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இலங்கைச் சட்டத்தரணிகள் சங்கம்
BAR ASSOCIATION OF SRI LANKA

4th July 2022

His Excellency Gotabhaya Rajapakse,
President of Sri Lanka,
President's House,
Colombo 1

Your Excellency,

THE TENSE SITUATION AT FUEL STATIONS; THE USE OF THE ARMED FORCES AND INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE

The Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL) expresses its gravest concerns at the current situation at fuel stations throughout the country and the reports of several incidents of conflicts between civilians and members of the police force and the armed forces at fuel stations. There has been video footage of civilians being assaulted by personnel of the armed forces and the police, the latest being of a civilian being kicked by an army officer at a fuel station. There have also been situations of the police and army opening fire into the air to contain the crowd.

Your Excellency is no doubt aware that thousands of desperate civilians are waiting in queues at hundreds of fuel stations in the country. The queues are kilometres long. The tension at the fuel stations have arisen from this desperation for which there is no immediate solution in sight.

The BASL wishes to warn Your Excellency of the imminent dangers this situation could give rise to. The present unrest could result in a conflagration between civilians and members of the armed forces or the police. Some years ago, confrontations between members of the public and the armed forces resulted in the deaths of civilians. Such incidents between the members of the armed forces or the police and the civilians will discredit Sri Lanka's armed forces and the police.

We call upon Your Excellency to take all necessary steps to give instructions to the Defence Secretary, the Commanders of the Tri Forces and the Inspector General of Police to ensure that there is an immediate de-escalation of the situation in different parts of the country – especially at fuel stations – understanding the difficulties faced by public. Whilst keeping in mind that the police and armed forces are acting under very trying circumstances, nevertheless it is necessary to give strict instructions to the police and the forces to desist from violence in dealing with the public and to act with utmost restraint. We also call upon you to ensure that steps be taken under the law to deal with errant officers who have subjected civilians to such violence.

The Sri Lanka Army and other service personnel must be deployed only in very limited circumstances as contemplated in the Criminal Procedure Code. The BASL is of the view that it is not appropriate for service personnel to be deployed in the present manner in matters which essentially should be managed by the Sri Lanka Police. The Armed Forces should also not be used to disturb or hinder peaceful protests as was seen last week in Galle.

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We trust that this will receive the immediate attention of the Government as to do otherwise may otherwise result in unprecedented turmoil and harm.

The BASL believes that the ultimate solution to the situation at fuel stations is to be transparent with the public and to ensure an equitable and effective system of fuel distribution throughout the country.

Yours faithfully,

SALIYA PIERIS, PC
PRESIDENT
BAR ASSOCIATION OF SRI LANKA

ISURU BALAPATABENDI
SECRETARY
BAR ASSOCIATION OF SRI LANKA