

Sri Lanka - A Parallel State?

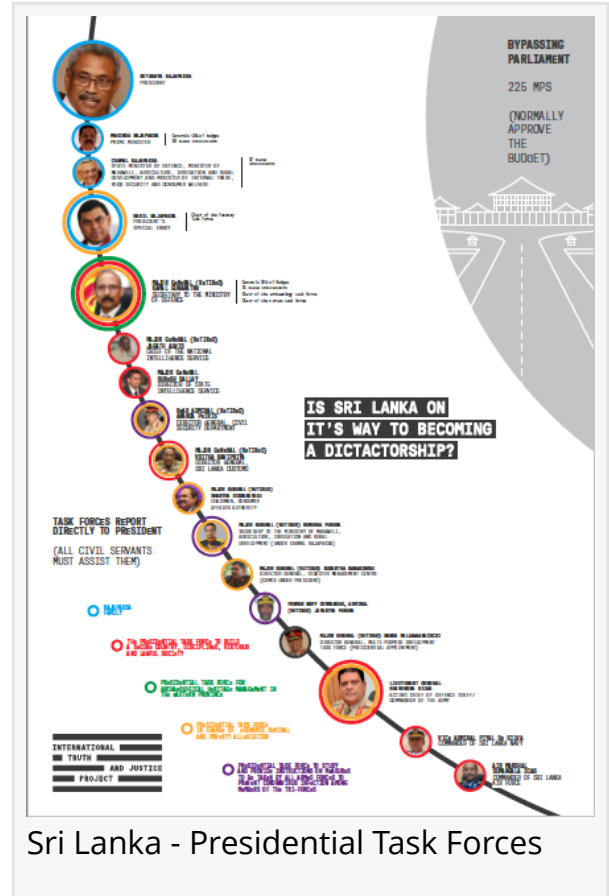
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/EINPresswire.com/ -- A new [infographic](#) reveals how President [Gotabaya Rajapaksa](#) is ruling Sri Lanka, as if he is autonomous, through powerful militarised task forces that bypass the usual checks and balances of a democratically elected parliament . These bodies are unelected and report directly to the President requiring the full cooperation of the Sri Lankan civil service and are not subject to the usual scrutiny and oversight of parliament. Not just secretaries but Ministers (currently 16) and ministerial committees will have to serve and obey these unelected bodies and if they don't will be referred to the President with unspecified consequences to their careers . This is made more worrying because of the forthcoming parliamentary elections in which the President hopes to gain a two thirds majority to be able to alter the Constitution .

“The Task Forces risk creating a parallel state and potentially give the President, his family and former military comrades unparalleled control over patronage networks and the use of public assets,” said the ITJP’s executive director Yasmin Sooka. “More worrying is that this new schematic for exercising control could survive beyond the next elections, which are anyway expected to return a parliament compliant and subservient to the Rajapaksa family”.

The President is allegedly allocating government funds and operating directly on a Budget on Account enabled by the absence of a sitting parliament for more than three months. According to the Sri Lankan state run newspaper and other media, approximately half the funds this quarter have reportedly gone through the Ministry controlled by his brother the Prime Minister, Mahinda Rajapaksa, and ten percent to the Ministry of Defence, headed by Major General Kamal Gunaratne, with no apparent independent oversight .

“The latest developments centralise power and give even more untrammelled authority to the President’s key military allies who already enjoy enormous power through formal appointments,” said the ITJP’s Executive Director Yasmin Sooka. “This is the ‘deep state’ coming into the open,” she added. “It’s a structure of governance reminiscent of the President’s early role as an all-powerful district military coordinator during the crushing of the JVP in 1989 in Matale;



Sri Lanka - Presidential Task Forces



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he appears to be replicating this model of unfettered control over the entire nation”.

Lawyers in Sri Lanka have argued that the establishment of the Task Forces is legally questionable and administratively murky . The task forces have no time limit, while the drafting is sloppy and ungrammatical . The name itself - task force - is redolent of militarism and the composition of the bodies is overwhelmingly military, male, Sinhala and unelected, save for the bureaucrats who are included, whose only role is to execute the commands of the Task Forces.....

Significant is that military members of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa’s inner circle have held multiple positions, in two or even three of the Task Forces, as well as holding other powerful government positions.

-Retired Major General Kamal Gunaratne is chair of two of the new Presidential Task Forces . He is also secretary of defence and when President Gotabaya Rajapaksa came to power he was assigned 31 key state institutions to his control.

-Retired Major General Sumedha Perera is a member of two of the current Task Forces . He served under Gotabaya Rajapaksa in the Gajaba Regiment in 1989 when the President was District Military Coordinator in Matale at a time when 700 Sinhalese were allegedly reported disappeared in state custody in the District .

-Lt. General Shavendra Silva, who also served in Matale under Gotabaya Rajapaksa, sits on two of the Task Forces as well as holding the two most senior military posts in the country. As 58 Division Commander he was a key officer in the 2009 war when Gotabaya Rajapaksa was the powerful secretary of defence. He is designated for alleged gross violations of human rights by the United States Government .

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa’s key trusted lieutenants are public servants who hold critical positions in the State – with control of the military , the ministry of defence , intelligence , key police departments , customs , ports , prison vocational training . This new structure outside of parliament allows them to exercise power and control over the economy, security, media and all key aspects of life.

Family

In addition, three of the President’s brothers are directly involved in running the country:

-Mahinda Rajapaksa is Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Economy and Policy Development, Minister of Buddhasasana, Cultural and Religious Affairs, Minister of Urban Development, Water Supply & Housing Facilities and Minister of Community Empowerment and Estate Infrastructure Development .

-Chamal Rajapaksa is state minister of defence, Minister of Mahaweli, Agriculture, Irrigation and Rural Development and Minister of Internal Trade, Food Security and Consumer Welfare.

-Basil Rajapaksa chairs the Economy Task Force. He too was investigated in five cases for alleged corruption under the last government . He is a dual US Sri Lankan citizen, and is not elected but acts as the President's Special Envoy.

Before the Task Forces were appointed, local news reports said the Rajapaksa brothers were reportedly in control of 145 state institutions – 88 alone in the hands of Mahinda Rajapaksa . This is despite Gotabaya Rajapaksa's manifesto promise that, "All appointments as heads of State institutions, corporations and statutory boards, and appointments to Boards of Directors will be based on merit and leadership abilities" .

Nepotism. patronage and militarisation are the characteristics of the new government in Sri Lanka with power consolidated following the elections.

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