandemic (ibid; See also *Most Sri Lanka workers without formal protection amid Covid-19 shock: IPS study*, 2020).

In an October 2020 report published by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL), it was stated that there was a decline of 2.4% in the employed population for 2020, with a major decline in private sector employment figures (*Recent Economic Developments: Highlights of 2020 and Prospects for 2021*, 2020). While the public sector too recorded a decline, government employment schemes such as those providing employment for unemployed graduates have been able to control public sector unemployment figures to an extent (ibid). Admittedly, however, the sustainability of these programmes is yet to be assessed. The report, as the ones before, also acknowledges the need for social security measures for informal workers especially during the pandemic.

The World Bank's Sri Lanka Development Update for 2021 assessing COVID-19's impact on the country's employment and poverty, highlights three important pre-existing vulnerabilities that impact macro employment figures. These include low earnings, informal workers with no social protection, and some segments of formal workers (e.g. apparel workers) as the most vulnerable under COVID-19 conditions (*Sri Lanka Development Update: Economic and Poverty Impact of COVID-19*, 2021). In terms of government assistance rendered to diminish the impact of job losses, the report discusses two main measures i.e. support through existing welfare schemes such as *Samurdhi,* and temporary allowances for low-income families specifically designed to combat the economic effects of the pandemic (ibid). In the subsequent sections, using data from the 'Socio-Economic Index In the Face of Covid-19', a survey conducted by Social Indicator, the survey arm of CPA in the first quarter of 2021, this chapter captures the micro experiences of the population to assess their perceptions regarding government relief schemes.

Lives and livelihoods: COVID-19 induced economic fears in Sri Lanka

State capacity during COVID-19

If the Sri Lankan case is to be assessed along the axes of the three success factors of state capacity mentioned by Yeyati and Filippini (2021), it becomes apparent that Sri Lanka lacks both digital delivery and real-time tracking that has exacerbated the impact of COVID-19 both in terms of lives and livelihoods. Internet usage statistics in Sri Lanka bear testimony to the fact that internet usage in urban areas is twice as much as in rural areas (*Sri Lanka Development Update: Economic and Poverty Impact of COVID-19*, 2021, p. 30). Against such a backdrop, ensuring smooth digital delivery uniformly across the country is a far-fetched dream. Considering how the Sri Lankan government was not even able to track the changing infection rates accurately, real-time tracking also seems quite impossible at this stage. It came under severe criticism for its mishandling of the pandemic with intentionally reduced testing and underreporting of figures (Gunasekera, 2021; Jayasinghe, 2020). This has contributed towards soaring death rates and a massive crippling of the economy, with poorly planned – and executed – mobility restrictions. Against this backdrop, we are left with one more criterion i.e. existing social support infrastructure to assess if the Sri Lankan state has been successful in mitigating the pandemic-induced economic impact.

The discussion below looks at how successful these initiatives (both existing and newly introduced) have been in providing redress to affected groups. An important point to bear in mind in this relation is that the situation of the welfare state in Sri Lanka is dismal at best. This is not a result of the pandemic but rather a situation that well predates it, which has been highlighted and aggravated by the pandemic. The Sri Lankan state is seen adopting more and more neo-liberal[2] policies, resulting in a steady shrinking of its social

2 Neo-liberalism has come to denote multiple ideas and meanings. However, the overarching idea of the neo-liberal project is economic restructuring in a manner characterised by authoritarian capital that is inimical to economic redistribution and social welfare (Venugopal,

safety network, supplemented by further and further centralisation of Executive power and securitisation tendencies that the pandemic seems effectively to justify. Chapters in this volume on Free Trade Zone workers and education discuss further how this neo-liberal mentality is seeping into various other sectors of society. This chapter looks at its ramifications for the lives and livelihoods nexus.

Public perception regarding government assistance rendered during the pandemic

The top line survey[3] reveals 52.7% of respondents to be dissatisfied with the government's efforts towards ensuring employment security. Out of this, 59.8% was from urban areas, while 50.5% was from rural areas. 67.8% of the respondents have experienced worsening financial situations, with a slightly higher percentage of rural respondents claiming so. This is a very important observation since macro economic statistics reveal the rural economy to be less affected by the pandemic, given that the industrial sector recorded a harsher decline than agriculture which constitutes the lifeblood of the rural economy. Upon being asked about coping strategies adopted to survive the economic repercussions of the pandemic, only 9.7% claimed to have received frequent government assistance (2.3% urban and 11.8% rural), with 28.5% (18.3% urban and 31.4% rural) receiving occasional government assistance. The most widely used coping strategy seemed to be cutting down of expenses, followed by using up savings. Other strategies included purchasing of items for credit (42.1%), pawning jewellery/obtaining bank loans (42.2%), borrowing money from lenders (29.5%), and receiving assistance from family and friends (37.7%). This data highlights a version different from the official government narrative regarding welfare, in that the government has left it largely to the people to come up with coping strategies, thus shirking off its welfare responsibilities to a significant extent. In analysing the data, it is

2015).

3 Please note that the analysis takes into account only those responses that recorded 'often' and 'sometimes' in the survey key. Responses that record 'once' have thus been excluded.

important to shed light on the government's conduct at the national level that gives more perspective on the narratives that emerge out of the survey findings.

Before delving into the national level policy debates, two cases, namely those of fisheries and agriculture, will be presented in order to highlight how governmental policy blunders might have facilitated the types of perceptions emerging out of the survey data.

Fisheries and agriculture: Is the government doing enough?

The small-scale fisheries industry across the island was hit harshly by the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. A World Bank report recorded a 50-65% fall in fish production at the end of the first wave, due to lockdown imposed declines in both demand and supply (as reported by Jayamanne, 2020). Jayamanne further reports how, against a backdrop of all international trade links being fully or partially destroyed by April 2020 and the non-availability of any alternative sources of income, the fisheries industry was making slow but steady recovery by June 2020. However, with the outbreak of the second wave of the pandemic that started off with the Peliyagoda fish market cluster, within months the sales of fish dropped drastically owing to a fish phobia that discouraged the public from purchasing fish, affecting many fishermen and their families. The government was unsuccessful in tackling this phobia through the dissemination of proper information (ibid). Nor was it able to extend sufficient financial support. The only noteworthy interventions they made were the promotion of dry fish, and purchasing the entire fish harvest in late October 2020 (*Sri Lanka : The government decides to buy all the fish harvest*, 2020).

While the industry was still trying to recover from these shocks, the government's mishandling of the third wave and related mobility restrictions made small-scale fisheries suffer another blow. In May 2021 came the greatest shock to the fisheries industry in the form of the X-Press Pearl disaster, a cargo of 146 containers that burnt off the shores of Colombo (Sirilal and Illmer, 2021; Perera, 2021) that will have ramifications for decades to come. It contaminated the Sri

Lankan seas with the bioaccumulation of the ship's wreckage, which is believed to have an impact on marine life for years to come. This spells daunting consequences for the fisheries industry. In the absence of a comprehensive relief package, fishermen in the Western coast are already voicing out their concerns about a total loss of livelihoods, and are not very hopeful about the portion of insurance money the government will allocate for them (ibid). Tiuline Fernando, who has been in the industry for 35 years, was quoted saying:

> The fish are bred in the coral reefs in the area and authorities are saying that all those breeding grounds are destroyed due to the dangerous chemicals. There is no other option than jump into the sea and die. (Fernando as quoted in Sirilal and Illmer, 2021)

Despite the World Bank estimations of a much less troublesome 2.4% decline in the agriculture sector (*Sri Lanka Development Update: Economic and Poverty Impact of COVID-19*, 2021), the CPA survey data revealed 69.5% rural respondents, that is a 7.6% increase compared to their urban counterparts, to have reported of having a worse financial situation post-COVID-19. A closer look at national level government policy blunders provides a possible explanation, and also a factor that might further aggravate this situation. In May 2021, the GoSL banned chemical fertiliser stating that it would be a 400 million USD savings on imports a year (*Sri Lanka farmers, local bodies to be taught produce organic fertilizer after import ban*, 2021). This policy was not only unexpected and random, but also lacked a solid scientific basis (See Waliwitiya, 2021; 'Fertiliser ban could have disasterous outcome', 2021; *Sri Lanka - Ban on agrochemicals*, 2021). The other stated objective of saving up on imports spending too is baseless, especially considering how the government is keen on spending on other non-essential imports such as vehicles for MPs.

The ban has a daunting impact on the rural economy especially since most of the rural population rely on agriculture including paddy cultivation, tea, rubber, cinnamon etc. Jayasuriya (2021) calls this a "policy underpinned by hearsay" that will make the average yield of paddy drop by 25% and tea by 35%. Nor does the country have the capacity to produce organic fertiliser to compensate

for the absence of chemical fertiliser (ibid). With the new ban, some fear a looming food shortage (*Fertilizer shortage could lead to food shortage in Sri Lanka, warn farmers,* 2021). This crisis also displays the perils of an unaccountable Executive Presidency, which in the wrong hands can cause severe damage. This is a glaring example of how the government is not only becoming unaccountable to the public, but also how it is normalising such arbitrary decisions as the norm with no public scrutiny or debate. Focus will now be shifted to the government's conduct in manoeuvring the welfare regime in Sri Lanka in response to pandemic induced economic strains.

GoSL and COVID-19 related welfare measures: What is the government doing and where did the funds go?

In March 2020, GoSL announced multiple concessions to the public affected by the pandemic. The Presidential Task Force in charge of the relief programme identified ten broad concessionary schemes and eligible groups for those. The welfare measures introduced included allowances of Rs. 5000 each for senior citizens, people with disabilities, kidney patients, *Samurdhi* recipients, and those registered under the farmers' insurance scheme (*Sri Lanka : Sri Lanka government grants more concessions to public affected by COVID-19 pandemic,* 2020). In addition, a monthly payment of Rs. 5000 to the low income families as a measure to specifically combat the pandemic induced economic strains was introduced (ibid). The measures are expected to continue until the end of the pandemic. For these efforts, GoSL received multiple donations and grants from international financial institutions. To name a few, The World Bank had allocated a total of 184.6 million USD for Sri Lanka's COVID-19 relief activities including protection for employment as of September 2020 (*World Bank Supports Sri Lanka With $56 Million to Mitigate COVID-19 Impacts*, 2020). In June 2020, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) approved a 3 million USD grant for COVID-19 relief efforts in the island nation (*ADB Approves $3 Million Grant to Assist Sri Lanka's Response to COVID-19*, 2020). In addition to these, GoSL also set up 'Itukama', its own COVID-19 relief fund initiated by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in March 2020 that received public

donations averaging Rs. 7 million a month, until April 2021 (*Sri Lanka : Remaining balance of 'ITUKAMA' COVID–19 Fund to be allocated for vaccination drive*, 2021). Contributions to this fund are on a voluntary basis and have come largely from the public, expats, and certain local institutions (ibid).

These measures highlight some important features regarding the Sri Lankan state. If compared against rising inflation and unemployment rates, Rs. 5000 is a woefully inadequate amount as relief aid. Given the macro-economic instability the country is facing, one might argue that something is better than nothing. However, despite the glum macro-economic picture, in May 2021, the government made preparations to import luxury vehicles at a cost of over Rs. 3.6 billion (*Preparations to import Luxury vehicles for MPs at a cost of over 3.6 billion rupees*, 2021) for Members of Parliament (MPs), dubbing it as purchases for emergencies to provide minimum facilities for MPs. The CBSL issuing a statement said it was unaware of the move (*Sri Lanka CB did not approve luxury SUV imports for MPs: Governor,* 2021) and amidst a large public outcry, the government had to halt the decision. Anura Kumara Dissanayake, MP from Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), alleged this to be a move made to win the confidence of certain backbencher MPs critical of the government's current conduct (*Sri Lanka says state luxury SUV imports for MPs halted following outcry*, 2021). In a television interview, Dissanayake was quoted saying:

> Some purchase the vehicles to match the maximum amount while I and some JVP MPs purchased double cabs worth 15,000 US dollars ... Can any MP talk about vehicles at this period? We accept that it is necessary to give an MP a vehicle for his duties during his MP tenure. But a time where there is no money for PCR test and vaccines when ICU beds are reduced and when the people of this country are scared of getting the virus and dying this shows an inhuman mentality. (Ibid)

Next, the role of the 'Itukama: COVID-19 Healthcare and Social Security Fund' is an interesting one. This can be called a clear

example of the hollowing out of the state[4] in that the extent of the government's involvement in providing public relief measures is questionable. Money for the fund as mentioned above came largely from the public, especially in a context where the government is displaying growing unaccountability towards those who voted them into power as shown throughout this volume.

Keeping this in mind, the crucial question now is if the money of the fund was utilised prudently and which portion of it went into welfare schemes. In March 2021, Verité Research filed a Right to Information (RTI) request with the Presidential Secretariat inquiring about the allocation of 'Itukama' funds for relief activities and social welfare programmes. The Secretariat was initially able to account only for 6% (Rs. 105 million) of the fund, which too was spent on things such as testing, quarantine facilities (again a questionable measure introduced mainly by the military, with no proper knowledge on the associated health concerns), and advocacy programmes (*The government spent only 6% of the Itukama COVID-19 fund balance*, no date). The remainder of the fund is said to be allocated for the vaccine rollout (*Sri Lanka : Remaining balance of 'ITUKAMA' COVID–19 Fund to be allocated for vaccination drive*, 2021). A later statement released by the President's Media Division in May 2021, was again able to account only for the utilisation of 23% of the fund with no allocation for social welfare (Thomas, 2021). This makes it clear that no money from the fund was allocated for social welfare programmes, despite it being a stated aim for the establishment of the fund.

While vaccines are important not only for bringing down mortality rates but also for the improvement of the economic conditions of the country, the vaccination programme too is marred with multiple controversies which will not be discussed in this

4 Hollow state is a metaphor used to denote the "degree of separation between a government and the services it funds" (Milward and Provan, 2000, p. 362). This is generally used in contexts where governments use external agencies to deliver public services. In the current situation, the Sri Lankan government can be seen using the public to fund certain initiatives it is supposed to carry out, thus outsourcing certain important functions. The important question here is, what then is the role of the state?

chapter. However, it is important to note that the mishandling of the vaccination programme[5] also bears testimony to the fact that the government no longer is fulfilling its responsibility in assuring safety for both lives and livelihoods, which will have serious long-term ramifications especially for the country's economy. The bona fide of the vaccination drive again came into question when an appeal made to vaccinate garment workers who have to work irrespective of travel restrictions, fell on deaf ears (Gunasekera, 2021; Glover, 2021). Let alone vaccination, they are even deprived of safe working conditions which speed up the spread of the virus, making them a group worst hit by the pandemic (Glover, 2021). Their plight is further discussed in a separate chapter of this volume that deals specifically with Free Trade Zone workers. In this light, as Fernando (2021) notes, it is now time for GoSL to transition from "I did it best", its general approach to handling the pandemic, to a more responsible "Let's do it together" approach.

Another development that took place in May 2021 that again speaks to the government's irresponsible and unconcerned attitude towards handling the pandemic is the allocation of Rs. 625 million for outdoor fitness centres (See Husain, 2021; 'Cabinet approves Rs 625 million to establish 500 outdoor fitness centers using containers', 2021), when the country is already being hit by a vicious third wave of COVID-19. In response to mounting public criticism especially on social media, Minister Namal Rajapaksa took to facebook to say that the government would of course prioritise the pandemic situation, and will only embark on preliminary work concerning the centres ('Cabinet approves Rs 625 million to establish 500 outdoor fitness centers using containers', 2021). He also went on to say should the finance ministry require this money for COVID-19 related relief programmes, they are willing to release it for such an emergency (Husain, 2021).

5 Concerns range from the non-availability of the second dose of the Astra-Zeneca vaccine to the insufficient stocks of vaccines available to vaccinate the entire population, efficacy of certain vaccines approved, and the equal distribution of vaccines across different income groups.

Management and administration of welfare funds

Having established the fact that GoSL typically suffers from a lack of commitment in the allocation of welfare funds, this then brings us to the question of how effective has it been in the management of already allocated funds for COVID-19 related welfare mechanisms. This is also the focus of another chapter of the volume that discusses in greater detail the administration of fund disbursement.

Transparency International, Sri Lanka (TISL), in a December 2020 entry, flags concerns regarding the administration of welfare funds using the experience of a group of 28 villagers in Vavuniya who were denied the essential monthly allowance of Rs. 5000 (*Ensuring COVID-19 relief reaches Sri Lanka's people,* 2020).These villagers had not been given the application to apply for the allowance, with no proper explanation offered by the village administration. This is merely one example of administrative inefficiency related to the disbursement of COVID-19 relief aid. The entire aid distribution mechanism is blemished with controversy ranging from administrative inefficiency to manipulation for political gains, and in some cases even stealing (ibid).

In May 2020, Mahinda Deshapriya, Chairman of the Elections Commission, forwarded a letter received by the Elections Commission regarding complaints pertaining to the COVID-19 relief programme (*Remove politicians from Covid-19 relief programme*, 2020).The letter highlights malpractices including manipulation of voter registration lists for political patronage, using the disbursement of the welfare allowance for publicity purposes of political parties in the run up to elections, and depriving certain eligible persons of the welfare allowance due to their political allegiance (ibid). Fonseka (2020) recording diverse experiences related to the deprivation of the allowance notes that:

> President of the United Self Employed Workers' Union Charles Pradeep said that there are around 50, 000 self-employed workers in Pettah alone and they have not received the Rs. 5000 allowance. A handful of the workers who have received their April allowances in May, are still waiting for their May allowances ... Estate workers in Hatton and Watawala have been going to their local government

> institutions for more than two weeks to get the Rs. 5000 allowance of May. They have been informed that the authorities were yet to receive funds from the government to distribute among beneficiaries.

Furthermore, the article goes on to report the instance of a fraudulent officer in East Kithalagama, Matara who allegedly stole Rs. 100,000 from the funds allocated for the disbursement of the essential allowance of Rs. 5000 (ibid).

An informal discussion with a professional from the upper-middle income bracket revealed another important aspect of this administrative deficiency.[6] She had gone to the *Grama Niladhari* (GN) in early June 2021 to seek assistance to facilitate a movement pass for her spouse who had returned from abroad and was in hotel quarantine to return home upon completion of the quarantine period. After the paper work was done, the GN had asked her if her name should be included in the list of recipients for the essential allowance. This clearly shows that the disbursement lacks proper coordination and relies on word of mouth in certain areas. When 28 villagers who were actually in need of the allowance were denied of it with no proper explanation, others who clearly do not need it are being given the opportunity, in the absence of a proper coordination mechanism.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion makes it clear that the economic impact of the pandemic was not homogenous across different income groups of society, and that people are generally dissatisfied with the government's welfare response to the pandemic. With a large share of employment concentrated in the informal sector, the transition to tele-working is seen to be furthering already existing inequalities. In the absence of meaningful labour market security and unemployment insurance, the state's role in providing safety to the

6 Discussion with a legal professional from Kandy (virtual), 11 June 2021.

most vulnerable of its population has become ever more important. However, the government is manipulating relief packages for its own ends.

In this context, this chapter argues that the Sri Lankan state has been unsuccessful in mitigating COVID-19 induced economic shocks due to four reasons. First, the state has become a hollow state in that it's seen normalising the role of the private and international entities in fulfilling its role. It is also seen indirectly pushing its citizens to come up with their own coping mechanisms, thus shirking off its responsibility as the primary protector of its population. The state is thereby decreasing its welfare component thus leaving it upon the citizens to respond to emergencies. Next, the state seems more invested in policies that have no direct bearing on the pandemic situation and are an extravagance to an economy like Sri Lanka's. Third, the distribution and administration of aid is both mismanaged and misappropriated, thus depriving the most vulnerable of the population of social security benefits especially during a pandemic. Finally, the state seems to be formulating haphazard policies that have an adverse impact on the population, in quite an arbitrary manner. In conclusion, it can be argued that the pandemic is perhaps the best test of how effective the social welfare regime of Sri Lanka was, a test we are failing woefully as a nation.

References

ADB Approves $3 Million Grant to Assist Sri Lanka's Response to COVID-19 (2020) *Asian Development Bank*. Available at: https://www.adb.org/news/adb-approves-3-million-grant-assist-sri-lanka-s-response-covid-19 (Accessed: 30 June 2021).

BBC News (2020) 'Coronavirus: Greatest test since World War Two, says UN chief', 1 April. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-52114829 (Accessed: 27 June 2021).

'Cabinet approves Rs 625 million to establish 500 outdoor fitness centers using containers' (2021) *NewsWire*, 4 May. Available at: https://www.newswire.lk/2021/05/04/cabinet-approves-

rs-625-million-to-establish-500-outdoor-fitness-centers-using-containers/ (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

Decerf, B., Ferreira, F.H.G., Mahler, D.G., Sterck, O. (2020) *Lives and Livelihoods: Estimates of the Global Mortality and Poverty Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic*. 13549. Bonn: Institute of Labor Economics (IZA). Available at: https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/223991/1/dp13549.pdf.

Ensuring COVID-19 relief reaches Sri Lanka's people (2020) *Transparency.org*. Available at: https://www.transparency.org/en/blog/ensuring-covid-19-relief-reaches-sri-lankas-people (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

Fernando, L. (2021) 'Covid - Let's Migrate From "I did It Best" To "Let's Do It Together"', *Colombo Telegraph*, 7 May. Available at: https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/covid-lets-migrate-from-i-did-it-best-to-lets-do-it-together/ (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

'Fertiliser ban could have disasterous outcome' (2021), 10 June. Available at: http://island.lk/fertiliser-ban-could-have-disasterous-outcome/ (Accessed: 25 July 2021).

Fertilizer shortage could lead to food shortage in Sri Lanka, warn farmers (2021) *Newsfirst Sri Lanka*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GmjFkbQfFv8 (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

Fonseka, P. (2020) *Swindlers deal to deprive Rs. 5000 allowance*, *Daily Mirror*. Available at: https://www.dailymirror.lk/recomended-news/Swindlers-deal-to-deprive-Rs-5000-allowance/277-190489 (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

Glover, S. (2021) *Sri Lankan garment workers 'hit by third wave'*, *Ecotextile News*. Available at: https://www.ecotextile.com/2021062427983/materials-production-news/sri-lankan-garment-workers-hit-by-third-wave.html (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

Gunasekera, T. (2021) *Patriot, Bared*, *Colombo Telegraph*. Available at: https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/patriot-bared/ (Accessed: 30 June 2021).

Husain, J. (2021) *Namal Says Project To Establish 500 Outdoor Gyms Only After Covid-19 Third-Wave Ends*, *Daily Mirror*. Available at: https://www.magzter.com/stories/Newspaper/Daily-Mirror-Sri-Lanka/Namal-Says-Project-To-Establish-500-Outdoor-Gyms-Only-After-Covid-19-Third-Wave-Ends (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

Jayamanne, D. (2020) *Taking Stock of Growing 'Fish-phobia'*, *CeylonToday*. Available at: https://ceylontoday.lk/news/taking-stock-of-growing-fish-phobia (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

Jayasinghe, C. (2020) *Sri Lanka needs to ramp up daily PCR testing to 40-50,000 a day: Dr Rannan-Eliya*, *EconomyNext*. Available at: https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-needs-to-ramp-up-daily-pcr-testing-to-40-50000-a-day-dr-rannan-eliya-75755 (Accessed: 30 June 2021).

Jayasuriya, L. (2000) *Welfarism and Politics in Sri Lanka: Experience of a Third World Welfare State*. The University of Western Australia. Available at: https://research-repository.uwa.edu.au/en/publications/welfarism-and-politics-in-sri-lanka-experience-of-a-third-world-w (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

Jayasuriya, L. (2004) 'The Colonial Lineages of the Welfare State', in Kelegama, S. (ed.) *Economic Policy in Sri Lanka: Issues and Debates*. First edition. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Pvt. Ltd, pp. 403–425.

Jayasuriya, R. (2021) 'The coming full-blown crisis in agricultural sector courtesy of a shortsighted fertilizer ban', *LankaWeb*, 16 June. Available at: https://www.lankaweb.com/news/items/2021/06/16/the-coming-full-blown-crisis-in-agricultural-sector-courtesy-of-a-shortsighted-fertilizer-ban/ (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

Jayawardena, P. (2020) 'talkingeconomics - COVID-19 and Sri Lanka's Labour Market Gaps: Permanent Protection for Temporary Employees', *Institute of Policy Studies*, 9 September. Available at: https://www.ips.lk/talkingeconomics/2020/09/09/covid-19-and-sri-lankas-labour-market-gaps-permanent-protection-for-temporary-employees/ (Accessed: 29 June 2021).

Milward, H. B. and Provan, K. G. (2000) 'Governing the Hollow State', *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory: J-PART*, 10(2), pp. 359–379.

Most Sri Lanka workers without formal protection amid Covid-19 shock: IPS study (2020) *EconomyNext*. Available at: https://economynext.com/most-sri-lanka-workers-without-formal-protection-amid-covid-19-shock-ips-study-76369 (Accessed: 29 June 2021).

Perera, M. M. (2021) *Colombo, Express Pearl disaster worries Catholics and civil society*, *AsiaNews*. Available at: http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Colombo,-Express-Pearl-disaster-worries-Catholics-and-civil-society-53291.html (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

Preprations to import Luxury vehicles for MPs at a cost of over 3.6 billion rupees (2021) *Sri Lanka News - Newsfirst*. Available at: https://www.newsfirst.lk/2021/05/24/preprations-to-import-luxury-vehicles-for-mps-at-a-cost-of-over-3-6-billion-rupees/ (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

Ranaraja, M. (2020) 'Notes from Colombo: Sri Lanka Weathers the Covid-19 Storm', *The Asia Foundation*, 8 July. Available at: https://asiafoundation.org/2020/07/08/notes-from-colombo-sri-lanka-weathers-the-covid-19-storm/ (Accessed: 27 June 2021).

Recent Economic Developments: Highlights of 2020 and Prospects for 2021 (2020) Colombo: Central Bank of Sri Lanka. Available at: https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/en/publications/economic-and-financial-reports/recent-economic-developments/recent-economic-developments-2020 (Accessed: 29 June 2021).

Remove politicians from Covid-19 relief programme (2020) *Lanka Mirror*. Available at: https://srilankamirror.com/news/18247-remove-politicians-from-covid-19-relief-programme (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

Sirilal, R. and Illmer, A. (2021) 'X-Press Pearl: The "toxic ship" that caused an environmental disaster', *BBC News*, 10 June. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-57395693 (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

'Socio-Economic Index in the face of COVID-19' (2021) *Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 30 June. Available at: https://www.cpalanka.org/socio-economic-index-in-the-face-of-covid-19/ (Accessed: 30 June 2021).

