

Continuing with the Prevention of Terrorism Act is a crime against Sri Lanka's children

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Sri Lankans who grew up before 1971 have experienced basic freedoms, at least in a limited way. None of them experienced midnight knocks on their doors. If they went to a courthouse, they could expect certain treatment that while imperfect, would be relatively fair. If a policeman arrested them, they could ask why. Prolonged detention without the right of bail was not a frequent experience. Disappearances were hardly ever heard of.

This is not to suggest that there was a paradise that has been lost; rather, that there was a limited experience of freedoms.

The period from 1971 to now—except for short intervals from time to time—has been one in which normal laws have been suspended and replaced with emergency regulations. These emergency powers expanded to enable security forces and those under their direction to act as they saw fit. This resulted in a wave of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. Emergency regulations were further expanded and the Prevention of Terrorism Act came into being. Under this Act, actions that would previously have been considered outrageous and criminal, now became possible.

Sri Lankans growing up during this long period know emergency and anti-terrorism laws as the country's normal law. They were constantly told that 'national security' depended upon these laws, and that their freedom would have to be sacrificed for the sake of national security and public good. Such a framework conditioned their rational and emotional lives.

In this manner they were forced into blindness, and that blindness was justified as a better way of existence than the assertion of freedoms. The problem now is not about how to undo that past; the problem is how to undo the damage caused to their future.

Wild elephants are said to be tamed through iron manacles and chains. For a considerable time, the elephant in captivity will initially struggle against its bondage. In the process, it will learn that attempts at freedom are painful and futile. Gradually, it will submit to the law of the chains. Later, even though the chains are removed, the elephant will struggle no more. Its offspring will be born into the tamed world, where they will remain the willing slaves of their masters.

Long years of emergency and anti-terrorism laws have similarly affected all Sri Lankans, particularly those who have not had the opportunity to see anything different. Fear psychosis has become the Sri Lankan heritage. Each month and year spent under the operation of these repressive laws will further destroy the people's imagination and spirit.

While leaders who want to have the benefit of a crushed population will want to keep these laws in operation, no parent can want their children to be crippled by such bondage. If given the opportunity, children themselves would do all they could to reassert their love of freedom and live their lives without being victims to fear psychosis.

Parents and all those wishing for a brighter, freer future should rise against the continuance of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Failure to do so will constitute a crime against their children.

To sign the petition to end the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), please go to:
<http://campaigns.ahrchk.net/repealpta/>