



JOURNALISTS FOR DEMOCRACY IN SRI LANKA

Freedom of expression issues in Sri Lanka E bulletin / Month covered July 2009

1. 1st Jul y 2009: Minster Mervyn threw away TV microphone

Labour Minister Mervyn Silva threw away the Sirasa microphone State-sponsored ceremony at the BMICH on 28th June 2009. Silva, who had been involved in a running battle with the Maharaja Television Network, said that he wouldn't allow Sirasa to cover the event organised to honour journalists who had supported the war effort. Among the invitees in the front row were Ministers, Dinesh Gunawardene, Keheliya Rambukwella, Lakshman Yapa Abeywardena and Lakshman Hulugalle, Director General of the Media Centre for National Security. The organisers and the offender's ministerial colleagues looked the other way. - <http://www.island.lk/>

2. 2nd July 2009: Death threat to Ravaya journalist

Journalist Thilak Kodagoda who wrote an article critical to the Ravaya newspaper of aspiring President of the National Art Council, Buddhadasa Galappaththi has reportedly received death threats. Kodagaoda's article had also been critical of the chief editor of the Sunday Divaina newspaper and Art Council member, Gamini Sumanasekera. Angered by the article, Sumanasekera it is learnt had called Kodagoda and threatened him with death. "I will tell about you to the army commander and get you killed. You better be careful," Sumanasekera had told Kodagoda. (Mr. Sumansekera has not sent any correction to the news story so far)
http://www.lankanewsweb.com/news/EN_2009_07_02_004.html

3. 3rd July 2009: court rules predictions not a threat to the president

Chandrasiri Bandara, the astrologer detained by the CID for seeing signs in the stars that posed a threat to the President was released on Friday, July 3, after over a week in detention. The Colombo Court found insufficient evidence of a credible threat

posed by his predications to justify his continued detention. The astrologer was detained and questioned at length in order to ascertain whether or not the stars had given him special knowledge of a conspiracy against the President.
<http://www.thesundayleader.lk/20090705/NEWS.HTM>

4. 5th July 2009: Lasantha murder- no progress of police investigations

Six months after the murder of The Sunday Leader's Founder Editor Lasantha Wickrematunge police investigations into the killing are reported to have made no progress whatsoever. Further, on consecutive occasions when the Wickrematunge murder case was being heard at the Mt. Lavinia Magistrate's Court police representatives failed to make an appearance forcing the postponement of the hearings. When questioned by The Sunday Leader as to why the Mirihana Police had failed to appear before the court, Police Spokesman Ranjith Gunasekera had claimed that 'other commitments' did not allow them to attend the sessions.
<http://www.thesundayleader.lk/20090705/NEWS.HTM>

5. 5th July 2009: National Lawyers council oppose reactivation of press council

National Lawyers Association said yesterday that it would fight against the reactivation of the Press Council that can jail journalists, charging that the government is moving towards a dictatorship. National Lawyers Association Colombo Branch President, Member of the Western Provincial Council Srinath Perera told a news conference yesterday that they would fight the reactivation of the council which was made defunct by the UNP government of 2002. He said the Press Council was made defunct by the UNP government though the Act was not abolished.
http://www.dailymirror.lk/DM_BLOG/Sections/frmNewsDetailView.aspx?ARTID=53895

6. 5th July 2009: Teesha, popular singer threatened

Popular singer Teesha was threatened by a governing party politician and she went in to hiding according to Sinhala weekly Ravaya News paper. the reason given was that the singer didn't not give in to advances made by politicians in addition to singing on their stages.
http://www.lankanewsweb.com/Sinhala/Feature/FEATURE_09_07_20_001.html

7. 7th July 2009: President defends defamation laws

Defending defamation laws on media president Rajapaksha said: Some of our journalists want complete freedom. They can attack anybody, they cannot be charged. But the journalists also think they have the right to do whatever they want and get away with it — because they are journalists. But what are some of the newspapers doing? They use media power to blackmail innocent citizens and collect money. The journalist writes something and then publishes a correction — it is useless. Newspapers must take responsibility. If they won't do this, then you will

have laws to make them do this.