Sri Lanka - Ban on agrochemicals (2021). Available at: https://www.hortibiz.com/news/?tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=41137&cHash=dd059427406ea8fe24400acd2ef06b52 (Accessed: 25 July 2021).

Sri Lanka CB did not approve luxury SUV imports for MPs: Governor (2021) *EconomyNext*. Available at: https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-cb-did-not-approve-luxury-suv-imports-for-mps-governor-82962 (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

Sri Lanka Development Update: Economic and Poverty Impact of COVID-19 (2021) Washington, DC: The World Bank Group. Available at: https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/15b8de0edd4f39cc7a82b7aff8430576-0310062021/original/SriLanka-DevUpd-Apr9.pdf.

Sri Lanka farmers, local bodies to be taught produce organic fertilizer after import ban (2021) *EconomyNext*. Available at: https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-farmers-local-bodies-to-be-taught-produce-organic-fertilizer-after-import-ban-82690 (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

Sri Lanka: Remaining balance of 'ITUKAMA' COVID–19 Fund to be allocated for vaccination drive (2021) *Colombopage*. Available at: http://www.colombopage.com/archive_21A/May10_1620667307CH.php (Accessed: 30 June 2021).

Sri Lanka says state luxury SUV imports for MPs halted following outcry (2021) *EconomyNext*. Available at: https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-says-state-luxury-suv-imports-for-mps-halted-following-outcry-82413 (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka government grants more concessions to public affected by COVID-19 pandemic (2020) *Colombo Page*. Available at: http://www.colombopage.com/archive_20A/Mar31_1585667258CH.php (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

Sri Lanka: State of the Economy 2020 | Institute of policy studies Sri Lanka (2020). Available at: https://www.ips.lk/sri-lanka-state-of-the-economy-2020-2/ (Accessed: 29 June 2021).

Sri Lanka: The government decides to buy all the fish harvest (2020) *Colombo Page*. Available at: http://www.colombopage.com/archive_20B/Oct28_1603897849CH.php (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

The Global Economic Outlook During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Changed World (2020) *World Bank*. Available at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/06/08/the-global-economic-outlook-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-a-changed-world (Accessed: 28 June 2021).

The Global Economic Prospects (2021). Washington, DC: The World Bank Group. Available at: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/35647/9781464816659.pdf (Accessed: 28 June 2021).

The government spent only 6% of the Itukama COVID-19 fund balance (no date) *Publicfinance.lk*. Available at: https://publicfinance.lk/en/topics/The-government-spent-only-6-of-the-Itukama-COVID-19-fund-balance-1620900512 (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

Thomas, K. (2021) *What Happened To The Itukama Fund?* Available at: https://roar.media/english/life/current-affairs/what-happened-to-the-itukama-fund (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

Venugopal, R. (2015) 'Neoliberalism as concept', *Economy and Society*, 44(2), pp. 165–187. doi: 10.1080/03085147.2015.1013356.

Waliwitiya, R. (2021) *Sri Lanka fertilizer ban haphazard, modern tech, risk management the answer: researcher*, *EconomyNext*. Available at: https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-fertilizer-ban-haphazard-modern-tech-risk-management-the-answer-researcher-81643 (Accessed: 25 July 2021).

Weerasekera, H. (2020) 'talkingeconomics - Building Back Better: Reviving Sri Lanka's Economy Beyond COVID-19', *Institute of Policy Studies*, 19 October. Available at: https://www.

ips.lk/talkingeconomics/2020/10/19/building-back-better-reviving-sri-lankas-economy-beyond-covid-19/ (Accessed: 29 June 2021).

World Bank Supports Sri Lanka With $56 Million to Mitigate COVID-19 Impacts (2020) *World Bank*. Available at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/09/11/world-bank-supports-sri-lanka-with-usd56-million-mitigate-covid-19-impacts (Accessed: 30 June 2021).

Yeyati, E. L. and Filippini, F. (2021) *Social and economic impact of COVID-19*. 158. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution. Available at: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Social-and-economic-impact-COVID.pdf.

5

Ethno-centric pandemic governance: The Muslim community in Sri Lanka's COVID response

Sakina Moinudeen

Introduction

"Epidemics can potentially create a medical version of the Hobbesian nightmare – the war of all against all." (Strong, 1990, p. 258) This strange sense of 'epidemic psychology' portrays the situation as posing an immediate threat, either actual or potential, to public order. This was quite evident in the context of the pandemic in Sri Lanka, wherein the state's ethnocratic[1] system of governance (Balasundaram, 2016) was directed towards the Muslim community in particular, in the form of undue scrutiny, stigmatisation, and discrimination. "Classically associated with this epidemic of irrationality, fear and suspicion, there comes close in its train an epidemic stigmatisation both of those with the disease and of those who belong to what are feared to be the main carrier groups. This can begin with avoidance, segregation and abuse...

1 'Ethnocracy' refers to a system of governance run largely based on ethnic calculations; this could be at elections, in policy making, or when handling emergencies.

Personal fear may be translated into collective witch-hunts." (Ibid, p. 253) This sense of 'othering' was widely prevalent throughout the pandemic from contact tracing to the disposal of those deceased of COVID-19 who were of Islamic faith, which not only helped with diverting the public's attention from the government's inefficiency in managing the crisis, but also helped to reinforce and even intensify existing prejudices against the Muslim community for mere political advantage. As such, the pandemic in itself created the perfect backdrop for the government to continue its ethnocentric, anti-democratic system of governance with impunity.

This chapter provides an overview of how crucial aspects of the government's pandemic response facilitated a further polarisation of ethnic groups in the country, exacerbating prevailing inequalities within society. The chapter draws on a national poll conducted by Social Indicator, the survey research arm of the Centre for Policy Alternatives, in combination with field visits and qualitative content analyses.

The pandemic and the public psyche

The President and his associates on multiple occasions proclaimed their confidence and strength in dealing with the health crisis by drawing parallels between it and fighting a war. During an interview on the COVID-19 crisis in Sri Lanka aired by a leading television channel in the country, the Commander of the Sri Lankan Army, Chief of Defence Staff, and head of the National Operation Centre for Prevention of COVID-19 outbreak (NOCPCO), General Shavendra Silva reiterated the strength of the tri-forces and the confidence the President (and public) has in it, to beat the COVID-19 outbreak just as 'successfully' as it did 'defeating' terrorism in 2009 (*Full-Video of Army Commander speaks to Indeewari Amuwatte on battle against COVID-19 @HydePark*, 2020). The government's approach to addressing the pandemic spearheaded by military personnel created a notion that the virus was an enemy that had to be defeated. The strategy used was discipline to flatten the curve. Persons who the state claimed to not have obeyed this order, i.e. either violated COVID-19 restrictions or questioned the

government, were humiliated in public (*Sri Lanka investigates troops over 'humiliation 'of Muslims*, 2021). Framing the pandemic, which is essentially a public health crisis, as an issue of national security of a military nature was an assertion that was commonly exploited by those in power. Rather than initiating a civilian-led process with the supervision and direction particularly of the medical fraternity, there were multiple calls for 'obedience' as opposed to fact-based awareness measures, and appeals for 'patriotism' as opposed to solidarity when responding to the pandemic.

Whilst pandemics could strengthen social cohesion and compassion towards one another, they could also create extreme forms of social division wherein some groups are used as scapegoats, leading to their victimisation; this invariably creates a sense of social disorder within the community (Reicher and Stott, 2020). In this connection, it is noticeable how the suppression of civil liberties (via widespread surveillance and intimidation), circumventing processes and mechanisms of democratic accountability and transparency in the name of expediency in responding to an emergency, and the need to rally behind a strong leader against what is essentially an existential threat have been put to use as commonplace tropes to justify a particularly anti-democratic style of governance in Sri Lanka. This has largely altered the public psyche towards a more defensive, as opposed to a more empathetic, approach to those victimised by the virus – which has also fed into the vicious ethno-centric electoral calculus. The fear and anxiety thus amplified are craftily used by the newly elected political force and their allied media institutions to steer public support in favour of systematic and institutionalised discrimination. Mainstream media, a source of information to many about the pandemic, are used as an effective tool to stigmatise and stifle the rights of particularly the Muslim community, the main scapegoats of the novel virus.

Nationalistic rhetoric against calls to permit burials of persons of Islamic faith who died of COVID-19 was an opportune moment to rekindle the infamous 'one law - one country' slogan. Muslims were portrayed to be the trouble makers and made to be objects of public stigmatisation and targets of discrimination – a notion

that has continued with particular vigour since the Easter Sunday terror attacks of April 2019. Their faith, values, and culture were the 'collateral damage' of the so-called 'war against the pandemic'. To better appreciate the framework within which this anti-Muslim rhetoric comes into life, it may be instructive to take brief account of the steady build-up of such sentiments in post-war Sri Lanka.

Dynamics of ethno-religious governance in post-war Sri Lanka

The conclusion of armed hostilities in 2009 gave rise to a sense of triumphalism (Kumarasinghe, 2016) with a keen emphasis on the need to protect the Sinhala Buddhist identity (*New party aims to safeguard Sinhala identity*, 2016). The growing disappointment among the Sinhala- Buddhist community, particularly in relation to escalating economic distresses and the claim that Muslims monopolise economic gain (Kadirgamar, 2013), enabled nationalistic political forces to reclaim their lost appeal and facilitate a recurrence of violence (Zuhair, 2016). Politically, the rise of nationalistic political parties like Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), followed by ultra nationalist ethno-religious groups like Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), Sinhala Ravaya, and Ravana Balaya fuelled an ethno-nationalist narrative, which unfolded with great impunity due to direct or indirect state patronage, validating growing nationalistic sentiments and perceived insecurities among the majority community (*Sri Lanka: Preliminary findings of Country Visit to Sri Lanka by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief*, 2019).

Despite a rich history of democratic politics and a sound legal framework which protects religious freedom, a combination of trends including racism, violent xenophobia, islamophobia, racial slurs, and hate speech directed against the Muslims ensued in post-war Sri Lanka. This culminated in widespread communal violence on multiple occasions. Although the *Yahapalanaya* regime in 2015 pledged to strengthen fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, it failed to curb the recurring violence against minority communities and enforce legal action against perpetrators responsible for ethno-religious disharmony in the country. This further enabled

nationalistic and radical forces to roam with impunity, escalating the antagonism between the majority and minority communities (*President pardons Gnanasara Thero*, 2019; Mayberry, 2019).

Claims that Muslims were taking control of the country's economy and altering the demographics with their rapid population growth, and that they were contaminating and poisoning Sinhalese Buddhists via implanting dangerous substances in food, clothes, and material that could affect the fertility of the majority community, as well as charges of infertility procedures by Muslim professionals were a few of the varying allegations that triggered violent responses against the minority community. The Easter Sunday terrorist attacks – a rampage that took place in April 2019, killing more than 260 mostly Christian worshippers, and wounding many more – fed into the exiting resentment against the Muslim community, and further alienated it from not just the majority, but other minority communities (such as Sinhalese Catholics) as well.

Campaigning on a Sinhala Buddhist nationalist platform that proposed a mandate for 'Vistas, Prosperity and Splendour', the Rajapaska-led SLPP bloc secured a resounding victory in both the Presidential and Parliamentary elections, with a clear majority voting in favour of the incumbent President and his representatives (Srinivasan, 2019; *Sri Lanka election: Rajapaksa brothers win 'super-majority'*, 2020). The election win was reflective of a deeply divided society with unprecedented support from the ethnic majority Sinhalese, whilst Tamil and Muslim voters overwhelmingly rejected the SLPP (Thiruvarangan, 2020). The SLPP capitalised on the Easter Sunday terror attacks to effectively portray the need for a strong, overpowering leader that prioritised national security over everything else (*Gotabaya named as SLPP's presidential candidate*, 2019).

Added to this was the intensification of anti-democratic vigour with little concern for democratic forms of governance as was evidenced when President Gotabaya Rajapaksa dissolved Parliament during the height of the pandemic and established a range of task forces with no Parliamentary oversight or accountability. These task forces primarily headed by the military were given the powers

to lead the mitigation process of COVID-19, introduce measures for poverty eradication, support livelihood development, facilitate economic revival, and preserve archeological heritage, to name a few (*Sri Lankan Parliament dissolved; elections set for April*, 2020; *The appointment of the two presidential task forces*, 2020).

The Rajapaksas' wasted no time in proclaiming their agenda to strengthen Sinhalese Buddhist hegemony in the wake of their electoral victory. The President followed by the Prime Minister took their oaths at scared Buddhist temples to reaffirm the primacy of Buddhist cultural heritage. A Buddhist Advisory Council was constituted on the invitation of the President, to meet on the third Friday of every month, so as to provide advice and views of the Maha Sangha in the implementation of policies of the government (*Buddhist Advisory Council commends President for walking the talk*, 2020). It is in this context that the COVID-19 pandemic struck Sri Lanka in the first quarter of 2020.

The Muslim community and the pandemic

During a political interview aired on a pro-government news channel, with both ruling and opposition members of Parliament in April 2020, racial and derogatory slurs against the Muslim community were used both statistically (falsely) and rhetorically by the government ministers present, as well as by the host of the interview, which not only highlighted the animosity against the community, and reflected subscription to the false claims of Muslims being an existential threat to society as a whole (*Derana TV Chathura's double standards exposed: citizens enraged over racist slurs of Derana TV anchor*, 2020), but also denoted the role of the media in facilitating this form of racist behaviour. The notion that Muslims were the 'super spreaders' of the corona virus was first objectified during a television interview by the head of the NOCPCO which was aired at the very initial stages of the pandemic (early March 2020). He specifically indicated that persons from Puttlam (an area predominantly consisting of Muslims) had the highest number of persons returning from overseas territories who avoided registering themselves at the local police stations. He claimed that whilst they

were infected with the virus, they lacked discipline and roamed around spreading the virus to many in the area, and as a result indefinite curfew was forced to be declared in Puttlam (ibid). Following the complete lockdown of Puttlam, similar claims were made in relation to Akurana in the Kandy district and Atalugama in the Kalutara district – both predominantly consisting of Muslim communities (*Sri Lanka extends indefinite curfew to Kandy and Puttlam, Akurana under lockdown*, 2020).

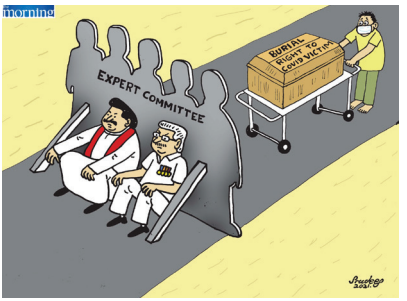
The government, which underplayed the severity of the virus initially and later failed to respond to the public health crisis swiftly and efficiently, had to scapegoat the Muslim community in order to deviate attention from their failures in aptly mitigating the public health crisis. Specific references to rates of infection identified within the Muslim community, villages, or locations were highlighted in daily reporting on pro-government media channels. The perception that the community was flouting quarantine regulations and thereby spreading the virus was a notion that had to be held on to and deviously documented. This was further reiterated by a resident from Atolugama when speaking about his experience and dilemmas faced during the second wave of the pandemic.

> My village was cordoned off by army and STF personnel following a claim by a doctor from the Bandaragama district hospital who has a private clinic in the area. The doctor assumed that the village could be infected by COVID-19 due to many with flu like symptoms consulting him. What was strange was that various media institutions accompanied the large groups of military personnel that surged into my village. We were dumbstruck and intimidated at the same time; we couldn't fathom what was going on. People were dragged out of their homes by force. To those who protested, questioned authority, or locked themselves indoors due to fear of being attacked, angry threats of feeding pork were made if instructions were not followed. Batches of residents from my village were taken for PCR testing either voluntarily or by force – approximately 1080 persons were sent to quarantine centres in Jaffna, Bandarawela, Batticaloa, and Beruwala. There were about 40-50 of us loaded into one bus. We were not allowed to open the windows. We were kept like this for nearly three hours before the journey commenced to our respective quarantine centres. All of

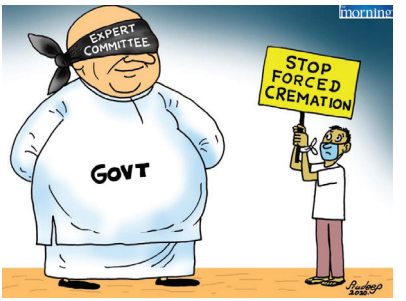
> this was perfectly documented by media personnel at the scene who eagerly waited to watch everything unfold. Although the authorities claimed that residents from my village tested positive for COVID-19, none of us had access to our test results. Some among us had given details for PCR testing, but were not subject to any form of PCR or antigen tests. We were told, including those who did not do any PCR or antigen tests, that we had been tested positive for COVID-19 and were sent to quarantine centres. Most of us who were sent to quarantine struggled to find our way back home after the 14 days, as transport back home was not provided. Most in my village are daily wage earners. This was a costly journey back home to many among us, as private vehicles for hire were scarce during the time – and rates that many charged us back home were very high. For two and a half months we were under complete lockdown. Our village was surrounded by the military and cordoned off. We were provided with state assistance twice by way of an allowance of Rs. 5000/= for each family and a package of essentials which consisted of outdated food items.[2]

In ethnocracies, the state apparatus is controlled by the dominant ethnic group, and policies that are implemented by the state largely favour the dominant ethnic group, disregarding other minority groups in society. This was glaringly evident when various state institutions implicitly and explicitly encouraged and spearheaded anti-Muslim propaganda in the guise of battling the COVID-19 crisis so as to appease the majority. A classic example for this is also highlighted in the memes reproduced below that were circulated on social media and detailed thereafter, wherein the mandatory cremation policy enforced by the government in relation to persons who died of COVID-19 was skillfully manipulated for the consumption of the majority population.

2 Discussion with small scale businessman from Atolugama, Bandaragama (virtual), 18 June 2021.



Source: Cartoonist Pradeep, 2021



Source: Cartoonist Pradeep, 2020

The Health guidelines issued by Sri Lanka's Ministry of Health following a gazette notification on the 27th of March 2020 echoed views similar to the WHO health guidelines in relation to the disposal of those who die of COVID-19. However, notwithstanding the guidelines that allowed for burial, following the first death of a person who was of Islamic faith, authorities forcefully cremated the victim despite the family's continuous objections. Later on that day, the health guidelines were amended to allow only cremation, which was further followed by an official mandatory cremation policy on the 11th of April 2020. With over 190 countries allowing burial of persons who died of COVID-19 under specified health guidelines, Sri Lanka remained an outstanding nation that implemented a mandatory cremation policy for nearly a year without any sound scientific evidence.

Cremation of the dead goes against Islamic teachings of dignified burials. The mandatory cremation policy did not only deprive Muslims of their basic religious rights, but also contributed to the widespread perception that Muslims' religious practices aid the spread of the virus. The smear campaign against Muslims heightened with calls on the government to retract the ban on burials of persons who died of COVID-19. Debates in this regard took an anti-Muslim turn that justified the mandatory cremation policy issued by the government. The voices of scientists and medical professionals in the field who advocated for the need to follow WHO guidelines – as mandatory cremation had no scientific base – were sidelined and denied due publicity in both print and electronic media aligned with the state.

The chief epidemiologist along with many politicians in power claimed that based on the opinion of an 'expert' committee, the composition and qualifications of which remain unknown, burial of COVID-19 bodies would increase the risk of communicable disease by contamination of ground water. These claims were not supported by any form of scientific evidence but were strongly repeated to anyone who questioned the policy. . What was more bizarre was the fact that cremation often took place immediately upon notification of test results, without allowing family members reasonable time or opportunity to request a verification test. This led to, on many occasions, hospital officials refusing continuous pleas by families of the deceased to conduct a second test for complete verification. Families of the deceased were forced to sign papers authorising the cremation of their loved ones, whilst also not being allowed to view their body (*Coronavirus funerals: Sri Lanka's Muslims decry forced cremation*, 2020).

Dr. Channa Perera, a Consultant Forensic Pathologist attached to Sri Lanka's Ministry of Health in an interview with the BBC World Service went to the extent of saying that the "government has nothing against Muslims but they have a small fear about whether the virus can be used for unauthorised activities. Maybe an unwanted person could get access to a body and it could be used as a biological weapon." (*Small fear whether the dead bodies with the virus can be used as biological weapons*, 2020) To further support this claim, leading state sector academics advocated for the compulsory cremation policy imposed by the state. A strong advocate for the compulsory cremation policy imposed by the state was Prof Meththika Vithanage from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura where she argued that viruses in buried cadavers can contaminate the ground water. Although there were grave errors and contradictions in these claims of contamination of ground water, these were given a lot of publicity in order to maintain that the policy had a scientific base (*CCPSL says no solid evidence indicating burial of COVID-19 victims increases spread of virus*, 2021; *Sri Lanka can bury COVID-19 victims: SLMA*, 2021; Marsoof, 2020).

False propaganda led by the state and supported by various leading academics and epidemiologists then found resonance in the collective psyche of many Sinhalese, as well as other non-Muslim communities. According to the survey, a majority among the Sinhala, Tamil, and Up-Country Tamil communities are of the view that cultural/ religious practices of some religious groups could be a cause for a higher possibility of the spread of COVID-19. Among those who oppose this, most are from the Muslim community. Furthermore, on fair treatment during the pandemic, it is mostly respondents from the Muslim community, in comparison to respondents from the Sinhala, Tamil, and Up-Country Tamil communities, who felt that the government's COVID-19 rules (guidelines) were unfairly implemented in relation to different ethnic groups in society ('Socio-Economic Index in the face of COVID-19', 2021).

The College of Community Physicians of Sri Lanka (*CCPSL says...*, 2021) and the Sri Lanka Medical Association issued statements (*Sri Lanka can bury...*, 2021) clarifying that there has been no proof that burial of COVID-19 dead bodies constitutes a public health hazard. World-renowned Pathologist and Virologist Professor Malik Peiris (*World renowned virologist Prof. Malik Peiris refutes claims that burials transmit COVID-19*, 2020), currently serving as the Chair Professor of the Department of Virology at the University of Hong Kong who is also a leading scientist who discovered the virus that causes SARS, questioned the theory of compulsory cremation stating that "Covid-19 is not a waterborne disease.... and I haven't seen any evidence to suggest it spreads through dead bodies. A virus can only multiply in a living cell. Once a person dies the ability of the viruses to multiply decreases... Dead bodies aren't buried right in running water. Once you bury the body six feet under wrapped in impermeable wrapping, it is highly unlikely it would contaminate running water."

Although there were many protests staged against the discriminatory policies implemented by the government during the pandemic, there were also many limitations to them due to travel embargos. Although it was quite obvious that the government was playing the racist card and institutionalising discrimination amidst the pandemic, very little adherence was given to the Muslim

politicians who tried to pressure (Ranawana, 2020) the government's discriminatory policy. Protests went viral on social media forums both locally and internationally, drawing the attention of many Muslim countries globally. The refusal of Sri Lanka's Supreme Court to hear the petitions challenging the discriminatory policy was the tipping point which forced the Muslim community to seek international assistance to find a solution to the issue of forced cremations during the pandemic. UN special rapporteurs wrote to the government in April 2020 and January 2021, urging the government to respect the wishes of those who seek burial, and to recognise that the disregard of Muslims' feelings may lead to more complex issues. It was further highlighted in the 46th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council from February-March 2021, with the 57-member Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) raising the issue. Sri Lanka was to face a fresh resolution by the UNHRC at its 46th sessions and needed the support of the OIC and its South Asian neighbour Pakistan (*Sri Lanka does away with forced cremations after PM Imran Khan reportedly raises issues*, 2021) which could have been one of the few reasons as to why this ban was revoked (Fonseka and Dissanayake, 2021). Following the lifting of the ban there was no reason provided for the long drawn out argument of the contamination narrative associated with burying deceased persons. Yet, to keep the fires of ethnocentrism burning and evade public uproar against permitting the burial of COVID-deceased persons, burials were permitted in Oddamavadi, a Muslim populated village in the Eastern province.

As already demonstrated, the systematic injustice faced by Muslims during the pandemic was not limited to mainstream or social media, but was extended to institutionalised discrimination embedded in various government policies. This not only impedes on the basic rights of those belonging to minority communities, in this instance the Muslims in particular, but also has crucial implications for coexistence and ethnic harmony as a whole. False propaganda has further contributed to the erosion of trust between communities, which has facilitated a serious deterioration of democratic values within society as a whole, undermining prospects for substantive democracy.

Conclusion

A combination of the government's war rhetoric and stringent COVID-19 regulations has helped to portray communities who are more vulnerable to the virus as a threat to society, and thereby criminalise those who contract the virus. This sense of victimisation has exacerbated with the military taking control of the COVID response – which in turn considered the victimised as mere 'disposable bodies' in the larger scheme of ethno-nationalism. Ethnic, cultural, and economic minorities have been made to accept policies, rules, and procedures that are purely palatable to the sensibilities of the majority community - couched in the language of 'one country-one law'. In this context, this chapter has demonstrated how the Muslim community has specifically been targeted during the COVID-19 public health crisis in Sri Lanka.

Like their Sinhalese and Tamil counterparts, Muslims too, faced many challenges due to numerous pandemic regulations imposed by the government ostensibly to curtail the spread of the virus. However, in the hands of an ethnocratic state apparatus, the Muslim community was subjected to harsh, humiliating, and unfair implementation of such regulations. The chapter demonstrates that the Muslim community therefore underwent double victimisation in the pandemic governmentality of the Rajapaksa regime, which exposed how deep-rooted ethnocracy in Sri Lanka is. It is noteworthy to point out that endorsement of ethnic-based rationality in devising and implementing pandemic regulations not only came from vote-savvy racist politicians, but many educated academics and senior bureaucrats as well.

Contrary to the popular perception that disasters and calamities bring people together by strengthening social bonding, this chapter shows that the virus as well as the government's response to it have further strained prospects for coexistence, especially with regards to Sinhala-Muslim relations. The Rajapaksa government that came into power by exploiting the anti-Muslim sentiment prevalent at the time, either explicitly or implicitly supported various state and non-state actors who engaged in the government's COVID response

that labeled the Muslim community as a threat to society at large. This resulted in the already strained intercommunity relationships following the Easter Sunday terror attacks to further deteriorate.

Whilst this chapter predominantly highlights the way in which COVID-19 policy-making affected the Muslim community - from a broader perspective what is important to note is the general plight of minorities under regressive forms of governance in a staunchly majoritarian state structure, where not everyone is quite treated as a rights bearing citizen. Although what is needed presently is to learn from the past and establish pluralism and democratic values in governance, the current reality is the near absence of it. What is truly troubling is how the arbitrary and selective application of laws, along with excessive powers vested in the Executive, signal a deeper erosion of democratic foundations within the Sri Lankan society.

References

Balasundaram, N. (2016) 'Sri Lanka: An Ethnocratic State Preventing Positive Peace', *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 8 (3), pp. 38-58.

Buddhist Advisory Council commends President for walking the talk (2020) *Presidential Secretariat*. Available at: https://www.presidentsoffice.gov.lk/index.php/2020/09/18/buddhist-advisory-council-commends-president-for-walking-the-talk/ (Accessed: 19 June 2021).

Cartoonist Pradeep (2020) *Facebook*. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/CartoonistPradeep/photos/2808197036062999 (Accessed: 25 June 2021).

Cartoonist Pradeep (2021) *Facebook*. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/CartoonistPradeep/photos/2839047026311333 (Accessed: 25 June 2021).

CCPSL says no solid evidence indicating burial of COVID-19 victims increased spread of virus (2021) *Daily FT*. Available at: https://www.ft.lk/news/CCPSL-says-no-solid-evidence-

indicating-burial-of-COVID-19-victims-increases-spread-of-virus/56-710986 (Accessed: 21 June 2021).

Coronavirus funerals: Sri Lanka's Muslims decry forced cremation. (2020) *BBC*. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53295551 (Accessed: 05 June 2021).

Derana TV Chathura's double standards exposed: citizens enraged over racist slurs of Derana TV anchor (2020) *Colombo Telegraph*. Available at: https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/derana-tv-chathuras-double-standards-exposed-citizens-enraged-over-racist-slurs-of-derana-tv-anchor (Accessed: 20 June 2021).

Fonseka, B. and Dissanayake, U. (2021) 'Sri Lanka's Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour: A Critique of Promises Made and Present Trends', *Centre for Policy Alternatives*. Available at: https://www.cpalanka.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Sri-Lankas-Vistas-of-Prosperity-and-Splendour-A-Critique-of-Promises-Made-and-Present-Trends.pdf (Accessed: 22 July 2021).

Full-Video of Army Commander speaks to Indeewari Amuwatte on battle against COVID-19 @HydePark (2020) *Ada Derana*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJbQNnzoEx0 (Accessed: 20 June 2021).

Gotabaya named as SLPP's presidential candidate (2019) *Daily Mirror*. Available at: https://www.dailymirror.lk/top_story/Gotabaya-named-as-SLPP%E2%80%99s-Presidential-Candidate/155-172682 (Accessed: 18 June 2021).

Kadirgamar, A. (2013) 'The Political Economy of Anti-Muslim Attacks', *Colombo Telegraph*, 03 March. Available at: https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/the-political-economy-of-anti-muslim-attacks/ (Accessed: 10 June 2021).

Kumarasinghe, U. (2016) 'The Genesis of Sinha le', *Sunday Observer*, 31 January. Available at: http://archives.sundayobserver.lk/2016/01/31/fea14.asp (Accessed: 10 June 2021).

Marsoof. A. (2020) 'Debunking The Claim Against Burial Of Covid-19 Victims: A Response To Professor Vithanage', *Colombo Telegraph*, 12. Available at: https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/debunking-the-claim-against-burial-of-covid-19-victims-a-response-to-professor-vithanage/ (Accessed: 21 June 2021).

Mayberry. (2019) 'Suspicion stalks Sri Lanka's Muslim community after bombings', *Aljazeera*, 26 April. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/4/26/suspicion-stalks-sri-lankas-muslim-community-after-bombings (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

New party aims to safeguard Sinhala identity (2016) *Daily Mirror*. Available at: https://www.dailymirror.lk/102081/new-party-aims-to-safeguard-sinhala-identity (Accessed: 10 June 2021).

President pardons Gnanasara Thero (2019) *Daily FT*. Available at: https://www.ft.lk/front-page/President-pardons-Gnanasara-Thero/44-678714 (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Ranawana, A. (2020) 'Showing no compassion towards Muslim sentiments is shameful and dangerous', *Economynext*, 18 December. Available at: https://economynext.com/showing-no-compassion-towards-muslim-sentiments-is-shameful-and-dangerous-77047/ (Accessed: 18 July 2021).

Reicher, S. and Stott, C. (2020) 'On order and disorder during the COVID-19 pandemic', *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 59, pp. 694–702.

Small fear whether the dead bodies with the virus can be used as biological weapons – Dr. Channa Perera tells BBC (2020) *BBC*. Available at: Small fear whether the dead bodies with the virus can be used as biological weapons - Dr. Channa Perera tells BBC https://english.theleader.lk/news/690-small-fear-whether-the-dead-bodies-with-the-virus-can-be-used-as-biological-weapons-dr-channa-perera-tells-bbc (Accessed: 05 June 2021).

'Socio-Economic Index in the face of COVID-19' (2021) *Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 30 June. Available at: https://www.cpalanka.org/socio-economic-index-in-the-face-of-covid-19/ (Accessed: 30 June 2021).

Sri Lanka can bury COVID-19 victims: SLMA (2021) *Newsfirst*. Available at: https://www.newsfirst.lk/2021/01/03/sri-lanka-can-bury-covid-19-victims-slma/ (Accessed: 21 June 2021).

Sri Lanka does away with forced cremations after PM Imran Khan reportedly raises issues (2021) *The International News*. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/796072-sri-lanka-does-away-with-forced-cremations-after-pm-imran-speaks-about-minority-muslims (Accessed: 14 July 2021).

Sri Lanka election: Rajapaksa brothers win 'super-majority' (2020) *BBC*. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53688584 (Accessed: 18 June 2021).

Sri Lanka extends indefinite curfew to Kandy and Puttlam, Akurana under lockdown (2020) *Economynext*. Available at: https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-extends-indefinite-curfew-to-kandy-and-puttalam-akurana-under-lockdown-62832/ (Accessed: 20 June 2021).

Sri Lanka investigates troops over 'humiliation 'of Muslims (2021) *Aljazeera*. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/21/sri-lanka-investigates-troops-over-humiliation-of-muslims (Accessed: 21 July 2021).

Sri Lanka: Preliminary findings of Country Visit to Sri Lanka by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief (2019) *United Nations Office of the High Commissioner*. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24918 (Accessed: 15 June 2021).

Sri Lankan Parliament dissvolved; elections set for April (2020) *Al Jazeera*. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/3/2/sri-lankan-parliament-dissolved-elections-set-for-april (Accessed: 20 June 2021).

Srinivasan, M. (2019) 'Gotabaya wins in presidential poll', *The Hindu*, 17 November. Available at: https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/gotabaya-rajapaksa-wins-sri-lankan-presidential-election-official-results/article29998767.ec (Accessed: 17 June 2021).

Strong, P. (1990) 'Epidemic psychology: a model', *Sociology of Health*, 12(3). pp. 249-259.

The appointment of the two presidential task forces (2020) *Centre for Policy Alternatives*. Available at: https://www.cpalanka.org/the-appointment-of-the-two-presidential-task-forces/#_ftn1 (Accessed: 20 June 2021).

Thiruvarangan, M. (2020) 'Sri Lanka Elections: The SLPP's formidable majority doesn't bode well for pluralism', *The Wire*, 10 August. Available at: https://thewire.in/south-asia/sri-lanka-podujana-peramuna-elections-rajapaksa-sinhalas-tamils (Accessed: 18 June 2021).

World renowned virologist Prof.Malik Peiris refutes claims that burials transmit COVID-19 – Island (2020) *Newswire*. Available at: https://www.newswire.lk/2020/12/15/world-renowned-virologist-prof-malik-peiris-refutes-claims-that-burials-transmit-covid-19-islan/ (Accessed: 21 June 2021).

Zuhair, A. (2016) 'Dynamics of Sinhala Buddhist Ethno nationalism in Post-War Sri Lanka', *Centre for Policy Alternatives*. Available at: https://www.cpalanka.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Dynamics-of-Sinhala-Buddhist-Ethno-Nationalism-in-Post-War-Sri-Lanka.pdf (Accessed: 10 June 2021).

6

Not-so-free education: State-citizen relations in Sri Lanka's educational policy response to the pandemic

Hasini Lecamwasam

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is turning out to be one of the most serious challenges facing humankind the world over. It is threatening the very survival of our species, and after more than a year of battling the pandemic, governments have started buckling under the pressure of effectively responding to it in medical, logistical, economic, and social terms. These pressures are felt by different countries differently, and the variance is largely attributed to the resources at their disposal, including and primarily economic. Even though the virus itself is indiscriminate in who it affects, countries in the developing world, by socio-economic design, are more vulnerable to it and the ripple effects it causes.

As a developing country already grappling with serious economic issues (among other things), Sri Lanka was from the outset particularly vulnerable to the disruptions of COVID-19. This became evident across sectors starting with the economy, whereby many particularly in the informal sector were seen struggling to

survive in a situation of dwindling income induced by conditions of restricted movement, with no comprehensive relief package in place to assist them especially after the General election of August, 2020. The effects of collapsing domestic economies are spilling over into other terrains, leading people to violate COVID-19 protocol in search of employment, increasing domestic abuse and violence, and disrupting education in households that can hardly afford to spend even on basic survival.

Against this backdrop, I focus on education, one of the few sectors that has managed to continue through the pandemic even amidst great challenges. Taking state-sponsored education, also known as 'free education', as my frame of reference, I seek to visit the question as to how the pandemic has impacted the relationship between the state and citizen, using the case of education as the prism through which to look at it. In this connection, I reflect on whether it is possible for the country's system of free education to maintain its egalitarian spirit, if access to it is no longer dependent on merit alone, but rather mediated by one's spending capacity, which then leads to questions of state responsibility and what is happening to it. This line of thinking unfolds in a context where education has been required to shift online given the pandemic situation, without making adequate facilities available for all to access the process equitably. Given the democratic commitments upon which free education in Sri Lanka is premised, I argue that the failure to level out differential access and the push to continue on with educational activities seem to compromise the core of its democratic mandate, to the effect that free education may no longer even be itself.

The most fundamental peril in this shift is that it normalises the mediating role of money in facilitating access to things that we ought to have by right, and things that are essential for the realisation of our subjective conception of the 'good life'. It is important to bear in mind that online education is not an isolated occurrence necessitated strictly by the pandemic, but rather is intrinsically connected to a larger context of an increasingly privatising educational landscape, whose operational logic is also money. This is a slippery slope that

will open up the potential for the privileging of greater and more numerous forms of privatised education, starting with the gradual monetisation of the means of access to 'free education'.

In order to make this case, I draw on my own experience as one working in the higher education sector in Sri Lanka, in addition to some qualitative discussions I have been part of. These narratives are supplemented by the findings coming out of the 'Socio-Economic Index In the Face of COVID-19' survey conducted by Social Indicator, the survey arm of the Centre for Policy Alternatives. The survey was conducted between the second and third waves of the pandemic, and therefore reflects those realities. Additional qualitative discussions included individual and group interviews with activists, educators, and families of students. The resulting analysis begins with a brief introduction to the context of education in Sri Lanka and the changes already under way therein before the pandemic, and moves on to a descriptive account of education through the pandemic with special reference to the challenges faced. In the next section, I dissect the larger implications of these developments, and conclude with some observations.

The context of education in Sri Lanka

'Free education' in Sri Lanka was introduced, more than anything else, as an ideological project of levelling out the socio-economic differences that impede individuals from accessing education and, by extension, better life opportunities. It was thus motivated by the "egalitarian ideology of lessening social inequalities", and as envisioned "opened up opportunities for greater social mobility on the part of disadvantaged social groups" by way of facilitating access to prestige professions such as law and medicine (Jayasuriya, 1969, p. 170). Introduced by C.W.W. Kannangara, then Executive Minister of Education, Sri Lanka's system of free education acted throughout the country's late-colonial and post-independence eras as the "greatest social leveler" (Amarakeerthi, 2020), seeking to "dismantle the notion of education as a privilege of the rich" (ibid). It has, for

the longest period, constituted a shining example of social justice given how its "democratic potential ... [and the] task of empowering the socially marginalized" have made it into "one of the cornerstones of what citizenship means in material terms" whose broad objective is "a meta theoretical and political narrative of critical consciousness as Paulo Freire most famously stressed." (Sivamohan, 2021)

However, this core mandate and operational logic of free education has, since some time now, been coming under increasing strain. Sri Lanka's ever worsening economic performance – like that of many other developing countries – has compelled it to resort to loans from global financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. Such credit has implications for all sectors of the country, education included, and is in fact given out with specific conditions laid down for whatever sector is being funded. Consequently, the nature and trajectory of Sri Lanka's educational sector is increasingly being pushed in the direction of reducing the 'financial burden' it places on the state (part of the larger project of cutting back on public spending and subsequently shrinking the public sector), and grooming the graduates of the system for the 'job market' (Punchi, 2001; Perera, 2021), all in the name of economic progress.

These shifts are largely symptomatic of what is called 'neo-liberalism', varyingly understood as a growth-driven economic policy package; a tool of aggressive, authoritarian capital; a political project of the 'have's of accumulating at the expense of the 'have not's; and a morally reprehensible politico-economic project that resists redistribution, democratisation, and social welfare (Venugopal, 2015). My own understanding of the term aligns more with the leftist critique of the concept as a largely deliberate project of capital that is at once deeply political (in the sense of being predicated upon inequality and the relations of power it gives rise to), and paradoxically also driven by an extremely de-politicising ethos (of seeking complete homogenisation of society in the market mould).

In education, neo-liberalism seeks change both in its content as well as institutional frame. It envisions change in the content of education to respond to market needs by way of a) imparting the

required skills and competencies (Perera, 2021), and b) by instilling the moral ethos of a 'responsibilised individual' able to fend for her/himself, in which belief system the state is "no longer responsible for providing all of society's needs for security, health, education and so on. Individuals, firms, organisations, schools, hospitals, parents and each individual, must all take on (and desire to take on) responsibility for their own well-being." (Davies and Bansel, 2007, p. 251) It envisions changes in the institutional frame of education, more specifically public education, by way of advocating significant cuts on expenditure, such that it is "reconstituted ... as part of the market" where previously it was "supported as essential to collective well-being." (ibid, p. 254)

What should be borne in mind is that Sri Lankan public education, particularly its tertiary level, has been undergoing such changes for at least two decades now (Perera, 2021). It is in this context that the further changes induced – or in some instances exacerbated – by the pandemic should be understood, starting with online education , but encompassing much more including the employability narrative.

Education under COVID-19

On the surface, it may appear that education, compared to other sectors, has relatively little to complain about in terms of the impact of the pandemic. It has admittedly been one of the less disrupted sectors by COVID-19, given its ability to continue through 'work from home' arrangements. However, as sectoral overviews generally do, this bigger picture tends to mask the many difficult realities underneath. It is my intention in this section to sketch out the strategies adopted by those in education (both givers and receivers), and their actual impact on the ground level.

Strategies adopted

Across the world, the primary response to containing the spread of the virus has been lockdowns and other means of social distancing. Consequently, in many countries, physical premises of

schools and universities have been closed down, and educational activities have been shifted online as a means of ensuring uninterrupted education through the pandemic (Toquero, 2020). This sudden shift to online methods has been aptly phrased as 'crisis learning' rather than online learning per se (Pace et al., 2020). However, the scale and extent of online educational activities obviously vary from one context to another. For example, a 2020 report compiled by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development on the global response to the pandemic in the education sector, notes how countries such as Australia have made provisions for fully equipped online platforms to continue educational activities, while less developed nations seem to rely on more informal means of coping with the pandemic. Argentina is a case in point, where teachers work in rotating shifts to provide access to educational resources and sometimes food for the most vulnerable of their students, in addition to making learning resources available over online platforms. Yet other countries such as Belgium and Israel, the report notes, also broadcast lessons over national television, in order to reach out to those who may have difficulties in accessing online platforms (ibid).

In Sri Lanka too, a combination of these measures has been put in place to ensure educational activities continue uninterrupted. In the state education sector, the most comprehensive measures have arguably been introduced at the tertiary level, where institutionally-sponsored learning management systems have been put in place to continue educational activities. Since state-sponsored secondary education in the country is not streamlined enough to facilitate such centralised methods, many schools are left to their own devises in this regard. At both levels, however, access to the internet (by way of possessing the necessary connection as well as equipment) is presupposed on the part of both students and teachers. It could be argued that teachers in secondary education are under greater strain in this regard due to the absence of any institutional platforms to help them perform their expected functions.

Therefore, the effectiveness of these strategies are compromised to a significant extent by a seriously unequal landscape of resource availability and access. For instance, the survey revealed

that the studies of 4% of the national sample in the school going category and 0.9% of those receiving tertiary education had come to a complete halt, by as early as the first wave of the pandemic (please refer tables 45 and 46 in annexure 3).

The survey figures on access to electronic equipment should shed further light on this. Although close to half the sample (with family members currently engaged in educational activities at the primary, secondary or tertiary levels) reported to have enough electronic equipment to facilitate continued access to educational activities to all in the household, as much as 31.5% said they had to share, while 5.6% said they had to borrow. 2% reported to be completely left out of such activities for lack of access to the necessary equipment (please refer table 49 in annexure 3). Similar patterns were visible in relation to internet connections and financial resources as well (please refer tables 50 and 51 in annexure 3).

The topline report of the survey ('Socio-Economic Index in the face of COVID-19', 2021) revealed a telling pattern in this regard, where a marked difference was observed along the urban-rural axis. On the three counts of electronic appliance ownership, access to a good internet connection, and the capacity to spend on online education, those from urban areas reported higher levels of ability than their rural counterparts (p. 18). It is worth noting that the vast majority of the student population in state-sponsored education is concentrated in the rural sector, at both the secondary and tertiary levels, and therefore this reality is likely more pervasive among beneficiaries of free education than even the results of this survey suggest.

What should also be emphasised here is that it is not about the numbers. It is, rather, about the moral commitments violated. In a system of education that has pledged itself to the principle of equality (from which follows equitable access), even if one person is left behind for lack of resources, the primary ethical commitments of the larger system may be considered compromised.

In this backdrop of extreme inequality, different teacher and student groups across the country have used – and are using – different mechanisms to keep up with their teaching/ learning

activities. In a discussion conducted with a group of secondary school teachers, it was revealed that there were serious disparities in terms of how much content has been delivered over virtual media depending on whether the school was close to a city centre or not.[1] This fact concurs with the findings coming out of the survey as well, wherein significant variations over the issue of accessibility are observed along the urban-rural axis (please refer tables 49, 50, and 51 in annexure 3). These differences include the percentage of students attending online classes, the level of ease of access for teachers, as well as the rate at which auxiliary commitments such as parent-teacher meetings take place. On all these counts, the school located in the urban neighbourhood was by far ahead of the rural schools.

One teacher from a rural area reported that she has to spend as many as six hours every working day beside a nearby lake in order to receive the required signal strength to conduct classes online. Administrative pressure on teachers to somehow ensure that the required amount of content is delivered within a stipulated time period has resulted in teachers being forced into taking such drastic measures to comply. Both urban and rural school teachers in this discussion also shared that their schools are pressurising them to conduct online cultural activities for Vesak (including synchronous activities such as singing religious songs, and asynchronous activities such as compiling photo records of students' Vesak celebrations), in spite of the huge challenges involved.

However, interviews conducted with two principals from a primary school and a rural national school, offered no corroboration of this fact.[2] Both principals acknowledged the difficulties involved, but did not report of any serious pressure from the zonal education office – to which they are directly answerable – in this regard. Rather, they shared that there were directives to continue educational activities as best they can. Both admitted, however, that no institutional provisions were/ are made available to this end, and schools are left

1 Discussion with school teachers from Matara and Kalutara (virtual), 27 May 2021.

2 Discussions with two school principals from Kurunegala and Walapane (virtual), 05 June 2021.

to their own devises, consolidating extant hierarchies between and within schools. For instance, access to at least a smartphone with WhatsApp is presupposed for participating in educational activities, thus leaving some students out of the process completely. What these individual incidents mean within the broader context of the welfare state will be discussed later.

A participant of another group discussion conducted among mothers of school going children shared that alternative means of accessing education have been devised, which require going to a pre-designated place in the closest town to fetch and photocopy study material.[3] While this is economically much more accessible than online education, given the social distancing requirements of the pandemic situation, it stands to reason that these options were not used regularly. In fact, the teachers group revealed that there are, among their students, those who live in extremely remote locations with absolutely no internet connectivity, and from where access to the nearest town is very difficult particularly in the lockdown conditions of limited food supplies and restricted movement. As a result, many students from such localities miss out on accessing study material left to be fetched in midway locations. On one such occasion, one respondent in the group reported, a whole group of students from such a location missed a mock test and the opportunity to receive feedback for their performance because they could not come to the nearest town frequently enough.

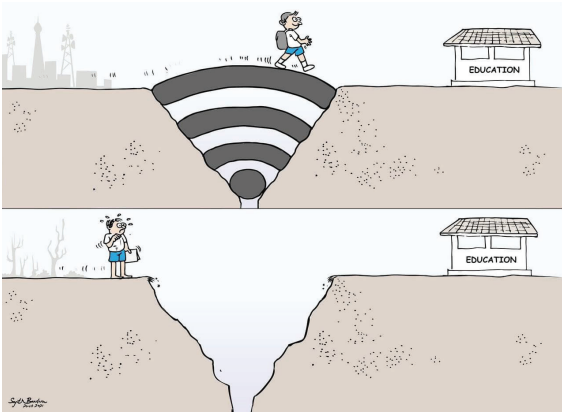
Personal experience teaching in an institute of tertiary education sheds further light on the issue. In courses conducted online, the number of regular participants is consistently less than the number enrolled in a given course. Further, the number participating in WhatsApp groups tends to be greater than that on the institutional platform (Moodle), presumably because the latter consumes more data. On a few unfortunate occasions, some students were unable to complete their end of semester examinations online (as revealed

3 Discussion with mothers of school going children from Moneragala (virtual), 06 March 2021.

by the difference between the number of students enrolled and the number that submitted their end-semester examination answer scripts online).

What has been the impact of these developments? The next section delves into this issue within the larger frame of equality that free education supposedly draws on, and the equitable access it presupposes.

The impact



Source: Bandara, 2021

Pandemic-induced (and sometimes exacerbated) inequalities in education, as mentioned at the outset, are not peculiar to Sri Lanka, but rather shared across many developing nations. In Pakistan, for example, online education has proven unable to "produce desired results ... where a vast majority of students are unable to access the internet due to technical as well as monetary issues." (Adnan and Anwar, 2020, p. 45) In fact, it may be unrealistic to assume equitable access even in developed countries, where impressive macroeconomic indicators tend to mask actual and serious disparities embedded in the social fabric. For instance, Li and Lalani (2020) report how in the US, nearly 25% of 15-year-old learners do not have a computer to work on. UNCTAD's head of digital economy Torbjörn Fredriksson has noted how the consequent gap may further feed into

an already intense digital divide, running the risk of "those that do not have access ... being left further behind as digital transformation accelerates ... " (*Coronavirus reveals need to bridge the digital divide*, 2020). Admittedly, the effect of this is exacerbated in developing countries, where the more glaring extant inequalities are likely to be compounded as a result.

Given that the virus situation is very much current, precious little can be found by way of systematic research on its impact on education in Sri Lanka. However, much debate surrounds the decision to shift to online education at such short notice, particularly in state education institutions where many from underprivileged backgrounds complete their education. Jayaratne (2020) uses anecdotal evidence to substantiate a similar claim, showing how the lack of access to internet and infrastructural facilities has, in some cases, resulted in students getting their friends to complete and submit assignments on their behalf. Given this ground situation, the presidential directive to continue business as usual, and the task force that was appointed to inform of "any delay or default", have drawn much criticism. Some have noted how the directive is worded in a way that has reduced systemic inequalities to individual successes or failures, taken to reflect commitment or the lack of it (Ranasinghe, 2020), signalling a spreading neo-liberal ethos.

The survey findings reproduced above speak to just how restrictive access to education has been in the pandemic context. In addition, the reported levels of satisfaction with online education effectively communicate the success of its intended impact. The opinion was divided almost equally, with a slightly higher percentage of respondents reporting they were satisfied than those who reported otherwise (please refer table 53 in annexure 3). That nearly a half of the sample was dissatisfied with online education in general is reflective of many things. The inequalities compounded and intensified by the sudden shift to the virtual mode are key among them, as is elaborated below. However, even in situations where access has not been an issue, online education is known to have had detrimental health implications due to the strain it puts on the eyes, shoulder muscles, and spine even of very young children, as a mother of three children

in primary school shared in an informal exchange.[4] Conversations with teachers of both secondary and tertiary institutions,[5] and my own personal experience, reveal this to be the case on the individual educator's side as well.

Epistemologically, online education – in spite of its admitted merits particularly when used in blended environments (Dede, 2008) – tends to be detrimental to the social and constructivist thrusts of education. These strands of educational theory attempt to facilitate learner-centered creation/ construction of knowledge that is context- and content-dependent (Rovai, 2004; Liaw, 2001). Arbaugh and Benbunan-Fich (2006, p. 443) show that "the time and locational aspects of traditional classrooms, which provide a built-in structure and opportunities to use rich communication media, are absent" in the virtual experience, rendering it an inadequate substitute. Even though approximations of such learning can be facilitated in highly advanced online settings, it presupposes equitable access and equal facilities on the part of all learners involved, not to mention teachers, and it is here that issues of extant inequalities become relevant.

These issues have also been the central focus of many qualitative discussions on pandemic education that I have been part of. In one such discussion, a participant highlighted how relations within the house as well as neighbourhood are strained by limited access to electronic equipment for children to continue their educational activities. Within households, siblings have to compromise to make sure everybody gets the opportunity to participate in at least some of their online educational activities by foregoing others, given that parents cannot afford individual equipment for all in need of them. Among households, those with greater access to equipment such as smartphones are shutting themselves off from neighbours in need of them, because they themselves can hardly afford such facilities, let alone share them.[6]

4 Informal discussion with a mother of school going children, 12 June 2021.

5 Discussion with school teachers from Matara and Kalutara (virtual), 27 May 2021; informal discussion with two teachers from a tertiary institute, 19 April 2021.

6 Discussion with activist group in secondary education (virtual), 07 April 2021.

In tertiary education, on the institutional level, disparities consolidated and exacerbated by the sudden shift to online education have started to generate considerable dispute and resistance, both among students and teachers. On the one hand, there is pressure from various quarters to 'get things done' so boxes can be ticked, students graduated, and then released to a failing economy that may well be unable to absorb them. On the other, there is a push back to these directives that is gradually gathering momentum. Teachers are conflicted as to the course of action to be taken in this moral dilemma, particularly given that examinations are conducted online – which is itself coercive given the serious resource constraints confronting many students – and there is a moral obligation to prepare students to this end. Torn between demands, sometimes from students themselves, to complete work on time, and the equal – if not greater – force of the moral case involved, teachers find themselves unable to take a strong stand on the issue of online education.