<http://www.hindu.com/2009/07/08/stories/2009070855380900.htm>

8. 8th July 2009: TV producer removed on political grounds

Producer of the popular political satire TV series Wasantha Moragoda was removed from the Swarnawahini TV because of political pressure. It was reported that some of the recent episodes had earned the ire of the government higher-ups.

http://www.lankanewsweb.com/Sinhala/news/2009_07_08_005.html

9. 9th July 2009 : Minister Mervyn admits killing Lasantha

Speaking at a gathering at the Jayanthi Mahal Junction at the opening ceremony of a Sathosa outlet in Hunupitiya, Kelaniya on Thursday Minister Mervyn silva said:

"Lasantha from the Leader paper went overboard. I took care of him. Poddala agitated and his leg was broken. Now a fellow in my electorate is trying to stand against me. I now tell him in his own hometown, I will give him only seven more days."

http://www.lankanewsweb.com/news/EN_2009_07_13_006.html

10. 10th July 2009: journalist receives death threat

Mr.Sundaralingam Vadamarachchi area correspondent of Uthayan news paper received death threats from unknown quarters during the first week of July 2009. Police provided security to his house for some days after he complained.

11. 10th July 2009: www.defense.lk attacks lawyers for defending Sunday Leader

Official website of the defense ministry named lawyers who appeared on behalf of the Sunday Leader news paper as traitors by a post published on 10th July 2009 under the heading **Traitors of black courts flock together:** *" The original Defence team had voluntarily resigned from handling the case citing it was against their ethical and moral standing to oppose a national hero like the Secretary of Defence, with whose unwavering commitment and focus Sri Lanka is a free country today. A new team comprising of some who have a history of appearing for and defending LTTE suspects in the past, namely Srinath Perera,PC ,Upul Jayasuriya, S. Sumanthbiran, Attorney-at-Law Viran Corea, Attorney-at-Law instructed by Athula Ranagala,Attorney-at-Law appeared for Leader Publications."*

12. 11th July 2009: government bans www.lankanewsweb.com

The Sri Lankan government has banned Lanka News Web in Sri Lanka from yesterday (11) night in complete violation of the people's right to information.

www.lankanewsweb.com cannot be viewed thru any of the local servers. It carries a

notice on how to read it thru a proxy server: Our website has been banned in Sri Lanka, viewers could access the site by going through <http://www.bbcproxy.info/> . At least 5 news web sites are remained banned in Sri Lanka today.

13. 13th July 2009: death threats against Uthayan journalists continue

Reporters, employees and agents of Uthayan Tamil daily published in Jaffna continue to be issued with death threats by post despite President Rajapakse's recent assurance that he will not permit anyone to violate the freedom of the press, sources in Jaffna said. Complaints have been lodged by the reporters and agents to their local police stations and Sri Lanka Army (SLA) high officials.

<http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=29780>

14. 14th July 2009: defending press freedom; Uthayan gets an award

Uthayan newspaper received the award for defending press freedom at the Editors' Guild - 2008 Awards Ceremony held on Tuesday the 14th. Editor of Uthayan/Sudar Oli N. Vidyatharan accepted the award on behalf of the newspapers. The newspaper had faced several threats and attacks over the past years while Mr. Vidyatharan was also arrested and subsequently released.

http://www.dailymirror.lk/DM_BLOG/Sections/frmNewsDetailView.aspx?ARTID=54884

15. 15th July 2009: Human Rights defender further remanded

Executive secretary of the National Christian Council Shantha Nihal Fernando was further remanded yesterday (July 15) by Colombo Additional Magistrate Praharsa Ranasinghe under emergency regulations. He was arrested for having some literature related to Tamil civilian deaths in no fire zone on 27th March 2009. The Colombo Additional Magistrate called for a report from the attorney general before releasing the suspect on bail. Both parties agreed for the report to be produced on July 24. (On 7th Aug he was further remanded till 19th Aug.)