In all these developments, certain fundamental principles on which our society are organised are being ever so subtly – but decisively – renegotiated in a way that alters the very nature of the social contract therein. The implications of pandemic time policy directives on education are, therefore, analysed in detail in the next section.

What does it all mean?

What do these experiences tell us about where we, as a political community, are going? What do they say about the principles on which our social existence is modelled? How are such principles evolving, especially in the context of a global pandemic and the emergency mode of decision-making it seems so effectively to justify? What bearing has such evolution had on the social contract in Sri Lanka? When reflecting on these questions, two overarching themes seem to emerge about the new ideological and mental parameters within which decisions are increasingly made. Both of these themes, I submit, can be subsumed within, and in fact emerge from, the larger neo-liberal system.

Neo-liberal rationale

A recurrent theme in the discussions with those involved particularly in secondary education – teachers, students, principals – is that despite the supposedly 'free' education system in place, responsibility for keeping up with educational activities through the pandemic has fallen largely, if not entirely, on the individual student/ parent, teacher, or sometimes principal. The real tragedy of this situation is that this state of affairs has been so normalised as to make people assume individual responsibility for the continuation of their/ their children's education, with absolutely no discussion of their right to such. The so-called welfare state has been completely written off of its responsibility to facilitate equitable access to education, no questions asked.

This attitude was particularly prevalent in a principal interviewed for the study. Clearly a man of exemplary work ethic, he was nonetheless prone to reduce structural issues bearing on online education to matters of individual commitment. While admittedly there are concerns of individual motivation and commitment involved in the equation to an extent, the propensity to boil the entire situation down to a matter of individual choices completely discounts the crippling influence of structural impediments on one's ability to participate in online education, whether as a student or teacher. In this scheme of things, those who do all the work by themselves 'without burdening the system' (because "even the government doesn't have money noh?")[7] are lauded for their work ethic, while the issue of institutional responsibility for free education is left completely unaddressed. The lack of institutionally provided platforms to conduct online educational activities and make available the necessary learning material for asynchronous learning, is never questioned. Rather, what is questioned is the lack of commitment and motivation on the part of individual teachers to 'somehow' continue their teaching engagements, bearing the financial cost of these initiatives by themselves.

7 Discussion with school principal from Walapane, (virtual), 05 June 2021.

This principal in question had gone so out of his way as to spend on data packages for those members of his staff who could not afford to do so. He had even instructed, quite genuinely out of concern, those parents who could not afford a smartphone to facilitate their children's education, to tap into the savings they had left aside for their child's future in order to secure a smartphone. While certainly admirable on the count of dedication and sincerity, this mode of reasoning is nonetheless lethal to any possibility of a rights discourse even emerging, let alone sustaining itself.

In tertiary education, marginally greater consciousness in this regard seems to prevail, possibly due to the history of struggle in the university space. Conversations over issues of equitable access and pressure on faculty are, however feebly, happening, complemented by processes of collective decision-making at the faculty level. Institutionally sponsored learning management systems have been made available for teachers to conduct teaching in a manner largely at their discretion, negating the need for teachers to individually finance online teaching, and minimising the costs incurred by students as well.

This is not to suggest that all is well in universities either. As mentioned before, the efficiency rhetoric is clearly taking over, not just on the administrative side, but also on the side of students who are, understandably, in a hurry to graduate. It is worth noting that the employment bottleneck intensifying by the day does not figure prominently in this train of thought, as students scramble to exit the university into a world of work that they hope awaits them, only to be crushingly disappointed. The pandemic is further restricting employment opportunities already monopolised by network politics, leaving fresh graduates in despair. All blame for this is pinned on the university for not imparting the right 'skills' that would render their graduates more 'employable', pushing academics to efficiently build skills, while the gaping structural hole in the economy continues to be ignored.

Neo-liberal ethics and ethos

When any discussion on rights and entitlements is gradually squeezed out of the rationale within which decisions are made, as mapped above, the result is an ethos wherein efficiency calculations dominate over normative reasoning. In this scheme, everyone – including those likely to find themselves particularly marginalised by such thinking – tends to prioritise an attitude of 'getting things done' over forwarding rights claims or thinking about the politico-moral commitments that make such claims possible. It is the atomising individualistic logic of neo-liberal thinking that perpetuates and normalises this sort of mindset, rendering many unable to appreciate how this may constitute a relinquishing of at least some of their rights.

It is against the backdrop of this troubling state of affairs that we have to consider free education and its likely future trajectory. When citizens increasingly take it upon themselves to see that access to education is secured for themselves/ their loved ones on an individual/ household basis, the concept of free education is gradually hollowed out, to be replaced by a conception of education first as a matter of individual responsibility and choice, and later – and more dangerously – as a commodity. It is instructive, in this relation, to also pay attention to the trends emerging in privatised forms of education in the pandemic context. As the survey revealed, 79.7% of the respondents with school going children in the household who attend tuition classes reported that such classes continue through the pandemic (please refer tables 54 and 55 in annexure 3).

The propensity for privatised forms of education to continue largely uninterrupted, even when free education is collapsing in part, says much about our priorities set within the neo-liberal frame of rationale. This shift in mindset is both a cause and consequence of these changes occurring in the larger educational landscape. It is telling that one of the two principals interviewed for this study in fact spoke highly of tuition classes as a shining example of the difference that can be made when individual educators take their responsibilities seriously. He attributed this increased sense of responsibility prevalent in the tuition classroom to its performance-based reward

system, particularly for the teacher. While there is a lesson to be learnt in this, advancing this line of argumentation will lead to further monetisation of education, and consequently its complete commodification at the cost of the ideological commitments of free education.

What this discussion hopes to achieve is highlighting how the increasingly prevalent neo-liberal rationale in the present education system may slowly but surely push us to abandon our democratic commitments as a political community. In this emerging rationale, ethical commitments are being redefined in the market mould, wherein individual commitment and responsibility are valorised over and above rights claims on the discriminatory system, which are delegitimised as an excuse for laziness. At the current stage where the system is in transition to this new model of thinking, free education functions as a mere progressive frill to what is essentially a system of education driven by money, rendering it more morally palatable.

Conclusion

My attempt in this chapter has been to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the relationship between the state and citizen, through the prism of education. My point of departure was the sudden shift to online education that was justified by the pandemic and the social restrictions it imposed. However, given that access to education during this period was not institutionally provided, but rather mediated by the individual student's ability to afford a functional internet connection and the necessary equipment, I question whether free education can continue to call itself such anymore. This shift, I argue, has compromised the egalitarian commitments upon which free education is premised, because it has consolidated – and in many cases, exacerbated – extant marginalities in society.

I wish to emphasise that these developments have implications beyond the pandemic, and are in fact underpinned by realities that well predate the pandemic as well. The portrayal of online education as being without alternative and absolutely necessary for

the foreseeable future, with no institutional support provided, is but an early step toward the monetisation of education, starting with the means of access to 'free education'. When access to education is monetised, responsibility for facilitating it no longer rests with institutions, rendering education a commodity. As such, all talk of welfare is effectively replaced by the market logic, making rights claims impossible, despite extreme – and widening – inequalities.

The lack of a push back against this state of affairs, and the individualisation of responsibility it normalises, is demonstrative of the pervasive apathy characteristic of the spreading neo-liberal ethos of the present times. A handy supplement to this has been the efficiency rhetoric of the education apparatus and students, who are both made to believe that the sooner education is completed, the better students will be able to contribute to the economy of the country and at home, despite glaring evidence to the contrary. Driven by the efficiency rationale and the urgency it encourages, this line of thinking has come to be equated with common sense.

What is observable here is the gradual consolidation of neo-liberalism through education, wherein the pandemic simply appears to have expedited and justified the shift. Education is no longer a medium of social justice nor the right of people, but rather a commodity that in turn serves individual economic interests. In this scheme, free education simply serves the function of rendering this shift more morally palatable by holding up the pretense of equality for as long as is necessary for the market to transform education to fit its needs.

References

Adnan, M. and Anwar, K. (2020) 'Online Learning amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: Students' Perspectives', *Journal of Pedagogical Sociology and Psychology*, 2(1), pp. 45–51.

Amarakeerthi, L. (2020) 'Let's Make Our Education "More Open Than Usual"', *Colombo Telegraph*, 16 December. Available at: https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/lets-make-our-education-more-open-than-usual/ (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Arbaugh, J. B. and Benbunan-Fich, R. (2006) 'An Investigation of Epistemological and Social Dimensions of Teaching in Online Learning Environments', *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 5(4), pp. 435–447.

Bandara, S. (2021) *Facebook*. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/ArtOfSajith/photos/a.281558598710607/1858830217650096/?type=3 (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Coronavirus reveals need to bridge the digital divide (2020) *UNCTAD*. Available at: https://unctad.org/news/coronavirus-reveals-need-bridge-digital-divide (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Davies, B. and Bansel, P. (2007) 'Neoliberalism and education', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 20(3), pp. 247–259. doi: 10.1080/09518390701281751.

Dede, C. (2008) 'A Seismic Shift in Epistemology', *EDUCAUSE Review*, 43(3), pp. 80–81.

Jayaratne, H. (2020) 'Covid-19 Through The Perspectives Of Children & Youth', *Colombo Telegraph*, 3 July. Available at: https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/covid-19-through-the-perspectives-of-children-youth/ (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Jayasuriya, J. E. (1969) *Education in Ceylon before and after independence: 1939-1968*. 1st edition. Associated Educational Publishers.

Li, C. and Lalani, F. (2020) *The COVID-19 pandemic has changed education forever. This is how*, *World Economic Forum*. Available at: https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-education-global-covid19-online-digital-learning/ (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Liaw, S.-S. (2001) 'Designing the hypermedia-based learning environment', *International Journal of Instructional Media*, 28(1), pp. 43–56.

Pace, C., Pettit, S. and Barker, K. (2020) 'Best Practices in Middle Level Quaranteaching: Strategies, Tips and Resources Amidst COVID-19', *Becoming: Journal of the Georgia Association*

for Middle Level Education, 31(1), pp. 2–13. doi: 10.20429/becoming.2020.310102.

Perera, K. (2021) '"Marrying the Monster": World Bank Loans and English Language Projects in Sri Lankan Universities', *University of Colombo Review*, 2(1), pp. 42–60.

Ranasinghe, P. (2020) 'Zooming of Education', *Groundviews*, 21 June. Available at: https://groundviews.org/2020/06/21/zooming-of-education/ (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Rovai, A. P. (2004) 'A constructivist approach to online college learning', *The Internet and Higher Education*, 7(2), pp. 79–93. doi: 10.1016/j.iheduc.2003.10.002.

Sivamohan, S. (2021) 'Kuppi Talk: setting the terms of the debate on education', 3 February. Available at: http://island.lk/kuppi-talk/ (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

'Socio-Economic Index in the face of COVID-19' (2021) *Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 30 June. Available at: https://www.cpalanka.org/socio-economic-index-in-the-face-of-covid-19/ (Accessed: 30 June 2021).

Toquero, C. M. (2020) 'Challenges and Opportunities for Higher Education Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Philippine Context', *Pedagogical Research*, 5(4). Available at: https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1263557 (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Venugopal, R. (2015) 'Neoliberalism as concept', *Economy and Society*, 44(2), pp. 165–187. doi: 10.1080/03085147.2015.1013356.

7

Out of the frying pan into the fire: Life of migrant garment workers in the COVID-19 response

Kaushini Dammalage

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has been ravaging the world for more than a year, rendering precarious many sectors in society. National and domestic economies are reeling from its effects, teetering on the edge of complete collapse in some cases. As the virus mutates and spreads almost uncontrollably, and the medical sector struggles to respond effectively, lockdowns and social distancing have proven to be the most effective containment measures. Lives are being saved thus, however, at the cost of livelihoods. In the apparel industry, as elsewhere, excuses are made about massive declines in demand and subsequent cancellations of orders leading to investors slashing their expenses, and factories having to try and minimise losses. An inevitable spillover of this, as it has been made out to seem, are wage cuts and layoffs, placing workers in a more precarious situation than ever before. It is in this context that I focus on the experiences of Free Trade Zone (FTZ) workers in Sri Lanka, and explore the implications of pandemic developments for the capital-labour nexus and the mediatory function of the state in this equation.

FTZ workers, as common knowledge as well as an extensive body of literature tell us, constitute an especially marginalised group in society. Cultural norms and narrative constructions of them have positioned them very much in the margins of society, and defined them as a disempowered and voiceless category. The pandemic has drastically exacerbated this state of affairs, rendering them especially vulnerable. In this chapter, I map their economic experience during the pandemic, including increasing precarity and the vulnerabilities it introduces. Second, I look at the changes induced in their work and personal lives by the pandemic, and the extreme difficulties they had to grapple with as a result. Third, I visit the question of how pre-existing narratives about them have served to further marginalise FTZ workers in these conditions, and how they have further spawned such derogatory narratives in the process. Finally, I examine the role of capital as well as the state in conditioning the choices available to labour. In building my analysis, I draw on primary and secondary qualitative data.

Context

Since the introduction of the open economy in the late 1970s, the Free Trade Zones (FTZ) have constituted a 'neo-liberalised space' (Jayawardena, 2020) capitalising on the labour of Sri Lanka's rural women drawn to the employment opportunities afforded by these new establishments. They have, thence, "formed the backbone of an enormous economic shift toward export-oriented industrialization." (Hancock, 2006, p. 1) Hewamanne (2020, p. 3) observes how the deliberate feminisation of these spaces has much to do with "patriarchal stereotypes of women being nimble fingered, docile and supplementary earners", while Gunathilake (2019) highlights how global capital extracts profit through this arrangement of women's subordination.

In addition to gender, these young women also come from economically and socially marginalised backgrounds, with relatively low levels of education (Hewamanne, 2017), rendering them particularly apt candidates for the kind of 'productive labour' that the global factory floor demands (Jayawardena, 2020). Given that

most of these women are resident elsewhere, they find themselves accommodations in and around the FTZ, which are most of the time privately afforded by them. The deplorable conditions of these accommodations is well known and documented (see, in this regard Hewamanne, 2003, 2017, 2019, 2018; Jayawardena, 2017, 2020; Hancock, Middleton, and Moore, 2012).

Stemming from these difficult circumstances is the identity of the 'zone girl' as exploited and 'contaminated', thereby being rendered culturally questionable. As such, they are dominantly associated with promiscuity, prostitution, abortion, and more generally the victims of their own lax moral standards. In their neighbourhoods, they are referred to as 'juki pieces' and the FTZ in general as the 'whore zone' (Hewamanne, 2003; Jayawardena, 2017; Attanpola, 2006; Hancock, 2006).

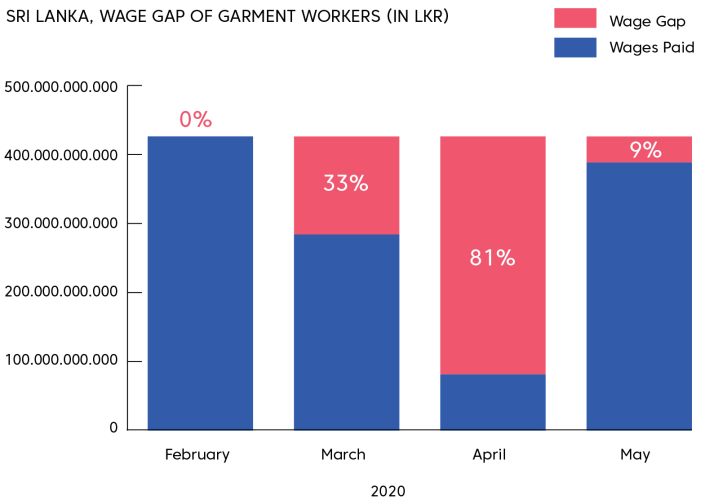
Their lives on the factory floor are no better. They are regularly subject to extreme pressure to complete targets, mandatory overtime shifts, verbal and physical abuse by their supervisors, and the resultant psychological toll of these. They have, therefore, become victims of the industrial system, completely disempowered, subjugated, and subordinated (Jayawardena, 2017; Hancock, 2006).

Two inferences may be made from the above discussion. First, women employed in the FTZs are rendered dually vulnerable at the workplace and in the social realm, due both to being a FTZ worker and a woman. Second, they have transcended the influence of the rural/ familial patriarchy into which they were born, only to find themselves bound by the shackles of industrial patriarchy and its subjugating influence in the FTZ. Therefore, their condition of marginality, even though the terms within which it is experienced have altered, remains essentially unchanged.

My focus in this chapter is to examine how these workers have become further vulnerable in the COVID-19 pandemic and the new and more intense vulnerabilities they have had to grapple with, in this context. This reflection is intended to shed light on how an external shock such as COVID-19 has laid bare and reinforced extant marginalities in society, and what its impact has been on the lived experience of a marginalised group, namely FTZ workers.

Economic anxieties and the struggle for survival

With the island-wide curfew imposed on the 20th of March, 2020, around 275,000 FTZ migrant workers found themselves trapped in their temporary accommodations around their zones, quite unable to fend for themselves (*UN(DER) PAID IN THE PANDEMIC: An estimate of what the garment industry owes its workers*, 2020, p. 28). When discussing their plight, it makes sense to take their economic condition as the point of departure, as that is at the root of many of the structural marginalities they face.



Source: UN(DER) PAID IN THE PANDEMIC: An estimate of what the garment industry owes its workers (2020, p. 29).

The onset of the pandemic saw their salaries being shaved significantly, New Year and cumulative bonuses withdrawn, and in some cases employment terminated as well (*Sri Lankan garment workers decry violations of labor rights - UCA News*, 2020; Hari Tv, 2020). It should be borne in mind that this is in a context of their salary during normal times averaging around 25,000 LKR, overtime included (Hewamanne, 2021, p. 56). The 'COVID-19 Pandemic: A Pretext to Roll Back Sri Lankan Garment Workers' Rights' Report (2020, p. 4) reveals that FTZ workers suffered pay cuts of up to

40% of their normal time salaries. In this context, Trade Unions, employers, and the government came together in a tripartite agreement on the 5th of May 2020 to protect the rights of FTZ workers in the pandemic context. It contained clauses on preventing lay-offs, providing at least 50% of the salary of all those who do and do not report to work during the pandemic (or a minimum wage of 75 USD), and continuing to contribute to the social security funds of permanent workers (*COVID-19 Pandemic: A Pretext to Roll Back Sri Lankan Garment Workers' Rights*, 2020; *UN(DER) PAID IN THE PANDEMIC: An estimate of what the garment industry owes its workers*, 2020). In spite of this, the Department of Labour found that as many as 32% of the employees in the FTZs had not been paid their May and June salaries, adding up to approximately 88 million LKR lost to the workers each month. It is noticeable that this loss was not compensated by any government relief scheme (*UN(DER) PAID IN THE PANDEMIC: An estimate of what the garment industry owes its workers*, 2020). The chart above illustrates the wage gap of FTZ workers from February through May 2020.

An activist working for the rights of FTZ workers shared the spill over effects of these wage cuts on the everyday lives of workers stuck in the FTZs under lockdown conditions:

> They gave the 14,500 LKR minimum wage because the Minister asked them to, but knocked down all the bonuses usually given for the New Year. Most couldn't pay off their loans, pay their boarding fees, and send money home. Some were made to report to work in batches. But even in their case, only half the salary was paid during the first two months, then it dwindled down to a quarter of the regular salary, and then when the second wave came they terminated the services of whoever they wanted. Some actually sued for compensation and got it, but there were many others who were not willing to do so for fear of not getting work anywhere in the zone in future.[1]

1 Discussion with an activist (virtual), 28 May 2021.

While the capital owner maximises their profit by exploiting workers through pay cuts and lay-offs (Hari Tv, 2020), placing the latter in an economically precarious position, the state too excludes them from access to its welfare schemes (Arunathilake, 2013). This was clearly visible in how FTZ workers could not avail the emergency relief measure of 5000 LKR provided by the government, as they could not produce proof of residence in the areas in which they were physically living. A worker interviewed for this study shared how "they wouldn't give a curfew pass for me to go back to my village where I could show proof of residence and take the 5000. I didn't even have money to eat."[2]

Source: Artigala (2020).

Neither their employers nor the state, then, has been sensitive to the economic plight of the workers in the pandemic situation, and has not concerned themselves with their rights either as employees or citizens. This has led to the further economic marginalisation of an already vulnerable group, and has contributed to the loss of what little decision-making power they exercised in their lives through the leverage provided earlier by their income (Hewamanne, 2021). Therefore, the COVID-19 situation may be considered as having reproduced and worsened the conditions of economic marginality of FTZ workers.

2 Discussion with Biyagama FTZ worker (virtual), 31 May 2021.

Deterioration of living conditions under COVID-19

That the impact of COVID-19 has been felt differently by different quarters of society is by now well known. The FTZ worker stands out as a particularly marginalised and victimised identity in this regard, so rendered due to the multiple and overlapping vulnerabilities in her life that far predate the pandemic. The health crisis has resulted in their rights being violated both as workers and as individuals. In this section, I visit the question of how these rights violations also constituted a decline in their already compromised standards of living, on the factory floor as well as outside of it.

Working life

From the first wave of COVID to the second, FTZ workers experienced a marked decline of living quality due to a collapsing personal economy. The issue was exacerbated with the emergence of what came to be known as the 'Brandix cluster', or the large group of COVID infected persons found clustered in a garment factory in Minuwangoda, in the October of 2020. I reproduce below an excerpt from a worker of the factory borrowed from a web source:

> I am currently receiving treatment for Corona Virus at the Kuburugamuwa Hospital in Matara. About 200 people who used to work for our company here are receiving treatment for Corona Virus. Initially, about 600 employees were infected with fever but were told to work to cover the targets. If this had been identified in that situation, the disease would not have spread like this. When we found out, we were told to come to the factory and do the PCR test. There I was diagnosed with the COVID-19. My family was informed to self-quarantine and the food items they needed were provided from the factory. My Mother, Father and Sister's PCR tests are scheduled for tomorrow. We were sewing clothes from the Victoria's Secret Brand when we found out. There is a rumor that clothes were brought from India. I do not know the truth or falsehood. (*Garment workers on the frontline of the pandemic outbreak in Sri Lanka*, 2020)

Source: Bandara (2021a).

The harrowing experience of having to perform labour intensive tasks such as sitting up for extended periods of time despite being infected, needs no further emphasis to be understood as corrosive. There were also instances where those who could continue to work had to compensate for the absence of others by working extra for the same wages.[3]

Having engaged in such heartless extraction, it is deplorable that no measures have been taken by these companies to either inoculate their non-infected staff, or follow any other accepted health protocol to ensure the health and safety of those working round the clock on the factory floor (Hari Tv, 2020; Ruwanpura, Gunawardena, and Padmasiri, 2021). Hewamanne (2021, p. 65) notes that these practices may well have continued, if not for the risk posed by a COVID cluster to larger society, and the need therefore to contain the spread of the virus.

Individual/ private life

Various publicly accessible sources such as social media posts and accounts on other print and electronic media revealed that FTZ workers found themselves extremely vulnerable to conditions of physical insecurity through the lockdown period at

3 Discussion with FTZ worker (virtual), 28 May 2021.

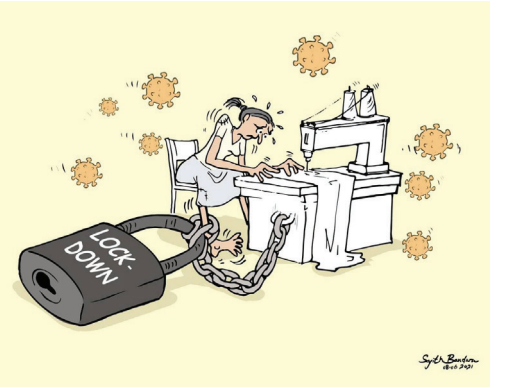
their accommodations. These vulnerabilities had manifested in the form of not having enough to eat, physical abuse and violence by frustrated partners, and unwanted sexual attention (and advances, in some cases) from landlords, etc. This is in addition to the inherent vulnerability of their accommodations to the spread of the virus, given the overcrowded living arrangements typically found therein (Perera and Fenando, 2020). As an activist working in the Biyagama FTZ shared:

> When they test positive, they're asked not to come to work. Then everybody staying with them is asked to home quarantine for 14 days. When they go to use the toilet or bath, landlords look at them as though they are the devil. They had nothing to eat, no vitamin C, not even a visit by the PHI to check on them. After some time, some landlords wanted them to vacate because when a lot of people are quarantining in the same building, toilets get clogged electricity bills shoot up, all of that. Also, some workers had to live in quarantine for as many as 30 days, because when one person in the building tests positive, they have to quarantine for 14 days, and within that period another tests positive. So, some were perpetually in quarantine.[4]

Workers were also struggling with food shortages induced by travel restrictions and plummeting wages. Many had managed with just one meal a day, while others were relying on black tea and the edible yield of trees like jackfruit, provided one was accessible. Some had simply survived on water. Any grocery purchases had been made on credit. Most had had to work until as late as 2 pm on days when curfew was to take effect from 6 pm, making it impossible for them to go home (ibid; Wijesinghe, 2020).

The narrative of exploitation that cuts across all these different experiences, and explains all the many extreme marginalities faced by FTZ workers, should lay bare the corrosive bases of accumulation employed by capital and solicited by the state. The deliberate withdrawal of state authorities from monitoring the situation of FTZ workers living in quarantine or working through

4 Discussion with activist (virtual), 28 May 2021.



Source: Bandara (2021b)

the raging pandemic, and the generally lax disposition of the state health apparatus (including the military that was put in charge of 'annihilating' the virus) towards glaring violations of COVID protocol within garment factories, indicate the complicity of the state in the process of global capital accumulation at the expense of the health, safety, and dignity of the labour that powers the process.

Social prejudice

The view of the FTZ worker as particularly prone to being a carrier of the virus has much to do with the narrative surrounding their work and social existence that stigmatise them as 'contaminated' and morally lax (Preston and Firth, 2020, as cited in Hewamanne, 2021). This was particularly evident in the case of the Minuwangoda Brandix cluster, when compared with the cluster that emerged around the same time from the Peliyagoda fish market. Over mass media and social media, the Brandix cluster was highlighted above and over the fish market cluster as the new source of the COVID virus. This discourse was closely connected to the 'contamination narrative' surrounding FTZ workers mentioned previously, which in turn is grounded in patriarchal depictions of 'moral women' and how those who do not fit these parameters may suffer exposure to various dangers. The suffering that these narratives gave rise to was immense, as one respondent shared:

> Most of these workers could not return to their villages because their neighbours would call up 119 and report them to the authorities. In one instance that I know of, a worker took the train all the way to Polonnaruwa just to catch a glimpse of her mother from the railway platform, and then returned to Colombo. She could not go home with her mother because people were scared that garment workers would bring the virus to the village. They were caught in a situation where they could not go to work, could not stay in their boarding houses, and could not go home.[5]

The state and society both tend to view the migrant FTZ worker as an 'outsider' living in the city. This view of them as outsiders has to a significant extent sanctioned the violation of many of their rights, whereby their presence does not register in any meaningful everyday sense with other citizens, nor in an administrative sense with the state (due to them being officially registered as residents elsewhere in the country). Attanapola (2006) reasons that this 'placelessness' they experience has introduced in the migrant worker a mindset that makes them grateful just to not fall prey to any misfortune, rather than strike back at the structures that make them vulnerable to such. Once this mentality is internalised and the corrosive structures that exploit them unquestioningly accepted, their exploitation becomes so normal as to be invisible, both to themselves and the outer world.

Their gender, their position in the economic structure, and their occupation all intersect to reinforce their subaltern experience, further restricting possibilities for corrective action (Jordal, Öhman, and Wijewardene, 2020). The extreme and increasing marginality that these realities give rise to make them further and further vulnerable to various sorts of abuses, including sexual. A respondent from the Biyagama FTZ shared how a police officer whom she had approached to secure a curfew pass in order to travel home had offered to come pick her up personally after he got off duty, clearly insinuating other intentions[6]. In many other instances, FTZ workers had been hoarded to buses and unceremoniously carted off to their

5 Discussion with an activist (virtual), 28 May 2021.

6 Discussion Biyagama FTZ worker (virtual), 31 May 2021.

home districts, where they had been dumped off at the relevant city centre, left to devise their own ways of getting home from there. In a situation of a country-wide lockdown and after an extended period of serious impoverishment at their temporary accommodations, some workers had taken as many as two days to reach home, as they had to walk up the distance[7].

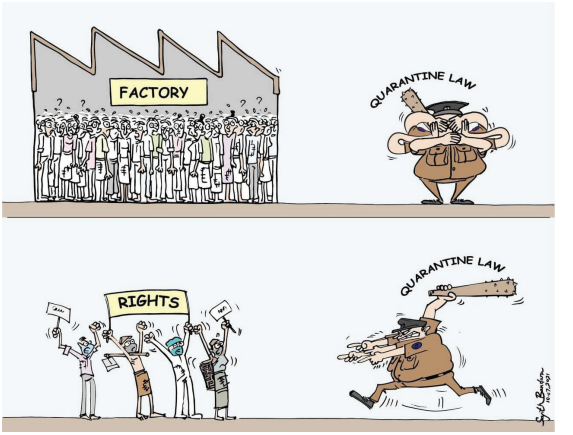
The sapping of this group of a voice signalled by this state of affairs (because the worker is not in a position to speak up, much less be heard) is, as this case and numerous others demonstrate, largely institutionally sanctioned as well. In many instances, workers have reported being hoarded by the military into quarantine centres at a moment's notice, sometimes even carted away as COVID positive cases even when they had medical evidence to assert otherwise, never being given an explanation or notice (De Silva, 2020). This treatment is indicative of how even the state apparatus viewed them as those not worth the time and effort of treating with dignity.

These accounts demonstrate how the voicelessness of FTZ workers has translated into a serious case of rights violations, particularly in the context of the pandemic. A long history of such violations had already normalised the situation to the point of invisibility (as discussed above), and the additional challenges posed by the health emergency served to compound and exacerbate them, pushing the already marginal to extreme marginality, given their lack of economic and social security. However, this structural build-up is hardly ever recognised or acknowledged even by the workers themselves, who have by now been fragmented as a labour force, making it nearly impossible to unionise or organise in any capacity. The breakdown of this collective labour power is chiefly in the service of capital accumulation. In this connection, I next discuss the alienating influence of the FTZs on these workers, and its implications on the enjoyment of their rights.

7 Discussion with NGO staff member (virtual), 20 June 2021.

The state, capital, and labour

In the multiple vulnerabilities faced by the FTZ worker in the pandemic context, it is possible, at least in part, to discern the role played by the state and capital in conditioning labour. It is already evident that both the state and capital conveniently looked away from the difficulties of the FTZ worker in this situation. What may not be quite so apparent is how this looking away made it possible for the FTZ worker to be continually used for purposes of capital accumulation in disturbingly extractive ways.



Source: Bandara (2021c).

I will first take up the case of capital, as exemplified by factory owners and managers. When the workers found themselves trapped in the FTZ, unable to go home and unable to step out due to the societal view of them as carriers of the virus, factory owners and managers strategically used their vulnerability to increase profit margins by decreasing production costs. This was done first by way of providing them transport to and from the factories, and then increasing the length of the working shift of the individual worker; slashing social security expenditure of permanent employees on the pretext of decreasing demand for their products; and substituting the labour of those who contracted the virus with those who did not, without compensation for the additional hours put in or the

additional targets met, among other things[8]. The fact that there was this serious a push from the management to continue the production process is itself evidence that there was no considerable decline in demand. In fact, there were reports of additional – and massive – orders for healthcare gear from textile plants in Sri Lanka (*Sri Lanka's apparel industry attracts over 500 mln USD orders for PPE*, 2020). On top of all this, the benefits of the GSP+ scheme also have not trickled down to the level of the worker in this time of enormous need (Hari Tv, 2020).

The treatment of the worker here is strongly indicative of a denial of their human worth and dignity, wherein settling the bare minimum of their wage is viewed as adequate. In effect, what this signifies is the reduction of the human person to a commodity, put in the service of capital, specifically its accumulation and expansion. I want to next focus on how these conditions of exploitation serve the interests of the state as well.

As Hancock (2006) demonstrates, women's labour is the key source of revenue for the failing economy of the country. More than their labour per se, what generates these revenues is the exploitation of such labour, which increases profit margins. Therefore, making conditions conducive for exploitation to continue is directly beneficial to the revenue seeking state. Harvey (2007) and Bourdieu (1998) further a similar line of thought, whereby they explain how the reliance on pools of informal labour and their extreme exploitation is a hallmark of a revenue seeking, neo-liberalising state. As such, the state's institutions are also involved in the process of controlling labour thus, either by way of turning a blind eye to its exploitation, or by actively becoming complicit in it.

Turning a blind eye to labour exploitation is something for which the Sri Lankan state – and admittedly most developing states – is notoriously known. Despite a labour raw regime that is applicable to all working citizens of and in the country, FTZs are considered and treated as de facto legal bubbles in which these laws take no effect. Unjustifiable work shifts, inadequate leisure time

8 Discussion with NGO staff member (virtual), 20 June 2021.

within the working day, and unsafe working conditions are only some of the problems prevalent in the FTZs. This state of affairs has been normalised in the mindset of not only state officials and factory management, but also workers themselves (Skanthakumar, 2017). When COVID arrived in this prevailing state of affairs, the complicity of the state in the continued exploitation of labour was made evident in cases where workers were refused curfew passes, dropped off in city centres, with no regard to how they would get home, made ineligible for government relief mechanisms, etc. as discussed previously. In both the cases of capital and the state, one sees the extraction of labour on hugely exploitative terms, and the complete abandonment of the body that makes capital accumulation possible (Hewamanne, 2021). The interdependence between the state and capital for mutual sustenance, therefore, has been key to the continued exploitation of labour in the FTZs.

Conclusion

In this chapter, my focus was on understanding the ramifications of COVID on the migrant factory workers of Sri Lanka's FTZs. I have discussed how the COVID response of the government has contributed to reproducing extant marginalities, and subjected these groups to further exploitation.

FTZ workers, even during normal times, are subject to multiple marginalities found at the intersections of class, gender, and socio-cultural realities. The arrival of COVID-19 at this already highly marginalised state of affairs has turned the situation from bad to worse. With each new wave of the pandemic, we see a continuous deterioration of the personal economy of the FTZ worker, and a corresponding decline in her living standards. In this situation, the exploitative conditions in which she usually finds herself have gradually intensified, even while they become more and more normalised and thereby rendered invisible.

The already existing negative perception of FTZ workers was further aggravated by the pandemic, whereby they were viewed more and more as particularly prone to be carriers of the virus given

their living and working arrangements. The workers themselves were largely resigned to their fate, having already lived in corrosive conditions for years, perhaps decades. This state of marginality has been further reinforced by the fragmenting effect of neo-liberalism, which provides workers with ever more excuses not to organise, but rather 'manage' by the day.

The role of the state and capital in making these conditions possible cannot be ignored. Both have reduced the FTZ worker to a mere commodity, easily settled by paying the minimum wage, completely sapped of their human worth and dignity. In effect, the body of the worker has been neglected, while the labour it produces has been commodified on very exploitative terms to increase profit margins. For the state, this labour is simply a means to much needed revenue, and for capital it is but a tool for further accumulation and expansion. As such, both have reason to continue the conditions of marginality which the FTZ worker finds herself in, and the pandemic has but provided an additional excuse for the marginality and exploitation to continue and intensify.

References

Artigala, A. (2020) *Facebook*. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=4562515707099223&id=580456651971835 (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Arunatilake, N. (2013) 'Precarious Work in Sri Lanka', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 57(4), pp. 488–506. doi: 10.1177/0002764212466246.

Attanapola, C. T. (2006) 'Were they ever "in place"? Sense of place and self-identities among migrant female export-processing zone workers in Sri lanka', *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift - Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 60(3), pp. 217–226. doi: 10.1080/00291950600891778.

Bandara, S. (2021a) *Facebook*. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/ArtOfSajith/photos/a.281558598710607/1829869590546159/?type=3 (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Bandara, S. (2021b) *Facebook*. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/ArtOfSajith/photos/a.281558598710607/1839013799631738/?type=3 (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Bandara, S. (2021c) *Facebook*. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/ArtOfSajith/photos/a.281558598710607/1873961409470310/?type=3 (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Bourdieu, P. (1998) *Acts of Resistance : Against the New Myths of Our Time*. Translated by R. Nice. Cambridge: Polity Press.

COVID-19 Pandemic: A Pretext to Roll Back Sri Lankan Garment Workers' Rights (2020) AFL-CIO, Clean Clothes Campaign, Labour Behind the Label, Workers United, Maquila Solidarity Network, War on Want and USAS. Available at: https://cleanclothes.org/file-repository/sri_lanka_brief_march_2021.pdf.

De Silva, M. (2020) 'Situation Of Garment Factory Workers In Katunayake – Covid-19', *Colombo Telegraph*, 14 October. Available at: https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/situation-of-garment-factory-workers-in-katunayake-covid-19/ (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Garment workers on the frontline of the pandemic outbreak in Sri Lanka (2020) WARONWANT. Available at: https://waronwant.org/news-analysis/garment-workers-frontline-pandemic-outbreak-sri-lanka (Accessed 20 June 2021).

Gunatilaka, H. (2019) 'Gender Inequality at Work: A Literature Review', *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)*, 3(IX). Available at: https://www.rsisinternational.org/virtual-library/papers/gender-inequality-at-work-a-literature-review/ (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Hancock, P. (2006) 'Women, work and empowerment: A portrait of women workers in two of Sri Lanka's Export Processing Zones', *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift - Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 60(3), pp. 227–239. doi: 10.1080/00291950600891836.

Hancock, P., Carastathis, G., Georgiou, J., Oliveira, M. (2016) 'Female workers in textile and garment sectors in Sri Lankan Export Processing Zones (EPZs): gender dimensions and working conditions', *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences*, 38(1), pp. 63–77. doi: 10.4038/sljss.v38i1.7386.

Hancock, P., Middleton, S. and Moore, J. (2012) 'Gender, globalisation and empowerment: a study of women who work in Sri Lanka's Export Processing Zones', *Work Organisation, Labour & Globalisation*, 6(1), pp. 131–146. doi: 10.13169/workorgalaboglob.6.1.0131.

Hari Tv (2020) සමහරු කොස් ඇට කාලා වතුර බිව්වා. කාන්තාවන්ව විවිධ දේවල් වලට භාවිතා කලා - හෙලිදරව්ව [Hari Tv]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekkeroK92FM (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Harvey, D. (2007) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hewamanne, S. (2003) 'Performing "Dis-respectability": New Tastes, Cultural Practices, and Identity Performances by Sri Lanka's Free Trade Zone Garment-Factory Workers', *Cultural Dynamics*, 15(1), pp. 71–101. doi: 10.1177/a033109.

Hewamanne, S. (2017) 'Toward Meaningful Health and Safety Measures: Stigma and the Devaluation of Garment Work in Sri Lanka's Global Factories', in Prentice, R. and De Neve, G. (eds) *Unmaking the Global Sweatshop*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 226–250. Available at: https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.9783/9780812294316-010/html (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Hewamanne, S. (2018) 'Sewing their way up the social ladder? Paths to social mobility and empowerment among Sri Lanka's global factory workers', *Third World Quarterly*, 39(11), pp. 2173–2187. doi: 10.1080/01436597.2018.1458302.

Hewamanne, S. (2019) 'Crafting social change: former global factory workers negotiating new identities in Sri Lanka's villages', *Identities*, 26(2), pp. 165–183. doi: 10.1080/1070289X.2017.1380942.

Hewamanne, S. (2020) 'From global workers to local entrepreneurs: Sri Lanka's former global factory workers in rural Sri Lanka', *Third World Quarterly*, 41(3), pp. 547–564. doi: 10.1080/01436597.2019.1675504.

Hewamanne, S. (2021) 'Pandemic, Lockdown and Modern Slavery among Sri Lanka's Global Assembly Line Workers', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22(1), pp. 54–69.

Jayawardena, D. (2018) 'Patriarchy and (Un)Doing Factory of Women's Collective Identity in Sri Lanka's Localised Global Apparel Industry: The Glass Ceiling Revisited', in Mahtab, N. et al. (eds) *Handbook of Research on Women's Issues and Rights in the Developing World*. IGI Global, pp. 19–36. doi: 10.4018/978-1-5225-3018-3.ch002.

Jayawardena, D. (2020) 'Other's Place or Othering Space Reframing the Performativity of the Neoliberalized Space(s) of Factory Women in a Free Trade Zone in Sri Lanka', *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 35(5), pp. 405–421.

Jordal, M., Öhman, A. and Wijewardene, K. (2020) 'Respectability and rights. Sexual and reproductive health and rights of Sri Lankan women formerly involved in prostitution', *Contemporary South Asia*, 28(1), pp. 28–42. doi: 10.1080/09584935.2019.1667301.

Liberation Movement on Facebook Watch (2021). Available at: https://www.facebook.com/LiberationMovementLka/videos/not-even-13-of-the-working-class-has-been-given-the-covid-19-vaccine-as-yet-on-o/323307655890361/ (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Perera, W. and Fernando, K. (2020) *Sri Lankan free trade zone employees told to keep working as infections rise*, *World Socialist Web Site*. Available at: https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/10/17/coro-o17.html (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Ruwanpura, K. N. (2012) *Ethical codes: reality and rhetoric-a study of Sri Lanka's apparel sector*. University of Southampton. Available at: https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/8747298.pdf (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Ruwanpura, K. N., Gunawardana, S. and Padmasiri, B. (2021) 'Vaccine Inequality and the Cost to Garment Sector Workers', *Groundviews*, 22 May. Available at: https://groundviews.org/2021/05/22/vaccine-inequality-and-the-cost-to-garment-sector-workers/ (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Skanthakumar, B. (2017) *Living for the day': Contract Workers in Sri Lanka's Free Trade Zones*. Katunayake: Dabindu Collective.

Sri Lankan garment workers decry violations of labor rights - UCA News (2020) *ucanews.com*. Available at: https://www.ucanews.com/news/sri-lankan-garment-workers-decry-violations-of-labor-rights/89988 (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

Sri Lanka's apparel industry attracts over 500 mln USD orders for PPE (2020) *Xinhua News*. Available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/22/c_139079934.htm (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

UN(DER) PAID IN THE PANDEMIC: An estimate of what the garment industry owes its workers (2020) Clean Clothes Campaign. Available at: https://cleanclothes.org/file-repository/underpaid-in-the-pandemic.pdf.

Wijesinghe, R. (2020) 'Sri Lankan garment workers face difficulties during and after COVID-19 curfew', *Praja*, 3 June. Available at: http://praja.lk/english/sri-lankan-garment-workers-face-difficulties-during-and-after-covid-19-curfew/ (Accessed: 24 July 2021).

8

Contacts during difficult times: A study on the function of social networks in accessing state services during the COVID-19 pandemic

Shashik Silva

Introduction

In Sri Lanka as elsewhere, the COVID-19 pandemic has made citizens dependent on the state significantly more than usual for such things as obtaining permits to hold ceremonies, engaging in certain business activities, traveling from one location to another, receiving vaccinations, receiving rations, etc. more than they usually do. In such a critical context, the state has a strong obligation to honour the principle of equality. However, at Sri Lanka's national level, there have been numerous discussions about the types of favouritism and discrimination in operation when people seek COVID-19-related state services.

Several cases have been reported that serve as examples of such favouritism and discrimination. A recent incident in a COVID-19 vaccination centre in the Colombo district in which the Chairman of an Urban Council insisted that medical officers only vaccinate people in the area who brought a token issued by him is a

clear example of biased access to state-supplied vaccines (*Moratuwa Mayor arrested for disrupting the duties of health workers,* 2021). Another widely publicised incident involved a group of people from the Western Province traveling to Galle in the Southern Province despite travel restrictions being in operation, in order to receive the second dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine. This was in spite of the fact that the state had not yet officially begun the vaccination process for the second dose at the time and there was a limited supply of vaccines in the country even for the first dose (*Report finds 425 from Western Province got Covishield jab in Galle*, 2021). There were also numerous reports of ceremonies and public gatherings taking place during the period when travel restrictions were supposedly in force, and of specific individuals being granted exemptions from quarantine regulations. In a recent sensational example involving prominent figures in Sri Lanka's entertainment industry, those who had organised a birthday celebration at a luxury hotel in Colombo were reportedly given a lot of flexibility during their subsequent quarantine process (*Chandimal's birthday party: Seven arrested and granted bail*, 2021).

These events demonstrate how some are more capable than others in engaging with state services efficiently, resulting in greater injustice to the average citizen. In such situations, people use their existing social networks at the national level to gain access to or misuse state services. In this paper, I examine the role of social networks during a pandemic situation in which many people perceive the state's involvement in civic life to be more important than usual. I visit four issues in this connection: First, the role of political and non-political actors in combating COVID-19; second, how the political patronage network functioned as a social network in facilitating access to state services during COVID-19; third, inequalities sustained as well as spawned due to the function of patronage networks; and last, the role played by mediators in enabling access to state services during the COVID-19 crisis.

My analysis is based on a series of qualitative interviews and observations conducted in two districts in the Western Province, namely, Colombo and Kalutara. This information was supplemented

by insights drawn from secondary sources, and data from a survey titled 'Socio-Economic Index in the Face of COVID-19' (2021) that provided insights into COVID-19-related state services during the pandemic. Drawing on the work of three theorists who have written extensively on the subject of 'Social Networks,' namely, Robert Putnam, James. C. Scott, and Pierre Bourdieu, as well as the works of Partha Chatterjee on political community, I argue that formal democratic institutions and processes have been somewhat suspended in the pandemic situation, to be almost entirely replaced by informal and largely extra-institutional means of engaging with the state.

Political and non-political actors in combating COVID-19

During the first quarter of 2021, Social Indicator conducted a survey that revealed that the public is more satisfied with the role of the Grama Niladhari, the health sector, the police, and the military in combating COVID-19, than with the Parliamentary representatives of their local areas (please refer tables 5-10 in annexure 3). Grama Niladaris were assigned several COVID-19 related duties such as distributing the Rs. 5000 allowance and dry ration packs to families under home quarantine, providing necessary information regarding getting medicine delivered to homes from government hospitals during the lockdown, and ensuring the public coordinates with the PHI in the event of a loved one's death during the pandemic, among other things. The police and military too had multiple responsibilities at the time, including imposing travel restrictions and controlling the spread of the virus, with the military in particular being in charge of running quarantine centres. During the third wave, the military was heavily involved in the vaccination process in order to meet the daily vaccination targets. By this point of the pandemic, Public Health Inspectors (PHI) had gained prominence and were recognised as playing a critical role in the fight against COVID-19. They were primarily in charge of ensuring that quarantine regulations were followed, but they also had a number of other responsibilities in their respective local areas.

However, it should also be noted that there have been reports of Grama Niladharis and PHIs refusing to fulfil their responsibilities due to a variety of pressures. For example, Grama Niladharis raised concerns regarding participating in the distribution of the Rs. 5000 allowance on two occasions in 2020 and 2021. They stated in 2020 that they distributed the relief due to political pressure and according to them, there was no need to distribute the relief during that time period because the pandemic was still in its early stages (*Grama Niladharis call off boycott of Rs 5,000 allowance distribution duties*, 2020; *Distribution of Rs 5,000: Grama Niladharis to withdraw*, 2020). In 2021, they refused to distribute the relief yet again, claiming that it was unsafe for the officials to do so and that the government's request to distribute it before the New Year was too optimistic (*Grama Niladharis refuse to distribute Rs. 5,000*, 2021). Similarly, PHIs wished to withdraw from COVID-19 control duties after being denied legal cover for their work and after health ministers made a demoralising statement that PHIs are causing inconvenience to the general public (*PHIs step away from COVID-19 control duties*, 2020).

According to the survey data, it is clear that non-political actors have become more popular among the public for providing a satisfactory service during the pandemic, whereas political actors have not enjoyed such popularity. However, based on the above incidents that are demonstrative of non-political actors' reluctance to continue their services, it is possible to conclude that there has been tension between political and non-political actors, with political actors maintaining an advantage over non-political actors throughout the COVID-19 period.

In addition to the issue of reluctance stemming from political involvement, there has been growing dissatisfaction in the healthcare sector about the military's involvement in pandemic control. For instance, the Government Medical Officers' Association has informed the Health Ministry that they are dissatisfied with increased military involvement in the vaccination process, claiming it has caused some confusion among the public (*GMOA complains of military interference in vaccination drive: Army refutes allegation*, 2021).

Role of political patronage in the pandemic situation

Nature of political patronage in Sri Lanka

It is necessary to understand what 'patronage' means in order to understand its impact during the pandemic. Patronage was a rather clear affair in feudal society, consisting of an uneven power relationship between landlords and their tenants. This means that the superior party, the patron, exerts influence on the inferior party, the client, by supporting or protecting the latter, and the latter, in turn, performs certain services, the nature of which is determined by the patron's demands (Scott, 1972; Hettige, 1984).

However, with the emergence of democracy, patron-client relationships became more complicated. Clients gained more agency in this new situation because patrons were under pressure to placate the ever-increasing number of clients. Because this growing demand could not be fulfilled in their personal capacity, patrons were forced to turn to state-owned resources in addition to what they already had (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2005). As a result, we see the formation of a 'patronage democracy', or a kind of democracy based primarily on patron-client relationships, in which patrons enable their clients' access to state-controlled resources in exchange for their vote.

In this equation, even welfare is used to cater to the patronage demands of voters, resulting in people viewing the state as "the supreme agency of social welfare and benevolence." (Uyangoda, 2010, p. 61; also see Weerawardana, 1951) Thus, politicians have come to play an important intermediary role between citizens and welfare such that they have become indispensable in accessing welfare services, rendering them absolutely necessary for the former, in oder to access the latter (Gunasekara, 1992; Uyangoda, 2010; Peiris, 2021). It is in this context that 'contacts' and 'networks' during the pandemic should be understood, to which I turn next.

Patronage networks and convenient access to state services during the pandemic

As mentioned earlier, politicians have become useful and efficient nodes of access to the state's welfare scheme. In the pandemic situation too, there were several instances where established patronage networks were used as an effective means by many local communities to access COVID-19-related state services. Most of the time, having access to state services was critical to people's lives, for purposes such as obtaining travel passes to cross provincial borders during personal emergencies, or obtaining permits for businessmen to sell groceries or continue other personal business and so on.

It may be instructive, in this regard, to compare the experiences of two respondents I had approached for this study. One among them owns a small business in his area that produces hand sanitisers, masks, and other safety equipment. Through the assistance of a local politician, he had been able to easily send his employees who worked with him to their hometowns during the lockdown period in the first wave of COVID-19[1]. He was able to do so because of his close relationship with a local politician and his previous support for him in his political activities. Another respondent who is a young executive who is not connected to any patronage network in his local area, had been unable to send a mason who was working in their house back to his hometown during the lockdown period[2]. Yet another respondent, similar to the first case, reported to having obtained a coveted food distribution permit with the recommendation of the Chairman of his Urban Council, which had enabled him to sell his fresh vegetable produce through the travel restrictions of the third wave[3], when many others who lacked the necessary network could not do so.

1 Discussion with key informant, Kotikawatta Mulleriyawa Pradeshiya Sabha area, Colombo District, 02 June 2021.

2 Discussion with key informant, Kotikawatta Mulleriyawa Pradeshiya Sabha area, Colombo District, 02 June 2021.

3 Discussion with key informant, Kolonnawa Urban Council area, Colombo District, 04 June 2021.

These anecdotes demonstrate the difference between how easily one can be exempted from state rules and regulations on COVID-19 if one is connected to a patronage network, and the disadvantage of not being connected to such a network. Political patronage also worked in the pandemic situation to satisfy clients by allowing them to manipulate COVID-19 regulations. This type of patronage then gives rise to what Partha Chatterjee has termed 'political society' (2004), referring to that section of society which uses informal and extra-institutional means to access the state due either to the unavailability of alternatives or simply the greater effectiveness of such means.

However, because of limited resources and high demand during this time period, the utility of these patronage networks in gaining access to state services was limited. As a result, many people who had previously relied on such networks were disappointed in certain situations because they could not fully reap the benefits or achieve the desired outcomes through their connections. For instance, a labourer at a local Urban Council reported to be extremely dissatisfied with the fact that the second dose of the AstraZeneca vaccination, which they would have received as a Council employee, was given to relatives of the Chairman of the urban council[4]. These employees at the local council are also beneficiaries of the patronage network, and they were hired into the Urban Council as a result of these established networks. However, because the nature and availability of resources during COVID-19 are different, such networks may struggle to function and provide benefits as effectively as they did previously. Increased scarcity also has implications for issues of social equality, which I take up in the next section.

Patronage networks and inequalities

As previously stated, those who have connections in a patronage network often have easier access to services than those who do not. This had resulted in a situation in which one group of

4 Discussion with key informant, Colombo District, 17 June 2021.

people could reap the benefits of such services at a disproportionately higher rate than another. Therefore, patronage networks have contributed to the creation of even more inequality in society during the COVID-19 period.

For instance, there were reports of the government's Rs. 5000 allowance being distributed in accordance with state regulations, and in certain instances by manipulating the process. Individuals with patronage networks, for example, were exempt from the eligibility criteria and did not face a background check by the local officials in charge of allocating the allowance. On the other hand, some families who were not part of any patronage networks found it difficult to obtain the allowance and were required to follow the regulations in order to qualify and receive it. I reproduce below two stories from the field illustrative of this reality.

One respondent is a retired government employee with ties to the local patronage network, who is frequently seen participating in party mobilisation activities in his area during election season. He has two families living in his household, i.e. him and his wife as well as his son and daughter-in-law. He was able to obtain allowances for each family through his patronage network[5]. Another respondent, on the other hand, is an employee in the private sector who is not involved in any political activities. He too has multiple families living in his house, but was unable to obtain allowances for each family because he was not closely connected to a patronage network. He claimed he later approached one of his contacts, who had connections with a member in the local Pradeshiya Sabha, and was able to obtain allowances for each family in his household[6]. This latter example is a particularly apt one in relation to the point I am making here, namely that the respondent's realisation and actions indicate that approaching the patronage network was deemed more advantageous to him in obtaining the allowance than attempting to obtain it through formal means.

5 Discussion with key informant, Kotikawatta Mulleriyawa Pradeshiya Sabha area, Colombo District, 04 June 2021.

6 Discussion with key informant, Kotikawatta Mulleriyawa Pradeshiya Sabha area, Colombo District, 05 June 2021.

In yet another example, a respondent who works as the Secretary of her community's Samurdhi Society, and happens to be the sister of a local politician in that area, shared that she took the lead in distributing the Rs. 5000 allowance in her village. She had advised the Grama Sevaka and Samurdhi officers of the village to identify the area's low-income earners. However, many people had been dissatisfied with the way beneficiaries were identified and came into conflict with her because they believed the process was unfair. Many had claimed she gave the allowance to people in her close circle and within her own political network[7]. In this case, possible favouritism seems to have contributed to disproportionate access to state-sponsored welfare schemes.

In April 2021, the media reported an incident where people in the Ratmalana area complained that they were handed tokens based on a pre-prepared list, but when relief was distributed, it was based on favouritism, forcing them to wait in long lines for hours (*The 5000 that heated up Ratmalana,* 2021). Transparency International (*ENSURING COVID-19 RELIEF REACHES SRI LANKA'S PEOPLE,* 2020) also raised concerns about malpractices in the distribution of COVID-19 relief to disadvantaged families. TI also reported on an allegation that a local council member used the relief as a campaign tool by deciding who would receive it.

The main observation here is that these networks are primarily used to manipulate the existing system in order to obtain certain services in an unreasonable or disproportionate manner. This also created a situation in which people who were not connected to a political patronage network were unable to secure access to special provisions while others were able to.

Asquith (2019) expounding Bourdieu's conception of social capital notes how it "is shaped by the material, cultural and symbolic status of the individual and her/his family, status in the community, economic situation and engagement in certain forms of cultural activity. Therefore, the volume of social capital that an individual

7 Discussion with key informant, Beruwala Pradeshiya Sabha area, Kalutara District, 16 June 2021.

holds depends upon the size of his/her network and the cultural and economic capital that is possessed by the members of the network." (p. 32) As such, inequalities and exclusion are implied in the very idea of social capital, and come to occupy a central position when social capital is made to be the chief means of mediation in a situation. While it is true that the function of patronage politics has enabled those who are less powerful in society to benefit from the network as Chatterjee's political society thesis also posits, the very tendency to view what should be a right and an entitlement as a 'benefit' is the primary danger of this sort of patronage politics infiltrating into relief distribution schemes.

The importance of mediators in accessing state services

We have seen the critical role of mediators within political patronage networks in gaining access to state services or obtaining special exceptions from COVID-19 rules and regulations in the previous sections. The term 'mediator' in this context refers to a person who connects the general public to state services or assists in obtaining a special exception from COVID-19 rules and regulations.

Apart from mediators in the political patronage network, employees in the healthcare sector, officers in the police and military, and bureaucrats can all be viewed as potential mediators who could assist in obtaining of COVID-19-related state services and exemptions. However, the primary goal of this section is to describe the role of various types of mediators in patronage networks.

Mediators in the political patronage network

During the COVID-19 pandemic, mediators in political patronage networks became more visible and noticeable. Such mediators are at once part of the political patronage network as well as other social networks in their respective villages, which sometimes encourages them to provide services even beyond the scope of the patronage network.

For instance, a respondent who is a Govi Niyamaka and former Pradeshiya Sabha member shared how he contributed to the smooth execution of the vaccination drive of his area. He is also a member of several community-based organisations and is actively involved in social work such as shramadhanas and blood donation initiatives. Now a supporter of a local politician, he had been put in charge of making the necessary arrangements with the help of a local youth group to ensure the vaccination process at the centre went smoothly. At this centre, both the respondent and youth group made an effort to provide proper seating, ensure that sanitisation requirements were met, distribute water bottles to those waiting in line, and provide refreshments to the vaccinated. The mediators in this situation ensured that the message about the vaccination centre reached a large number of people, which helped attract voters, non-voters, and people from both inside and outside of the patronage network[8].

It is also worth noting that in this incident, the vaccination centre was a local Buddhist temple. The ideology promoted by this choice of location coincides with the agenda promoted by a certain political party during the previous Presidential election. As such, this could be considered as strengthening, either intentionally or unintentionally, the support base of this political party.

Similarly, another respondent who was a former local political candidate for the Pradeshiya Sabha elections, and is currently a Samurdhi officer, was put in charge of distributing the Rs. 5000 allowance in his area. The officer had used his previous political connections to help with the distribution. He claimed to have made certain that the allowance was distributed to both people within and outside of the patronage network in the area[9].

8 Discussion with key informant, Kotikawatta Mulleriyawa Pradeshiya Sabha area, Colombo District, 08 June 2021.

9 Discussion with key informant, Kotikawatta Mulleriyawa Pradeshiya Sabha area, Colombo District, 16 June 2021.

The above two incidents indicate that mediators play a dual role in strengthening the patronage network and other societal networks in the community, both indirectly and directly, due to their broad reach and engagement within their local areas. These mediators ensure that the network functions and that the process runs smoothly. The patronage network is designed in such a way that it strives to reach the ground in the most efficient way possible. Most of the time, the mediators and networks established on the ground that are largely used by politicians for political motives are also some of the best networks for organising and implementing such activities within local communities.

Patronage networks have become more successful in establishing themselves on the ground since the outbreak of the pandemic. They have done so by focusing on providing COVID-19-related benefits to their people in order to meet the demands of the time. Regardless of this success, it is necessary to keep in mind that using these same patronage networks to access services during the pandemic time has also resulted in disparities.

Mediators in the healthcare sector

With the onset of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka, employees from the healthcare sector received more recognition. In order to recognise and acknowledge the importance of the health sector and its services during this critical period, a campaign called 'Suwa Wiruwo' was launched in 2020, which received widespread attention. This campaign promoted the idea that the public should treat healthcare workers with utmost respect, as they were largely responsible for spearheading the national fight against COVID-19. The 'Suwa Wiruwo' campaign was successful in gaining the desired public attention.

Employees in the health sector have also received rewards such as special holiday packages from well-known hotel chains as a form of gratitude for their tireless efforts (*Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts offers a holiday package for "Suwa-Sewa Wiruwo"*, 2020). Furthermore,

in comparison to any other sector, employees in the health sector have gained an advantage in terms of being able to bargain for the improvement of their labour rights during this time.

Most importantly, people in local communities began to recognise the significance of certain healthcare workers due to their important role during the COVID-19 period. One of the study's respondents stated that previously they used to address the Public Health Inspector (PHI) in their area as "*Kunu Mahathaya*" *(*Waste Management Officer*)*, referring to his job as investigating improper waste disposal in the area. However, with the emergence of COVID-19, the locals' perception of the PHI's job have shifted, and many see them as providing an important service to the community. When applying Bourdeiu's understanding of social capital in this context, individuals who have healthcare sector employees in their social networks find it useful to have such connections to access state services. However, this has largely occurred in a manner in which citizens use them to manipulate COVID-19 regulations and the process in place in order to receive an efficient and timely service.

It is also worth noting the distinction between the mediation of healthcare employees and the mediation of the political patronage network in terms of access to state services. The involvement of healthcare sector employees is unavoidable in this equation due to the nature of the COVID-19 crisis, but they are not directly involved with state services through the established hierarchical network that is set up to collect votes. Many respondents revealed that they themselves or people they know received assistance from employees in the health sector for purposes such as quickly performing PCR tests upon the passing away of a dear one, in order to conduct their final rituals in time. In this context, where people's feelings are at stake, many claimed to have relied on contacts with healthcare workers. The excerpt reproduced below speaks directly to this fact:

> My uncle died during the third wave of COVID-19. He died shortly after being admitted to one of the city's public hospitals. The hospital staff told me that they will have to do a post-mortem, and I was asked to contact the police in my police area and get a police officer to conduct the post-mortem. Even after contacting the

> police station through a policeman that I knew, I was not able to get a police officer for the post-mortem process. I then approached the Chairman of my local Urban Council to expedite the process. The chairman sent one of his employees to the police station, but I still couldn't get a police officer in time. My final option was to approach a parliamentarian that I know. I knew the parliamentarian's cousin brother very closely. Once the parliamentarian's cousin brother asked me to help him during the election season to mobilise some votes from my networks. I remember I somehow managed to get a significant number of votes for him at the time, even though I didn't personally support his political party. After speaking to him and explaining my situation he quickly arranged for a police officer. But after the post-mortem, I was told that they had to do a PCR test to release the body, and that this process could take up to two days. I knew a nurse and another person who works for the Ministry of Health, and they helped me to complete the process in less than two days. On the seventh day following my Uncle's death, we had planned an almsgiving, but the monk of the local temple in our area refused to attend because of safety and health concerns. Then I spoke with one of my neighbours who said that he might be able to help me with getting a monk for the almsgiving. My neighbour is also a party mobiliser of one of the local ministers. Through him and his contacts, I was able to get a monk from another temple for the almsgiving in time.[10]

This account sheds light on the various types of social networks that have emerged during this time period and were being used to gain access to various services. The most intriguing aspect of his case is how healthcare workers are also emerging as an extremely important part of the social network when it comes to accessing state services.

Two other respondents also provided similar accounts. In one case, the respondent's father had died while at home during the second wave of COVID-19, and had later been taken to the hospital. To speed up the PCR process, they had approached one of their relatives, an ambulance driver, who had been able to hand over

10 Discussion with key informant, Kolonnawa Urban Council area, Colombo District, 04 June 2021.

the body to the deceased's family with all the required documents without conducting the PCR test[11]. In the second case, the respondent who is a marketing officer had been able to obtain the first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine through a nurse who was one of his clients, under the quota set aside for essential and frontline workers by the state[12].

All three examples above show that it is not only the mediators of political patronage networks who are crucial in securing access to much needed services and exemptions during the pandemic, but also employees of the healthcare sector. Drawing on Chatterjee's categories, it seems that employees in the healthcare sector work both as part of the formal and institutional setup in mitigating COVID-19, and also as part of 'political society', assisting people in their social networks to access state services in informal and extra-institutional ways. In doing so, they have amassed considerable recognition in social networks, and hence the arrangement may be seen as a horizontal one of mutual benefit (Putnam, 1993, as cited in Gelderblom, 2018, p. 4), which then translates into 'social capital' as Bourdieu would have it.

Integration of political patronage networks in to the public healthcare sector

In the pandemic, healthcare workers became more involved and visible in people's social networks. The role of political patronage networks during the pandemic, on the other hand, followed a well-structured hierarchy. Political leadership and advisory roles were prominent in COVID-19 control committees at the national and local levels. Residents at several local areas were seen thanking their elected representatives for bringing the vaccination programme to their communities by putting up posters and banners (please refer figures below).

11 Discussion with key informant, Kotikawatta Mulleriyawa Pradeshiya Sabha area, Colombo District, 14 June 2021.

12 Discussion with key informant, Kotikawatta Mulleriyawa Pradeshiya Sabha area, Colombo District, 14 June 2021.

Figure 1: Locals thank Ramesh Pathirana, Minister of Plantations, and Priyantha Sahabandu, Mayor of the Galle Municipal Council, for bringing the vaccination programme to Madawalamulla, Galle District.

Figure 2: Locals thank the President, Prime Minister, and Johnston Fernando, Member of Parliament, for bringing the COVID-19 vaccination programme to Hiriyala, Kurunegala District.

Figure 3: Rangana Sumith Kumar, candidate for local authorities elections-2018, displayed a banner in Welapura, Kaluthara District, thanking Rohitha Gunawardena, Minister of Ports and Shipping, for bringing the COVID-19 vaccination programme to the area.

During the early stages of the vaccination programme, when the number of vaccines available was limited and provided on a priority basis, patronage networks were effective in ensuring quick access to vaccines. One of the respondents in an Urban Council area chosen for this study spoke about two entrances to the MOH office, where the vaccination programme was being carried out. There had been a long line at the main entrance, and some people had gone through another entrance of the centre in case they knew someone inside the office and could thus get the vaccinations quickly. These people entering from the other entrance were those who had connections with the employees of the Urban Council. These Urban Council employees, who are supporters of various other Council members, were hired into the Urban Council through patronage networks as well. They, in turn, had been assisting others in their networks to enter the vaccination centre through the side entrance.[13]

There were several other instances where political patronage was used to gain easy access to vaccines, and in most of these cases, it was not disrupted or hampered by healthcare sector employees who work at the vaccination centres. Thus, even if one had no connections to employees in the health sector, being a part of a patronage network provided more opportunities to access health-related services. As a result, political patronage networks have continued to be an

13 Discussion with key informant, Colombo District, 14 June 2021.

important part of the larger social network during the pandemic. Unlike employees in the healthcare sector, politicians will continue to advance in social networks as powerful agents in the state-society relationship through patronage politics.

Conclusion

During the COVID-19 period, the role of the state in the lives of citizens has become increasingly important. Citizens approach the state to obtain COVID-19-related services such as vaccinations, and are also required to follow state rules in order to mitigate the spread of the virus, such as adhering to travel restrictions. In both cases, the state's involvement with society has grown. In practice, social networks influence the majority of these instances of engagement. Employees in the healthcare sector, in particular, are becoming important mediators in these social networks. However, the healthcare sector employees' role as a powerful mediator between the state and society is limited by the nature of their involvement in social networks, which is mostly horizontal, interpersonal, and ends with the completion of a specific task. Political patronage networks, on the other hand, are actively engaged when society seeks to access the state or vice versa, even before and beyond the pandemic period. In effect, therefore, one sees a *de facto* suspension of formal democratic institutions and processes in favour of more fluid and largely extra-institutional means of engaging with the state, in a manifestation of what Chatterjee has termed 'political society'. Even though, after Chatterjee, we could concede that these seemingly 'anti-democratic' methods in fact empower those in the margins in a manner that formal democracy has hardly been able to, the function of political patronage networks has also sustained and exacerbated disparities in ways that quite undermine the spirit of democracy, as particularly evidenced during the pandemic.

References

Asquith, L. (2019) *Rebuilding Lives After Genocide: Migration, Adaptation and Acculturation.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Chandimal's birthday party: Seven arrested and granted bail (2021) *Daily News.* Available at: http://www.dailynews.lk/2021/06/04/law-order/250861/chandimals-birthday-party-seven-arrested-and-granted-bail (Accessed: 20 June 2021).

Chatterjee, P. (2004) *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts offers a holiday package for "Suwa-Sewa Wiruwo" (2020) *Presidential Secretariat.* Available at: https://www.presidentsoffice.gov.lk/index.php/2020/06/16/cinnamon-hotels-resorts-offers-a-holiday-package-for-suwa-sewa-wiruwo/ (Accessed: 02 July 2021).

Distribution of Rs 5,000: Grama Niladharis to withdraw (2020) *Ceylon Today.* Available at: https://ceylontoday.lk/print-more/55570 (Accessed: 01 July 2021).

ENSURING COVID-19 RELIEF REACHES SRI LANKA'S PEOPLE (2020) *Transparency International.* Available at: https://www.transparency.org/en/blog/ensuring-covid-19-relief-reaches-sri-lankas-people (Accessed: 02 July 2021).

Gelderblom, D. (2018) 'The limits to bridging social capital: Power, social context and the theory of Robert Putnam', *The Sociological Review*, 66(6), pp. 1309-1324.

GMOA complains of military interference in vaccination drive: Army refutes allegation (2021) *The Island.* Available at: https://island.lk/gmoa-complains-of-military-interference-in-vaccination-drive-army-refutes-allegation/ (Accessed: 02 July 2021).

Grama Niladharis call off boycott of Rs 5,000 allowance distribution duties (2020) *Ada Derana*. Available at: http://www.adaderana.lk/news/62740/grama-niladharis-call-off-boycott-of-rs-5000-allowance-distribution-duties (Accessed: 01 July 2021).

Grama Niladharis refuse to distribute Rs. 5,000 (2021) *The Morning*. Available at: https://www.themorning.lk/grama-niladharis-refuse-to-distribute-rs-5000/ (Accessed: 01 July 2021).

Gunasekara, T. (1992) 'Democracy, Party Competition and Leadership: The Changing Power Structure in a Sinhalese Community', in J. Brow & J. Weeramunda (eds.) *Agrarian Change in Sri Lanka*. New Delhi and elsewhere: SAGE publications, pp. 229-260.

Hettige, S. (1984) *Wealth, Power and Prestige: Emerging Patterns of Social Inequality in a Peasant Context*. Colombo: Ministry of Higher Education.

Kitschelt, H. & Wilkinson, S.I. (Eds.) (1997) *Patrons, Clients and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Moratuwa Mayor arrested for disrupting the duties of health workers (2021) *Colombo Gazette*. Available at: https://colombogazette.com/2021/05/28/moratuwa-mayor-arrested-for-disrupting-the-duties-of-health-workers/ (Accessed: 20 June 2021).

Peiris, P. (2021) *Catch-All Parties and the Party-Voter Nexus in Sri Lanka* (forthcoming). London and elsewhere: Palgrave McMillan.

PHIs step away from COVID-19 control duties (2020) *News First*. Available at: https://www.newsfirst.lk/2020/07/17/phis-step-away-from-covid-19-control-duties/ (Accessed: 2021 July 01).

Report finds 425 from Western Province got Covishield jab in Galle (2021) *Daily News.* Available at: https://www.dailynews.lk/2021/06/28/local/252609/report-finds-425-western-province-got-covishield-jab-galle (Accessed: 20 June 2021).

Scott, C.J. (1972) 'Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia', *The American Political Science Review*, 66(1), pp. 91-113.

'Socio-Economic Index in the face of COVID-19' (2021) *Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 30 June. Available at: https://www.cpalanka.org/socio-economic-index-in-the-face-of-covid-19/ (Accessed: 30 June 2021).

The 5000 that heated up Ratmalana (2021) *Newsfirst Sri Lanka.* Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQxd1_RWuiE&ab_channel=NewsfirstSriLanka (Accessed: 2021 July 01).

Uyangoda, J. (2010) 'Politics of Political Reform – A Key Theme in the Contemporary Conflict', in C. Orjuela (ed.) *Power and Politics: In the Shadow of Sri Lanka's Armed Conflict* Stockholm: Sida Studies No. 25, pp. 29-78.

Weerawardana, I.D.S. (1951) *Government and Politics in Ceylon.* Colombo: Ceylon Economic Research Association.

Annexure 1

THE 'SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDEX IN THE FACE OF COVID-19' SURVEY: AN OVERVIEW

A national poll conducted during February to March 2021 by Social Indicator, the survey research arm of the Centre for Policy Alternatives, aimed to assess the impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods, social relations, access to healthcare, and education. This section consists of relevant details pertaining to the quantitative component, which is one of the core elements of the larger study.

Sampling procedure

The survey interviewed a total of 1000 individuals across all 25 Districts of the country. A systematic sample of respondents from the Tamil, Muslim, and Up-Country Tamil ethnic communities and also the Urban community was considered. Prior to analysis, data were weighted to reflect national demographics in order to allow meaningful subgroup analyses. The results are subject to a +/- 2.0% margin of error.

A maximum of 36 interviews per local government body (MC, UC, and PS) and a maximum of 6 interviews per Grama Niladari division were conducted. The Local Government Body was selected randomly. The Grama Niladari division and starting point was selected by the relevant field enumerators. Households were selected by the 'right-hand rule', and the head of household therein was selected as the respondent.

Questionnaire

Face to face interviews were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire designed to capture public perception on levels of satisfaction towards various institutions involved in mitigating

the COVID crisis, fair treatment of persons and intercommunity relations, awareness, and sources of information about the COVID-19 pandemic, coping strategies used due to financial restraints, access to education, and healthcare.

The survey questionnaire was designed in English and translated into Sinhala and Tamil. In order to test the clarity of the language, sequence effect of the questions, and relevance of the answer categories, the survey questionnaire was pre-tested on field by a group of senior field researchers, among a diverse group of respondents from Sinhala and Tamil speaking communities. The survey questionnaire was fine-tuned following the pre-test.

Field work

A total of 71 field enumerators – both male and female – participated in this study. They were given a comprehensive training on the study, the survey questionnaire, and field techniques by the research team. Interviews were conducted in the first language of both the respondent and the field enumerator. To ensure the quality of the data collected, accompanied visits and back-checks were done during and after fieldwork. Data collection was carried out from February -March 2021.

Annexure 2

RESEARCH INSTUMENT

SOCIO – ECONOMIC INDEX IN THE FACE OF COVID 19

February 2021

CONDUCTED BY SOCIAL INDICATOR

N0: 160g, poorwarama road, kirulapana, colombo 05
Phone no: 011-2826010

Respondent Information

R1	Respondent Age:		
R2	Respondent Sex:	Male	2. Female
R3	Respondent First Language:	Sinhala	2. Tamil 3. English

1. Could you please tell me as to what extent you are aware of the COVID 19 rules and regulations imposed by the government?

   i. Completely aware
   ii. Somewhat aware
   iii. Not aware at all (Go to Q2)

1a. If you are aware, could you please tell me as to how you got to know these?

RANK the top three.

Source of information	RANK
Media (TV, Radio, Newspapers, etc.)	
Social media	
Government officials / institutions	
Neighbors, relatives and friends	
Religious leaders/ religious institutions in my area	
Military	
Other	

2. Thinking about the current COVID 19 crisis, could you please tell me as to how satisfied/ dissatisfied you are with the following institutions in relation to their involvement in mitigating it?

	Completely satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Completely dissatisfied	Don't Know
Public Health Inspectors (PHI) of my area	1	2	3	4	99
Grama Niladhari of my area	1	2	3	4	99
Police	1	2	3	4	99
Military	1	2	3	4	99
President	1	2	3	4	99
Parliamentary representatives of my area	1	2	3	4	99

3. What are the precautions or practices that you and your family have taken thus far to avoid contracting the Corona virus? (Multiple answers applicable)?

	Often	Sometimes	Once	Never	Don't Know
Minimise going out	1	2	3	4	99
Adhere to wearing masks/ washing hands	1	2	3	4	99
Maintaining social distancing in public places	1	2	3	4	99
Avoid meeting potential risk groups	1	2	3	4	99
Consumed Western medicine	1	2	3	4	99
Consumed Ayurvedic medicine	1	2	3	4	99

4. How is the current financial situation of your household compared to what it was prior to the start of COVID 19?
   1. Got a lot better (Go to Q6)
   2. Got a little better (Go to Q6)
   3. Stayed the same
   4. Got a little worse
   5. Got a lot worse
   99. Don't Know

5. Since the start of COVID 19 have you or anyone in your household had to do any of the following due to the shortage of finances?

		Yes	No	Don't Know
1	Delay paying house rent, mortgage or leasing	1	2	99
2	Cut back on the quality of food you purchased	1	2	99
3	Reduced the portion of the size of your food/ meals	1	2	99
4	Reduced the number of meals eaten per day	1	2	99

6. How satisfied are you with the Government's performance in addressing the cost of living during COVID 19?
   1. Very Satisfied
   2. Somewhat Satisfied
   3. Somewhat Dissatisfied
   4. Very Dissatisfied
   99. Don't know

7. Thinking about your current household income in comparison to the time prior to the start of covid 19 could you please tell me as to what extent your household income has either increased or decreased?
   1. Increased (Go to Q10)
   2. Stayed the same (Go to Q10)
   3. Decreased
   4. Completely lost my household income
   99. Don't Know (Go to Q10)

8. If your household income has either decreased or has been completely lost, could you please let me know your coping strategies you have used thus far?

Coping Strategies	Often	Sometimes	Once	Never	Don't Know
Government assistance	1	2	3	4	99
Received assistance form others (friends, relatives, people known to you etc.)	1	2	3	4	99
Borrowed money from lenders / others	1	2	3	4	99
Pawned jewelers/ obtained loan(s) from Banks	1	2	3	4	99
Purchase items for credit	1	2	3	4	99
Used up the savings	1	2	3	4	99
Cut down some expenses	1	2	3	4	99
Found an alternative way of generating income	1	2	3	4	99
Sold valued possessions	1	2	3	4	99

9. How soon do you think your household income will return to its previous income status?

1. In less than three months
2. In less than a year
3. More than a year

99. Don't Know

10. Have you or any member of your household had to lose their employment since the start of COVID 19?
    1. Yes
    2. No (Go to Q11)

10a. If yes, have they/ you managed to find any alternative form of employment?
    1. Yes (Go to Q 11)
    2. No
    3. Not Required

10b. If No, how soon do you think he/she will be able to find an alternative form of employment?
    1. In less than three months
    2. In less than a year
    3. More than a year
    4. He/ She will not return to their earlier form of employment
    99. Don't Know

11. I am going to read out following on the government's performance in managing the cost of living, healthcare services, education, employment and the COVID 19 pandemic. Thinking about the current situation, could you please tell me as to what extent you are either satisfied or dissatisfied with it?

		Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Don't know
1	The government's management in controlling the prices of essential goods	1	2	3	4	99

2	The government's management of healthcare services during COVID 19	1	2	3	4	99
3	The government's management of school education of children, during COVID 19	1	2	3	4	99
4	The government's management in protecting employment safeguards/ opportunities during COVID 19	1	2	3	4	99
5	The government's management in controlling the spread of COVID-19	1	2	3	4	99

12. Are there any members in this household who are currently studying? (at a school, university, technical colleges etc.)
    1. Yes
    2. No (Go to Q22)

13. Could you please tell me as to how many members in this household are currently involved in /following some kind of studies/ course? .....

14. Could you please tell me as to how many electronic appliances (computers, smart phones, tabs etc.) are available at your home, which can be used for online studies? (Indicate the number of appliances) .....

15. I am going to read out to you, various educational levels. Thinking about your household, who are currently following studies, could you please tell me their educational level and the methods of learning that they follow since the start of the COIVD 19 pandemic?

	Online	In-Person Studies	Combination of online and in person	Completely halted studies	Don't Know
School education	1	2	3	4	99
University education	1	2	3	4	99
Vocational training/ Professional courses	1	2	3	4	99

16. Apart from the above, is there anyone in this household who follows any other alternative methods of learning as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic?

    1. Yes
    2. No
    99. Don't Know

17. Does this household possess enough electronic appliances (computers, smart phones, tabs etc.) for those who follow online learning?
    1. We have enough electronic appliances
    2. We don't have enough, but we can share with the other members in the household
    3. We don't have enough, we borrow from somebody/ somewhere
    4. We don't have, we are completely left out of the online learning process
    5. There is no one engaged in online learning (Go to Q21)

18. Does this household have access to internet?
    1. Yes, very good connectivity
    2. Yes, but very weak connectivity
    3. No, as we cannot afford to get connectivity
    4. No, as I have no connectivity in my area

19. How financially comfortable is it for your household to spend for internet connectivity (data), in order to continue with online learning?
    1. We don't have any problem
    2. It is somewhat difficult
    3. It is very difficult

19a. Thinking about the costs you spent for online DATA last month, could you please tell me as to roughly how much you incurred for data / internet connectivity? .....

20. How satisfied are you with the quality of learning received by your household members via online learning?
    1. Very Satisfied
    2. Somewhat satisfied
    3. Somewhat dissatisfied
    4. Very dissatisfied
    99. Don't know

21. Do any members of your household attend tuition classes (who are engaged in studies)?
    1. Yes
    2. No (Go to Q22)

21a. If yes, does that currently continue?
    1. Yes
    2. No

22. Please indicate whether your current interaction with the following has either increased or decreased in comparison to the time prior to the start of COVID 19.

	Increased	Remained the Same	Decreased	No Interaction	Don't Know
Interactions with my friends	1	2	3	4	99
Interactions with my relatives	1	2	3	4	99
Interactions with my neighbours	1	2	3	4	99

23. In relation to the following list of events / activities, could you please tell me as to how much your involvement in these has either increased or decreased, in comparison to the time prior to the start of the COVID 19 pandemic?

	Increased	Remained the Same	Decreased	Not participated at all	Don't Know
Engaged in religious ceremonies	1	2	3	4	99

Participating in sports or other recreational activities	1	2	3	4	99
Participated in funerals/ weddings/ various celebratory activities	1	2	3	4	99

24. Please indicate as to how much you agree or disagree with the below statements.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
1. COVID 19 could be highly prevalent among low-income dwellers	1	2	3	4	99
2. Cultural/ religious practices of some religious groups can cause higher possibility of spreading COVID 19	1	2	3	4	99
3. Prevalence of COVID 19 is less among people from my ethnic community	1	2	3	4	99

25. In your opinion how fairly have COVID 19 rules (guidelines) of the government been implemented among all ***income groups?***

1. Fairly

2. Unfairly
99. Don't Know

26. In your opinion how fairly have COVID 19 rules (guidelines) of the government been implemented among all ***ethnic groups?***
    1. Fairly
    2. Unfairly
    99. Don't Know

27. During the COVID 19 crisis if you or any member in your household had to visit a hospital/ doctor, could you please tell me as to what type of hospital you last visited?
    1. Government Hospital (National, Teaching, Divisional, Provisional etc.)
    2. Government Dispensaries
    3. Private Hospitals
    4. Private Dispensaries
    5. I had the need to visit a hospital/ doctor, but I didn't (Go to Q28)
    6. Did have a need to visit a hospital (Go to Q28)

27a. If you did visit the hospital/ doctor, could you please tell me if it was for a regular or emergency medical need?
    1. Regular medical needs
    2. Emergency medical needs
    3. To obtain pre-prescribed medication etc.

27b. If you visited the hospital/ Doctor, ***how easy*** was it for you to get the relevant services from the hospital/ Doctor?
    1. Extremely easy
    2. Somewhat easy
    3. Somewhat difficult
    4. Extremely difficult
    5. Did not receive any medical assistance (Go to Q28)
    99. No opinion

27c. If you visited the hospital/ doctor, could you please tell me as to how satisfied you were with the ***quality of service*** you received?

1. Very satisfied
2. Somewhat satisfied
3. Somewhat dissatisfied
4. Very dissatisfied
99. Don't know

28. If you were given the opportunity to obtain the COVID 19 vaccine which of the following best reflects your opinion?

1. I will get it without any further delay
2. I will get it, but will wait to see how it affects others before I get it
3. I will not get it soon, but will do so in the future
4. I will never get the vaccine
99. Don't know/ Not sure

DEMOGRAPHICS

D1. Religion

1. Buddhism
2. Hinduism
3. Islam
4. Christianity (Roman Catholic)
5. Christianity (Non-RC)
6. Other Specify: .....

D2. Ethnicity

1. Sinhala
2. Tamil
3. Up Country Tamil
4. Muslim
5. Burgher
6. Other: .....

D3. Educational Qualifications

1. Cannot Read or Write
2. Literate but no formal education
3. Up to Grade 5
4. Grade 6 – 9
5. Up to O/L
6. O/L
7. Up to A/L
8. A/L
9. Vocationally trained
10. Technically trained
11. Professional
12. Graduate
13. Graduate and above

D4. Respondents Current Occupation Sector

1. Government Sector
2. Privet Sector
3. Semi-Government
4. NGO
5. Other .....

D5. Total Monthly Income of Household

1. Less than Rs. 10,000/-
2. Rs. 10,001 – Rs. 15,000
3. Rs. 15,001 – Rs. 20,000
4. Rs. 20,001 – Rs. 25,000
5. Rs. 25,001 – Rs 50,000
6. Rs. 50,001 – Rs 100,000
7. Over Rs 100,000

99. Don't know

D6. Local Government Body

1. Municipal Council
2. Urban Council
3. Pradeshiya Sabha

D7. District: - .....

Annexure 3

RESULTS

DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE SURVEY SAMPLE

R1. Age	%
18-25 yrs.	12.0
26-35 yrs.	22.2
36-45 yrs.	28.4
46-55 yrs.	21.1
56-65 yrs.	11.3
Above 66 yrs.	5.1
Base	871

R2. Sex	%
Male	40.3
Female	59.7
Base	871

D1. Religion	%
Buddhism	59.5
Hinduism	22.0
Islam	13.0
Christianity (RC)	3.7
Christianity (Non-RC)	1.7
Base	871

D2. Ethnicity	%
Sinhala	61.2
Tamil	19.1
Muslim	13.0
Up Country Tamil	6.7
Base	871

D3. Educational Qualifications	%
Cannot Read or Write	0.6
Literate but no formal education	0.5
Up to Grade 5	3.2
Grade 6 – 9	8.8
Up to O/L	16.8
O/L	17.2
Up to A/L	13.7
A/L	19.0
Vocationally trained	2.6
Technically trained	1.0
Professional	2.3
Graduate	12.6
Graduate and above	1.6
Base	871

D4. Current Occupation Sector	%
Government Sector	20.5
Privet Sector	22.1
Semi-Government	1.7
NGO	1.4
Other	54.2
Base	871

D5. Monthly Income of Household	%
Less than Rs. 10,000/-	8.0
Rs. 10,001 – Rs. 15,000	10.9
Rs. 15,001 – Rs. 20,000	10.3
Rs. 20,001 – Rs. 25,000	13.0
Rs. 25,001 – Rs 50,000	32.9
Rs. 50,001 – Rs 100,000	18.9
Over Rs 100,000	3.9
Don't Know	2.2
Base	871

D6. Local Government Body	%
Municipal Council - MC	23.5
Urban Council - UC	30.0
Pradeshiya Sabha - PS	46.5
Base	871

D7. District	%
Colombo	9.3
Gampaha	7.0
Kalutara	6.1
Kandy	4.4
Matale	4.4
Nuwara Eliya	3.9
Galle	3.2
Matara	2.9
Hambantota	3.0
Kurunagala	3.0
Puttalam	3.6
Anuradapura	3.2
Polonnaruwa	3.3
Badulla	4.4
Monaragala	3.2
Ratnapura	4.6
Kegalle	2.2
Jaffna	1.9
Mannar	3.6
Vavuniya	1.9
Mullaitivu	1.9
Kilinochchi	1.9
Batticaloa	3.5
Ampara	6.7
Trincomalee	6.9
Base	871

Tables: National frequency and crosstabulation by Local government body, Ethnicity and Sex

TABLE 1:

Q1. Could you please tell me as to what extent you are aware of the COVID 19 rules and regulations imposed by the government?										
%	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC[61] Tamil	Male	Female
Completely aware	58.0	60.5	60.9	55.0	70.5	40.1	34.2	42.1	58.9	57.7
Somewhat aware	41.6	39.0	39.1	44.6	29.3	59.3	64.9	57.9	41.1	41.7
Not aware at all	.3	.5	0.0	.5	.2	.6	.9	0.0	0.0	.6
Base	870	205	261	404	533	167	114	57	350	520

14 Up-Country Tamil.

TABLE 2:

Q1a. If you are aware, could you please tell me as to how you got to know these? RANK -1										
%	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Media (TV, Radio, Newspapers)	80.2	78.4	76.3	83.5	85.9	64.5	70.2	87.9	74.1	84.1
Social media	13.1	13.2	15.3	11.7	8.6	25.9	19.3	6.9	18.8	9.3
Government officials / institutions	3.1	5.4	2.3	2.5	3.2	3.0	5.3	0.0	4.6	2.3
Neighbors, relatives and friends	2.5	2.0	4.2	1.7	1.3	6.6	2.6	3.4	1.7	3.1
Religious leaders/ religious institutions in my area	.5	0.0	1.5	0.0	.2	0.0	1.8	0.0	.3	.6
Military	.1	0.0	0.0	.2	.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	.2
Other	.5	1.0	.4	.2	.6	0.0	.9	1.7	.6	.4
Base	867	204	262	401	532	166	114	58	351	517

TABLE 3:

Q1a. If you are aware, could you please tell me as to how you got to know these? RANK -2										
%	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Media (TV, Radio, Newspapers)	15.6	17.2	18.8	12.7	11.1	26.7	22.3	10.2	19.7	12.6
Social media	38.6	43.3	34.1	39.2	41.4	28.5	36.6	45.8	40.2	37.5
Government officials / institutions	18.0	19.7	18.4	16.9	21.1	16.4	8.0	15.3	14.0	20.7
Neighbors, relatives and friends	23.5	15.3	23.8	27.5	22.6	24.2	24.1	27.1	19.7	26.1
Religious leaders/ religious institutions in my area	2.5	3.0	3.4	1.7	1.5	3.0	8.0	0.0	2.8	2.3
Military	.8	1.0	1.1	.5	1.1	.6	.9	0.0	1.7	.4
Other	.9	.5	.4	1.5	1.3	.6	0.0	1.7	2.0	.4
Base	867	203	261	403	532	165	112	59	351	517

TABLE 4:

Q1a. If you are aware, could you please tell me as to how you got to know these? RANK -3										
%	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Media (TV, Radio, Newspapers)	3.9	3.9	4.2	3.7	2.3	7.9	6.2	1.8	5.4	3.1
Social media	14.1	15.7	12.6	14.1	16.2	12.7	10.6	5.3	11.7	15.6
Government officials / institutions	28.8	25.5	29.5	30.0	31.2	22.4	26.5	31.6	29.9	28.0
Neighbors, relatives and friends	39.3	40.7	39.1	38.7	39.3	41.8	31.0	49.1	41.6	37.6
Religious leaders/ religious institutions in my area	9.7	8.3	10.3	9.9	7.7	9.1	21.2	5.3	7.7	10.8
Military	1.6	1.5	.4	2.5	1.3	4.2	0.0	0.0	1.1	1.9
Other	2.6	4.4	3.8	1.0	2.1	1.8	4.4	7.0	2.6	2.9
Base	868	204	261	403	532	165	113	57	351	518

TABLE 5:

Q2_1. Thinking about the current COVID 19 crisis, could you please tell me as to how satisfied/ dissatisfied you are with the following institutions in relation to their involvement in mitigating it? - Public Health Inspectors of my area										
%	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Satisfied	75.2	70.2	80.9	74.0	72.0	81.3	77.0	84.5	73.8	76.0
Dissatisfied	17.8	24.9	12.2	17.8	18.4	15.7	20.4	12.1	21.4	15.4
Don't Know	7.0	4.9	6.9	8.2	9.6	3.0	2.7	3.4	4.8	8.7
Base	871	205	262	404	533	166	113	58	351	520

TABLE 6:

Q2_2. Thinking about the current COVID 19 crisis, could you please tell me as to how satisfied/ dissatisfied you are with the following institutions in relation to their involvement in mitigating it? - Grama Niladhari of my area

%	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Satisfied	78.8	77.1	79.0	79.5	78.2	85.5	72.6	79.3	78.9	78.9
Dissatisfied	16.3	20.0	14.9	15.3	15.0	13.3	24.8	17.2	18.8	14.4
Don't Know	4.9	2.9	6.1	5.2	6.8	1.2	2.7	3.4	2.3	6.7
Base	872	205	262	405	533	166	113	58	351	521

TABLE 7:

Q2_3. Thinking about the current COVID 19 crisis, could you please tell me as to how satisfied/ dissatisfied you are with the following institutions in relation to their involvement in mitigating it? - Police										
%	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Satisfied	78.3	74.0	73.9	83.2	75.8	81.4	80.5	84.5	76.6	79.2
Dissatisfied	15.7	22.1	17.6	11.4	17.4	12.6	15.9	10.3	19.9	13.1
Don't Know	6.0	3.9	8.4	5.4	6.7	6.0	3.5	5.2	3.4	7.7
Base	870	204	261	405	534	167	113	58	351	520

TABLE 8:

Q2_4. Thinking about the current COVID 19 crisis, could you please tell me as to how satisfied/ dissatisfied you are with the following institutions in relation to their involvement in mitigating it? - Military

%	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Satisfied	75.3	73.5	71.8	78.5	79.0	72.9	68.1	62.1	76.4	74.4
Dissatisfied	11.3	11.8	11.5	10.9	8.3	16.3	15.9	15.5	10.8	11.5
Don't Know	13.4	14.7	16.8	10.6	12.8	10.8	15.9	22.4	12.8	14.0
Base	871	204	262	405	533	166	113	58	351	520

TABLE 9:

Q2_5. Thinking about the current COVID 19 crisis, could you please tell me as to how satisfied/ dissatisfied you are with the following institutions in relation to their involvement in mitigating it? - President										
%	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Satisfied	70.1	63.7	71.0	72.8	71.1	75.9	57.5	70.7	66.3	72.9
Dissatisfied	25.6	31.4	23.7	24.0	26.1	18.1	36.3	22.4	29.4	23.1
Don't Know	4.3	4.9	5.3	3.2	2.8	6.0	6.2	6.9	4.3	4.0
Base	870	204	262	404	532	166	113	58	350	520

TABLE 10:

Q2_6. Thinking about the current COVID 19 crisis, could you please tell me as to how satisfied/ dissatisfied you are with the following institutions in relation to their involvement in mitigating it? - Parliamentary representatives of my area

%	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Satisfied	30.0	20.6	36.3	30.7	25.3	31.1	43.9	41.4	25.9	32.9
Dissatisfied	56.0	61.3	50.4	56.9	61.9	51.5	43.0	41.4	63.2	51.2
Don't Know	14.0	18.1	13.4	12.4	12.8	17.4	13.2	17.2	10.8	16.0
Base	870	204	262	404	533	167	114	58	351	520

TABLE 11:

Q3_1. What are the precautions or practices that you and your family have taken thus far to avoid contracting the Corona virus? - Minimise going out										
%	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Often	75.0	69.8	70.3	80.7	82.6	62.7	63.7	64.4	67.2	80.4
Sometimes	22.4	26.3	25.5	18.3	16.1	34.3	29.2	30.5	30.2	16.9
Once	1.3	2.4	1.5	.5	.2	1.8	5.3	1.7	1.1	1.3
Never	1.4	1.5	2.7	.5	1.1	1.2	1.8	3.4	1.4	1.3
Base	872	205	263	404	534	166	113	59	351	520

TABLE 12:

Q3_2. What are the precautions or practices that you and your family have taken thus far to avoid contracting the Corona virus? - Adhere to wearing masks/ washing hands

%	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Often	95.7	95.1	96.9	95.3	97.7	91.0	92.9	96.6	94.6	96.5
Sometimes	4.3	4.9	3.1	4.7	2.3	9.0	7.1	3.4	5.4	3.5
Base	870	204	261	405	533	166	113	58	351	519

TABLE 13:

Q3_3. What are the precautions or practices that you and your family have taken thus far to avoid contracting the Corona virus? - Maintaining social distancing in public places										
%	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Often	83.1	80.9	86.6	82.0	82.9	83.7	86.8	77.6	79.4	86.0
Sometimes	15.2	19.1	11.8	15.3	16.3	12.0	10.5	22.4	18.9	12.7
Once	.7	0.0	.8	1.0	0.0	2.4	1.8	0.0	.6	.6
Never	.8	0.0	.8	1.2	.6	1.8	.9	0.0	1.1	.4
Don't know	.2	0.0	0.0	.5	.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	.4
Base	871	204	262	405	533	166	114	58	350	520

TABLE 14:

Q3_4. What are the precautions or practices that you and your family have taken thus far to avoid contracting the Corona virus? - Avoid meeting potential risk groups

%	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Often	76.8	79.4	70.9	79.3	87.8	61.1	58.8	50.8	74.6	78.1
Sometimes	12.5	10.3	16.9	10.9	10.1	16.2	14.9	18.6	13.4	11.9
Once	1.0	1.0	.8	1.2	0.0	4.2	.9	3.4	1.1	1.0
Never	8.4	7.8	10.7	7.2	1.3	18.0	21.9	22.0	9.7	7.7
Don't know	1.3	1.5	.8	1.5	.8	.6	3.5	5.1	1.1	1.3
Base	870	204	261	405	533	167	114	59	351	520

TABLE 15:

Q3_5. What are the precautions or practices that you and your family have taken thus far to avoid contracting the Corona virus? - Consumed Western medicine										
%	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Often	7.2	13.7	5.4	5.2	7.3	6.6	9.7	6.8	8.0	6.9
Sometimes	21.7	32.2	16.5	19.8	21.2	15.1	28.3	30.5	20.3	22.7
Once	4.5	4.4	5.7	3.7	3.9	6.0	5.3	5.1	4.6	4.4
Never	64.3	45.9	71.3	69.1	65.5	71.1	54.0	50.8	64.9	63.7
Don't know	2.3	3.9	1.1	2.2	2.1	1.2	2.7	6.8	2.3	2.3
Base	870	205	261	404	533	166	113	59	350	520

TABLE 16:

Q3_6. What are the precautions or practices that you and your family have taken thus far to avoid contracting the Corona virus? - Consumed Ayurvedic medicine

%	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Often	35.1	41.2	37.5	30.4	38.6	29.5	23.9	41.4	27.1	40.4
Sometimes	33.3	39.2	24.1	36.1	35.8	21.7	33.6	41.4	36.9	30.8
Once	4.6	3.4	3.8	5.7	4.3	4.8	7.1	1.7	4.9	4.6
Never	25.7	14.2	33.7	26.2	19.7	43.4	33.6	12.1	29.1	23.1
Don't know	1.4	2.0	.8	1.5	1.5	.6	1.8	3.4	2.0	1.2
Base	869	204	261	404	533	166	113	58	350	520

TABLE 17:

Q4. How is the current financial situation of your household compared to what it was prior to the start of COVID 19?										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Got better	4.2	1.5	5.3	4.9	4.9	3.0	1.8	5.2	3.4	4.6
Stayed the same	28.1	36.6	20.6	28.6	32.9	18.0	27.4	15.5	30.6	26.5
Got worse	67.7	62.0	74.0	66.4	62.2	79.0	70.8	79.3	66.0	68.8
Base	872	205	262	405	532	167	113	58	350	520

TABLE 18:

Q5_1. Since the start of COVID 19 have you or anyone in your household had to do any of the following due to the shortage of finances? - Delay paying house rent, mortgage or leasing										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Yes	30.1	32.2	29.7	29.4	33.5	23.7	23.4	32.7	28.4	31.5
No	69.9	67.8	70.3	70.6	66.5	76.3	76.6	67.3	71.6	68.5
Base	826	202	246	378	505	156	111	55	338	489

TABLE 19:

Q5_2. Since the start of COVID 19 have you or anyone in your household had to do any of the following due to the shortage of finances? - Cut back on the quality of food you purchased

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Yes	26.9	18.8	39.1	23.4	21.7	41.6	29.5	23.6	24.9	28.1
No	73.1	81.2	60.9	76.6	78.3	58.4	70.5	76.4	75.1	71.9
Base	835	202	248	385	506	161	112	55	338	495

TABLE 20:

Q5_3. Since the start of COVID 19 have you or anyone in your household had to do any of the following due to the shortage of finances? - Reduced the portion of the size of your food/ meals

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Yes	18.9	13.9	27.9	15.7	13.9	29.9	23.4	24.1	17.2	20.1
No	81.1	86.1	72.1	84.3	86.1	70.1	76.6	75.9	82.8	79.9
Base	830	202	247	381	505	157	111	54	337	492

TABLE 21:

Q5_4. Since the start of COVID 19 have you or anyone in your household had to do any of the following due to the shortage of finances? - Reduced the number of meals eaten per day										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Yes	8.5	5.5	14.6	6.1	4.5	14.7	17.1	9.1	6.3	10.0
No	91.5	94.5	85.4	93.9	95.5	85.3	82.9	90.9	93.8	90.0
Base	828	201	247	380	506	156	111	55	336	492

TABLE 22:

Q6. How satisfied are you with the Government's performance in addressing the cost of living during COVID 19?										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Satisfied	40.1	35.1	41.2	42.0	35.3	49.1	43.9	51.7	37.9	41.5
Dissatisfied	58.0	64.4	56.5	55.8	62.7	49.7	54.4	46.6	61.5	55.6
Don't know	1.8	.5	2.3	2.2	2.1	1.2	1.8	1.7	.6	2.9
Base	872	205	262	405	533	165	114	58	351	520

TABLE 23:

Q7. Thinking about your current household income in comparison to the time prior to the start of covid 19 could you please tell me as to what extent your household income has either increased or decreased?

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Increased	1.3	1.5	1.1	1.2	1.1	.6	1.8	5.2	.9	1.5
Stayed the same	29.7	34.3	26.1	29.7	35.3	18.0	26.3	17.2	33.1	27.3
Decreased	59.4	52.9	60.9	61.6	60.0	59.9	53.5	62.1	54.6	62.6
Completely lost my household income	9.4	11.3	11.5	7.2	3.6	21.6	16.7	15.5	11.4	8.3
Don't Know	.2	0.0	.4	.2	0.0	0.0	1.8	0.0	0.0	.4
Base	869	204	261	404	533	167	114	58	350	521

TABLE 24:

Q8_1. If your household income has either decreased or has been completely lost, could you please let me know your coping strategies you have used thus far? - Government assistance										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Often	9.5	2.3	16.4	8.3	12.7	7.4	5.0	2.2	7.8	10.6
Sometimes	28.5	18.3	27.0	34.3	28.6	25.9	31.3	31.1	23.5	31.8
Once	23.8	29.8	22.8	21.7	14.7	32.6	38.8	37.8	27.0	21.7
Never	38.2	49.6	33.9	35.7	44.0	34.1	25.0	28.9	41.7	35.9
Base	597	131	189	277	339	135	80	45	230	368

TABLE 25:

Q8_2. If your household income has either decreased or has been completely lost, could you please let me know your coping strategies you have used thus far? - Received assistance form others (friends, relatives, people known to you etc.)

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Often	6.4	4.6	8.0	6.1	5.6	7.4	10.0	2.2	5.7	6.8
Sometimes	31.3	29.2	41.5	25.4	25.8	36.8	41.3	37.8	31.9	31.1
Once	8.5	10.0	5.3	10.0	5.0	14.7	10.0	15.6	10.5	7.4
Never	53.8	56.2	45.2	58.4	63.5	41.2	38.8	44.4	52.0	54.8
Base	597	130	188	279	337	136	80	45	229	367

TABLE 26:

Q8_3. If your household income has either decreased or has been completely lost, could you please let me know your coping strategies you have used thus far? - Borrowed money from lenders / others										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Often	9.0	3.0	8.5	12.2	8.5	11.1	8.9	4.7	9.1	8.7
Sometimes	20.6	21.2	24.5	17.6	18.8	22.2	20.3	30.2	23.7	18.5
Once	8.7	10.6	7.4	8.6	7.6	8.9	11.4	11.6	10.8	7.6
Never	61.7	65.2	59.6	61.5	65.0	57.8	59.5	53.5	56.5	65.1
Base	598	132	188	278	340	135	79	43	232	367

TABLE 27:

Q8_4. If your household income has either decreased or has been completely lost, could you please let me know your coping strategies you have used thus far? - Pawned jewelers/ obtained loan(s) from Banks

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Often	15.6	8.3	23.8	13.4	17.2	16.9	8.8	13.6	13.4	16.9
Sometimes	26.8	22.7	29.6	26.7	20.7	45.6	11.3	40.9	26.8	26.7
Once	7.9	9.1	5.8	8.7	5.3	11.0	11.3	11.4	9.1	7.1
Never	49.8	59.8	40.7	51.3	56.8	26.5	68.8	34.1	50.6	49.3
Base	598	132	189	277	338	136	80	44	231	367

TABLE 28:

Q8_5. If your household income has either decreased or has been completely lost, could you please let me know your coping strategies you have used thus far? - Purchase items for credit										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Often	13.4	9.8	15.3	13.7	9.8	23.0	15.2	6.8	16.5	11.4
Sometimes	28.8	21.2	38.1	26.0	24.6	29.6	39.2	40.9	29.0	28.6
Once	5.7	6.8	2.1	7.6	3.3	7.4	8.9	13.6	5.6	5.7
Never	52.2	62.1	44.4	52.7	62.4	40.0	36.7	38.6	48.9	54.2
Base	598	132	189	277	338	135	79	44	231	367

TABLE 29:

Q8_6. If your household income has either decreased or has been completely lost, could you please let me know your coping strategies you have used thus far? - Used up the savings

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Often	27.7	24.6	31.6	26.5	28.9	30.1	22.8	20.9	27.3	27.9
Sometimes	33.6	33.8	39.0	29.8	33.3	30.1	32.9	46.5	36.6	31.8
Once	4.7	3.1	2.7	6.9	4.5	6.0	3.8	4.7	4.8	4.7
Never	34.0	38.5	26.7	36.7	33.3	33.8	40.5	27.9	31.3	35.6
Base	592	130	187	275	336	133	79	43	227	365

TABLE 30:

Q8_7. If your household income has either decreased or has been completely lost, could you please let me know your coping strategies you have used thus far? - Cut down some expenses										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Often	47.8	39.1	46.0	53.3	54.0	45.9	28.8	38.6	45.5	49.3
Sometimes	38.6	38.3	45.0	34.3	33.2	40.0	56.3	43.2	40.3	37.5
Once	2.5	5.3	1.1	2.2	2.1	3.7	2.5	4.5	3.5	1.9
Never	11.1	17.3	7.9	10.2	10.7	10.4	12.5	13.6	10.8	11.2
Base	596	133	189	274	337	135	80	44	231	365

TABLE 31:

Q8_8. If your household income has either decreased or has been completely lost, could you please let me know your coping strategies you have used thus far? - Found an alternative way of generating income

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Often	7.3	6.8	4.2	9.8	10.5	3.7	2.5	5.1	7.5	7.2
Sometimes	18.6	12.9	20.1	20.3	17.4	15.7	27.8	17.9	23.9	15.3
Once	4.6	1.5	3.7	6.8	3.6	6.0	5.1	2.6	5.8	3.9
Never	69.5	78.8	72.0	63.2	68.5	74.6	64.6	74.4	62.8	73.6
Base	587	132	189	266	333	134	79	39	226	360

TABLE 32:

Q8_9. If your household income has either decreased or has been completely lost, could you please let me know your coping strategies you have used thus far? - Sold valued possessions										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Often	.8	.8	1.1	.7	1.2	.8	1.3	0.0	.9	1.1
Sometimes	2.9	.8	3.7	3.3	1.8	4.5	5.0	4.7	3.5	2.5
Once	5.9	6.2	8.0	4.4	4.5	9.8	6.3	2.3	7.0	5.0
Never	90.3	92.3	87.2	91.5	92.5	85.0	87.5	93.0	88.5	91.4
Base	589	130	188	271	334	133	80	43	227	362

TABLE 33:

Q9. How soon do you think your household income will return to its previous income status?										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
In less than three months	2.2	1.5	3.2	1.8	.9	2.2	7.5	4.5	2.6	2.2
In less than a year	12.9	9.9	21.6	8.3	9.4	11.9	30.0	11.4	12.9	13.0
More than a year	47.6	43.5	45.3	51.1	46.8	60.0	31.3	43.2	47.0	47.6
Don't Know	37.4	45.0	30.0	38.8	42.9	25.9	31.3	40.9	37.5	37.2
Base	599	131	190	278	340	135	80	44	232	368

TABLE 34:

Q10.Have you or any member of your household had to lose their employment since the start of COVID 19?										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Yes	21.7	20.6	27.5	18.6	14.3	36.7	28.3	35.6	22.2	21.3
No	78.3	79.4	72.5	81.4	85.7	63.3	71.7	64.4	77.8	78.7
Base	870	204	262	404	533	166	113	59	351	520

TABLE 35:

Q10a. If yes, have they/ you managed to find any alternative form of employment?										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Yes	31.7	26.2	23.6	42.7	38.2	19.7	37.5	33.3	34.6	29.7
No	67.7	73.8	75.0	57.3	60.5	80.3	62.5	66.7	65.4	69.4
Not Required	.5	0.0	1.4	0.0	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	.9
Base	189	42	72	75	76	61	32	21	78	111

TABLE 36:

Q10b. If No, how soon do you think he/she will be able to find an alternative form of employment?										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
In less than three months	16.5	16.1	22.2	9.5	12.5	16.7	21.1	30.8	15.7	16.5
In less than a year	19.7	19.4	20.4	19.0	22.9	18.8	15.8	15.4	27.5	15.2
More than a year	28.3	25.8	31.5	26.2	20.8	43.8	15.8	15.4	27.5	29.1
He/ She will not return to their earlier form of employment	5.5	3.2	3.7	9.5	8.3	4.2	5.3	0.0	5.9	5.1
Don't Know	29.9	35.5	22.2	35.7	35.4	16.7	42.1	38.5	23.5	34.2
Base	127	31	54	42	48	48	19	13	51	79

TABLE 37:

Q11_1. The government's management in controlling the prices of essential goods										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Satisfied	32.8	25.5	30.9	37.8	29.5	38.9	38.9	34.5	33.4	32.5
Dissatisfied	66.2	73.0	67.9	61.7	70.3	59.9	57.5	65.5	66.0	66.5
Don't know	.9	1.5	1.1	.5	.2	1.2	3.5	0.0	.6	1.0
Base	871	204	262	405	532	167	113	58	350	520

TABLE 38:

Q11_2. The government's management of healthcare services during COVID 19										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Satisfied	77.5	66.3	78.2	82.7	78.2	83.1	65.5	81.0	77.0	77.9
Dissatisfied	21.3	32.2	20.6	16.3	21.2	15.1	32.7	17.2	22.4	20.6
Don't know	1.1	1.5	1.1	1.0	.6	1.8	1.8	1.7	.6	1.5
Base	872	205	262	405	533	166	113	58	352	520

TABLE 39:

Q11_3. The government's management of school education of children, during COVID 19										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Satisfied	50.6	52.0	50.2	50.1	50.3	56.0	38.9	60.3	50.9	50.3
Dissatisfied	45.6	45.6	46.4	45.2	45.6	40.4	58.4	36.2	44.0	46.8
Don't know	3.8	2.5	3.4	4.7	4.1	3.6	2.7	3.4	5.1	2.9
Base	870	204	261	405	533	166	113	58	350	521

TABLE 40:

Q11_4. The government's management in protecting employment safeguards/ opportunities during COVID 19										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Satisfied	40.1	35.6	42.9	40.6	46.2	25.9	36.3	32.8	37.9	41.7
Dissatisfied	52.6	59.5	50.2	50.7	45.6	69.3	58.4	58.6	57.3	49.4
Don't know	7.2	4.9	6.9	8.7	8.3	4.8	5.3	8.6	4.8	8.8
Base	870	205	261	404	533	166	113	58	351	520

TABLE 41:

Q11_5. The government's management in controlling the spread of COVID-19										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Satisfied	67.0	57.8	70.9	69.1	63.4	78.3	64.6	70.7	67.5	66.5
Dissatisfied	32.1	41.7	28.0	30.0	35.8	21.1	32.7	27.6	32.5	31.7
Don't know	.9	.5	1.1	1.0	.8	.6	2.7	1.7	0.0	1.7
Base	869	204	261	404	533	166	113	58	351	520

TABLE 42:

Q12. Are there any members in this household who are currently studying? (at a school, university, technical colleges etc.)										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Yes	74.0	74.5	75.9	72.6	71.5	73.5	82.5	82.8	71.2	76.0
No	26.0	25.5	24.1	27.4	28.5	26.5	17.5	17.2	28.8	24.0
Base	870	204	261	405	533	166	114	58	351	520

TABLE 43:

Q13. Could you please tell me as to how many members in this household are currently involved in/ following some kind of studies/ course?										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
1	42.2	35.3	43.4	44.9	42.0	47.9	37.2	39.6	43.6	41.5
2	41.1	50.3	35.4	40.1	45.9	31.4	35.1	39.6	38.4	42.8
3	14.0	11.1	18.2	12.6	11.3	18.2	19.1	14.6	14.4	13.9
4	2.2	2.6	2.5	1.7	.8	2.5	6.4	4.2	2.8	1.5
5	.3	0.0	.5	.3	0.0	0.0	1.1	2.1	.4	.3
6	.3	.7	0.0	.3	0.0	0.0	1.1	0.0	.4	0.0
Base	645	153	198	294	381	121	94	48	250	395

TABLE 44:

Q14. Could you please tell me as to how many electronic appliances (computers, smart phones, tabs etc.) are available at your home, which can be used for online studies? (Indicate the number of appliances)										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
0	11.2	8.5	12.1	11.9	10.5	13.1	11.8	10.4	10.8	11.6
1	41.7	35.3	45.2	42.7	37.7	46.7	45.2	54.2	36.0	45.1
2	34.1	34.0	35.7	33.1	36.9	32.8	29.0	25.0	36.0	32.9
3	8.4	13.1	4.5	8.5	9.2	5.7	9.7	6.3	10.4	7.1
4	3.3	6.5	1.5	2.7	4.5	1.6	2.2	2.1	4.4	2.8
5	.8	2.6	0.0	.3	.8	0.0	1.1	0.0	1.6	0.0
6	.2	0.0	0.0	.3	.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	.4	0.0
7	.3	0.0	.5	.3	.3	0.0	1.1	0.0	.4	.3
Don't Know	.2	0.0	.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.1	0.0	.3
Base	645	153	199	293	382	122	93	48	250	395

TABLE 45:

Q15_1b. I am going to read out to you, various educational levels. Thinking about your household, who are currently following studies, could you please tell me their educational level and the methods of learning that they follow since the start of the COIVD 19 pandemic? - School education

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Online	29.9	40.8	31.8	22.9	32.5	24.6	28.0	25.0	22.3	34.7
In-Person Studies	22.6	16.4	23.7	24.9	16.3	34.4	34.4	20.8	27.1	19.7
Combination of online and in person	33.4	27.6	32.3	37.2	38.1	24.6	24.7	33.3	33.9	32.9
Completely halted studies	4.0	5.3	4.0	3.4	3.7	4.9	4.3	4.2	4.4	3.8
Don't Know	10.1	9.9	8.1	11.6	9.4	11.5	8.6	16.7	12.4	8.9
Base	643	152	198	293	381	122	93	48	251	395

TABLE 46:

Q15_2b. I am going to read out to you, various educational levels. Thinking about your household, who are currently following studies, could you please tell me their educational level and the methods of learning that they follow since the start of the COIVD 19 pandemic? - University education

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Online	9.0	7.8	7.6	10.5	7.6	11.5	9.6	12.5	11.2	7.6
In-Person Studies	.2	.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	.8	0.0	2.1	.4	.3
Combination of online and in person	2.9	1.3	1.5	4.7	3.7	.8	4.3	0.0	2.8	2.8
Completely halted studies	.9	.7	.5	1.4	.8	1.6	0.0	0.0	.4	1.3
Don't Know	87.0	89.5	90.4	83.4	88.0	85.2	86.2	85.4	85.2	88.1
Base	645	153	197	295	382	122	94	48	250	395

TABLE 47:

Q15_3b. I am going to read out to you, various educational levels. Thinking about your household, who are currently following studies, could you please tell me their educational level and the methods of learning that they follow since the start of the COIVD 19 pandemic? - Vocational training/ Professional courses

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Online	4.0	3.9	3.5	4.4	3.7	2.5	8.5	4.1	5.6	3.0
In-Person Studies	2.3	3.9	1.5	2.0	1.8	4.1	2.1	0.0	1.6	2.5
Combination of online and in person	2.0	3.9	.5	2.0	2.9	.8	1.1	2.0	2.8	1.5
Completely halted studies	.6	0.0	1.5	.3	.8	1.6	0.0	0.0	.4	.8
Don't Know	91.0	88.2	92.9	91.2	90.8	91.0	88.3	93.9	89.6	92.1
Base	644	152	198	294	382	122	94	49	249	394

TABLE 48:

Q16. Apart from the above, is there anyone in this household who follows any other alternative methods of learning as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic?										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Yes	9.4	9.2	10.6	8.8	11.3	5.8	7.4	8.3	5.2	12.2
No	88.4	88.9	87.9	88.4	85.1	94.2	92.6	91.7	92.0	86.1
Don't Know	2.2	2.0	1.5	2.7	3.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.8	1.8
Base	646	153	199	294	382	121	94	48	250	395

TABLE 49:

Q17. Does this household possess enough electronic appliances (computers, smart phones, tabs etc.) for those who follow online learning?										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
We have enough electronic appliances	47.0	59.6	44.9	42.0	52.0	36.9	46.3	36.2	49.0	46.0

We don't have enough, but we can share with the other members in the household	31.5	28.5	35.4	30.5	28.6	37.7	31.6	38.3	31.3	31.6
We don't have enough; we borrow from somebody/ somewhere	5.9	3.3	5.6	7.5	5.8	5.7	7.4	4.3	2.4	7.8
We don't have, we are completely left out of the online learning process	2.0	2.6	1.5	2.0	2.1	1.6	2.1	2.1	2.4	1.8
There is no one engaged in online learning	13.5	6.0	12.6	18.0	11.5	18.0	12.6	19.1	14.9	12.9
Base	644	151	198	295	381	122	95	47	249	396

TABLE 50:

Q18. Does this household have access to internet?										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Yes, very good connectivity	52.8	72.0	48.0	44.8	57.4	43.4	50.6	41.0	55.6	51.0
Yes, but very weak connectivity	42.9	25.9	48.6	49.0	39.0	51.5	44.6	53.8	38.3	45.8
No, as we cannot afford to get connectivity	2.2	2.1	3.5	1.2	1.2	3.0	3.6	2.6	1.9	2.0
No, as I have no connectivity in my area	2.2	0.0	0.0	5.0	2.4	2.0	1.2	2.6	4.2	1.2
Base	557	143	173	241	336	99	83	39	214	343

TABLE 51:

Q19. How financially comfortable is it for your household to spend for internet connectivity (Data), in order to continue with online learning?

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
We don't have any problem	38.7	52.1	35.8	32.8	37.7	37.0	48.8	28.9	44.1	35.2
It is somewhat difficult	48.2	37.5	48.6	54.4	49.6	43.0	42.7	63.2	44.6	50.6
It is very difficult	13.1	10.4	15.6	12.9	12.8	20.0	8.5	7.9	11.3	14.2
Base	558	144	173	241	337	100	82	38	213	344

TABLE 52:

Q19a. Thinking about the costs you spent for online DATA last month, could you please tell me as to roughly how much you incurred for data / internet connectivity?										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Bellow Rs. 1000/=	60.9	56.6	62.4	62.4	55.4	63.6	73.2	78.9	60.1	61.4
Rs.1001/= - Rs. 2500/=	28.5	35.7	25.4	26.4	31.5	29.3	20.7	18.4	28.2	28.7
Rs. 2500/= - Rs. 5000/=	10.0	7.7	11.6	10.3	12.8	7.1	4.9	2.6	10.8	9.6
Rs. 5000/= - Rs. 7500/=	.5	0.0	.6	.8	.3	0.0	1.2	0.0	.9	.3
Base	558	143	173	242	336	99	82	38	213	345

TABLE 53:

Q20. How satisfied are you with the quality of learning received by your household members via online learning?										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Satisfied	52.7	54.5	50.9	52.9	48.7	62.6	51.9	65.8	48.8	55.1
Dissatisfied	41.6	39.9	42.2	42.1	46.0	30.3	44.4	28.9	42.7	41.1
Don't know	5.7	5.6	6.9	5.0	5.3	7.1	3.7	5.3	8.5	3.8
Base	558	143	173	242	337	99	81	38	213	343

TABLE 54:

Q21. Do any members of your household attend tuition classes (who are engaged in studies)?										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Yes	64.8	59.2	60.6	70.4	72.4	57.4	52.1	45.8	61.6	66.8
No	35.2	40.8	39.4	29.6	27.6	42.6	47.9	54.2	38.4	33.2
Base	644	152	198	294	381	122	94	48	250	395

TABLE 55:

Q21a. If yes, does that currently continue?										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Yes	79.7	83.5	79.2	78.3	73.9	85.7	98.0	90.9	83.7	77.3
No	20.3	16.5	20.8	21.7	26.1	14.3	2.0	9.1	16.3	22.7
Base	418	91	120	207	276	70	49	22	153	264

TABLE 56:

Q22_1. Please indicate whether your current interaction with the following has either increased or decreased in comparison to the time prior to the start of COVID 19? - Interactions with my friends										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Increased	2.5	2.4	1.5	3.2	1.9	6.6	.9	3.4	2.6	2.7
Remained the Same	23.1	25.9	14.9	27.0	22.3	31.1	21.9	10.2	27.1	20.4
Decreased	70.8	66.3	82.0	65.8	72.2	58.7	73.7	83.1	67.5	72.7
No Interaction	3.6	5.4	1.5	4.0	3.6	3.6	3.5	3.4	2.8	4.2

Base	870	205	261	404	533	167	114	59	351	520

TABLE 57:

Q22_2. Please indicate whether your current interaction with the following has either increased or decreased in comparison to the time prior to the start of COVID 19? - Interactions with my relatives

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Increased	2.0	1.5	1.5	2.5	.8	7.2	.9	1.7	1.7	2.3
Remained the Same	28.9	37.6	19.9	30.2	31.1	30.1	27.2	8.6	29.3	28.5
Decreased	67.0	60.5	76.6	64.1	66.0	62.0	68.4	86.2	67.5	66.5
No Interaction	2.2	.5	1.9	3.2	2.1	.6	3.5	3.4	1.4	2.7
Base	870	205	261	404	533	166	114	58	351	520

TABLE 58:

Q22_3. Please indicate whether your current interaction with the following has either increased or decreased in comparison to the time prior to the start of COVID 19? - Interactions with my neighbours										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Increased	4.0	3.9	3.8	4.2	1.5	10.8	7.1	1.7	5.1	3.5
Remained the Same	38.1	40.2	31.8	41.1	41.0	33.7	35.4	31.0	37.6	38.4
Decreased	55.9	53.4	62.8	52.7	56.0	53.0	54.0	65.5	55.0	56.2
No Interaction	2.0	2.5	1.5	2.0	1.5	2.4	3.5	1.7	2.3	1.9
Base	869	204	261	404	532	166	113	58	351	521

TABLE 59:

Q23_1. In relation to the following list of events / activities, could you please tell me as to how much your involvement in these has either increased or decreased, in comparison to the time prior to the start of the COVID 19 pandemic? - Engaged in religious ceremonies

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Increased	.9	.5	1.9	.5	.2	2.4	1.8	0.0	1.7	.4
Remained the Same	11.4	10.7	9.5	12.9	9.4	15.1	18.4	7.0	13.4	10.0
Decreased	73.0	70.7	72.9	74.3	75.2	66.9	69.3	77.2	70.1	75.0
No Interaction	14.7	18.0	15.6	12.4	15.2	15.7	10.5	15.8	14.8	14.6
Base	871	205	262	404	533	166	114	57	351	519

TABLE 60:

Q23_2. In relation to the following list of events / activities, could you please tell me as to how much your involvement in these has either increased or decreased, in comparison to the time prior to the start of the COVID 19 pandemic? - Participating in sports or other recreational activities

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Increased	1.7	.5	2.7	1.7	.8	5.4	1.8	1.7	2.6	1.3
Remained the Same	5.5	3.9	2.7	8.1	4.3	9.0	7.1	1.7	7.1	4.4
Decreased	55.5	53.4	62.8	51.9	56.0	52.4	53.1	63.8	59.4	52.7
Not participated at all	37.2	42.2	31.8	38.3	38.9	33.1	38.1	32.8	31.0	41.5
Base	870	204	261	405	532	166	113	58	352	520

TABLE 61:

Q23_3. In relation to the following list of events / activities, could you please tell me as to how much your involvement in these has either increased or decreased, in comparison to the time prior to the start of the COVID 19 pandemic? - Participated in funerals/ weddings/ various celebratory activities

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Increased	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Remained the Same	6.9	2.9	5.7	9.7	7.3	9.6	3.5	3.4	7.4	6.5
Decreased	81.6	79.4	83.5	81.4	81.1	81.9	82.5	81.4	83.5	80.2
Not participated at all	11.5	17.6	10.7	8.9	11.6	8.4	14.0	15.3	9.1	13.3
Base	869	204	261	404	533	166	114	59	351	520

TABLE 62:

Q24_1. Please indicate as to how much you agree or disagree with the below statements? "COVID 19 could be highly prevalent among low-income dwellers"										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Agree	55.7	51.0	54.4	59.0	61.0	48.8	40.7	55.2	54.7	56.2
Disagree	31.3	33.3	34.5	28.1	27.4	36.7	41.6	31.0	34.8	29.0
Don't know	13.0	15.7	11.1	12.8	11.6	14.5	17.7	13.8	10.5	14.8
Base	870	204	261	405	533	166	113	58	351	520

TABLE 63:

Q24_2. Please indicate as to how much you agree or disagree with the below statements?
"Cultural/ religious practices of some religious groups can cause higher possibility of spreading COVID -19"

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Agree	71.0	68.6	68.2	74.1	72.8	79.5	50.4	70.7	70.0	71.9
Disagree	18.9	21.1	23.4	14.8	15.6	13.3	41.6	20.7	22.3	16.4
Don't know	10.1	10.3	8.4	11.1	11.6	7.2	8.0	8.6	7.7	11.8
Base	870	204	261	405	533	166	113	58	350	519

TABLE 64:

Q24_3. Please indicate as to how much you agree or disagree with the below statements? "Prevalence of COVID 19 is less among people from my ethnic community"										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Agree	41.4	32.8	39.3	47.2	35.0	70.5	29.5	41.4	40.7	41.9
Disagree	40.2	51.5	41.6	33.6	44.4	24.1	50.9	27.6	43.9	37.9
Don't know	18.4	15.7	19.1	19.3	20.7	5.4	19.6	31.0	15.4	20.2
Base	871	204	262	405	532	166	112	58	351	520

TABLE 65:

Q25. In your opinion how fairly have COVID 19 rules (guidelines) of the government been implemented among all income groups?

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Fairly	45.6	31.4	55.2	46.5	43.3	56.6	33.6	58.6	42.2	47.9
Unfairly	40.3	52.5	32.2	39.4	43.3	30.1	47.8	25.9	46.7	35.8
Don't Know	14.2	16.2	12.6	14.1	13.5	13.3	18.6	15.5	11.1	16.3
Base	869	204	261	404	534	166	113	58	351	520

TABLE 66:

Q26. In your opinion how fairly have COVID 19 rules (guidelines) of the government been implemented among all ethnic groups?

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Fairly	46.5	39.5	57.6	42.8	47.9	54.2	23.9	55.9	39.9	51.0
Unfairly	36.7	43.4	28.6	38.6	34.6	35.5	54.0	25.4	45.3	31.0
Don't Know	16.8	17.1	13.7	18.6	17.4	10.2	22.1	18.6	14.8	18.1
Base	871	205	262	404	534	166	113	59	351	520

TABLE 67:

Q27.During the COVID 19 crisis if you or any member in your household had to visit a hospital/ doctor, could you please tell me as to what type of hospital you last visited?

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Government Hospital (National, Teaching, Divisional, Provisional etc.)	32.5	32.2	23.7	38.3	31.4	38.6	26.8	36.2	30.5	33.9
Government Dispensaries	3.4	2.0	5.3	3.0	4.3	1.2	1.8	3.4	3.4	3.5
Private Hospitals	12.2	17.1	13.4	8.9	10.9	12.0	20.5	8.6	14.5	10.6
Private Dispensaries	13.1	7.3	13.0	16.0	17.9	3.6	9.8	3.4	13.1	13.1
I had the need to visit a hospital/ doctor, but I didn't	7.2	4.4	9.5	7.2	4.1	16.9	8.0	3.4	7.7	6.6
Did have a need to visit a hospital	31.7	37.1	35.1	26.7	31.4	27.7	33.0	44.8	30.8	32.4
Base	872	205	262	405	532	166	112	58	351	519

TABLE 68:

Q27a. If you did visit the hospital/ doctor, could you please tell me if it was for a regular or emergency medical need?										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Regular medical needs	26.6	20.8	32.4	26.1	19.2	42.4	32.8	50.0	26.0	26.8
Emergency medical needs	65.1	69.2	58.6	66.8	72.4	47.8	61.2	43.3	65.1	65.3
To obtain pre-prescribed medication etc.	8.3	10.0	9.0	7.1	8.4	9.8	6.0	6.7	8.8	7.9
Base	533	120	145	268	344	92	67	30	215	317

TABLE 69:

Q27b. If you did visit the hospital/ doctor, could you please tell me if it was for a regular or emergency medical need?

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Easy	70.2	73.1	64.1	72.3	70.8	68.1	68.7	67.7	64.7	73.8
Difficult	29.2	26.9	33.8	27.7	28.3	31.9	31.3	29.0	34.4	25.6
No opinion	.6	0.0	2.1	0.0	.9	0.0	0.0	3.2	.9	.6
Base	531	119	145	267	343	91	67	31	215	317

TABLE 70:

Q27c. If you visited the hospital/ doctor, could you please tell me as to how satisfied you were with the quality of service you received?

	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
Easy	85.3	83.3	83.8	86.9	83.9	91.3	84.8	86.7	81.3	88.0
Difficult	14.5	15.8	16.2	13.1	16.1	7.6	15.2	13.3	18.7	11.7
Don't know	.2	.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	.3
Base	530	120	142	268	341	92	66	30	214	316

TABLE 71:

Q30. If you were given the opportunity to obtain the COVID 19 vaccine which of the following best reflects your opinion?										
	National	Local Government Body			Ethnicity				Sex	
		MC	UC	PS	Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim	UC Tamil	Male	Female
I will get it without any further delay	37.4	42.9	38.7	33.8	46.3	30.7	12.4	22.4	43.4	33.3
I will get it, but will wait to see how it affects others before I get it	27.2	21.0	24.9	31.9	23.3	26.5	39.8	41.4	23.7	29.8
I will not get it soon, but will do so in the future	21.7	23.9	19.5	22.0	16.9	29.5	31.9	24.1	20.3	22.7
I will never get the vaccine	11.4	10.7	14.6	9.6	10.3	12.7	13.3	12.1	10.3	11.9
Don't know	2.3	1.5	2.3	2.7	3.2	.6	2.7	0.0	2.3	2.3
Base	871	205	261	405	533	166	113	58	350	520

This volume centers on the impact of Sri Lanka's COVID-19 response on the political, economic, and social life of society, and the long term implications of these developments. Pandemics go far beyond mere public health crises, leaving an indelible mark on the contemporary social fabric, whose tangible and intangible transformations require intense probing. Through its 07 chapters, this book attempts to examine from various angles how the COVID response of the Sri Lankan government has impacted particularly the democratic fabric of society and politics.

Centre for Policy Alternatives (Guarantee) Ltd. (CPA)
Address: 6/5, Layards Road, Colombo 5, Sri Lanka.
Tel: +94 11 2081384, +94 11 2081385, +94 11 2081386
Fax: +94 11 2081388
Web: www.cpalanka.org
Email: info@cpalanka.org

Social Indicator
Address: 160G, Poorwarama Road, Kirulapone, Colombo 5, Sri Lanka.
Tel: +94 11 2826010
Web: www.cpalanka.org/survey-research/