<http://www.colombotoday.com/english/articles/NEWS/Christian-Council-official-further-remanded/3967.htm>

16. 16th July 2009: International Press Freedom Mission rights to the president

In an open letter addressed to the president of Sri Lanka The International Mission proposed to a 11-point plan to redress the perilous press freedom environment in Sri Lanka. The International Press Freedom Mission to Sri Lanka, is comprised of representatives from the world's media community, said that they are extremely concerned over the ongoing spate of violent attacks against the media in Sri Lanka.

<http://asiapacific.ifj.org/en/articles/open-letter-to-his-excellency-president-mahinda-rajabaksa>

17. 22nd July 2009: Visa denied to AP bureau chief

The Associated Press bureau chief in Sri Lanka, who broke news of private U.N. reports outlining civilian death tolls, was denied permission to remain in the country. The AP's Ravi Nessman left Sri Lanka on Monday after the government declined to renew his journalist's visa. The government denied that the decision was related to his reporting on the final throes of Sri Lanka's quarter-century civil war with the Tamil Tiger rebels. The AP reported extensively on the heavy toll the war took on civilians as government forces surged across the rebels' strongholds in the jungles of the north this year.

http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090721/ap_on_re_as/sri_lanka_journalist

18. 24th July 2009: SLBC denied media accreditation to selected journalists

Hudson Samarasinghe, Chairman of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Cooperation (SLBC) has refused to provide media accreditation cards to some journalists working there. Responding to a query whether the Information Department was unable to issue media accreditation unless recommended by their heads of institutions, Anusha Palpita, Director of Information said that media accreditation couldn't be given to any journalist unless recommended by their bosses.

<http://www.island.lk/2009/07/24/news18.html>

19. 24th July 2009: Minister's supporters threatened journalists with death

Revelations about the National Integration Minister Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan nom de guerre Col Karuna following the publication of the brief of his wife's interview and the background story surrounding his visit to Geneva in the Sri Lanka Guardian received the expected violent response from the Minister. Guardian correspondent in Zurich who undertook the interview with Karuna's wife Mrs Neela Vidayavady Muralitharan from London recently has been threatened by one of Karuna's senior goons. The senior member of the Karuna group by the name of Julian phoned Guardian correspondent Veeman and threatened him that he and his family will be finished off within next few days.

http://www.lankanewsweb.com/news/EN_2009_07_24_010.html

20. 25th July 2009: 12 websites banned for nude photographs

Colombo Chief Magistrate Nishantha Hapuarachchi yesterday ordered the Director General of Telecommunication Regulatory Commission to suspend the licenses of 12 websites which were exhibiting nude photographs. The Magistrate said the suspension was effective till 07 August and the parties concerned could make their submissions as to why they should not be suspended. The CID had petitioned Court

about the websites. The 12 websites are www.lankasexclips.com, www.ambalk.co.cc, <http://lankasexlalk.com>, www.sexylk.com, www.lankasexonline.com, www.redtube.com, www.tube.8.com, www.adultfriendfinder.com, www.livejasmin.com, <http://xhaster.com>, <http://zvideos.com> - <http://www.island.lk/2009/07/25/news24.html>

21. 25th July 2009: former Army commander censored

Lake House Chairman, Bandula Padmakumara, acting on a directive issued by Director General, Media Center for National Security (MCNS), Lakshman Hulugalle had ordered the Silumina newspaper editor to remove an interview and several photographs of former Army commander and present Chief of Defence Staff General Sarath Fonseka that were to be carried in last week's issue of the newspaper. Hulugalle in the letter signed by him has said that any interview, photograph or feature of the Chief of Defence Staff or any other forces head carried in the media should have prior approval of Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse. http://www.lankanewsweb.com/news/EN_2009_07_24_008.html

22. 26th July 2009: Director www.colombotoday.com asked to leave

Ruwan Ferdinanz, one of the three directors of www.colombotoday.com was asked to tend resignation because of political and commercial pressure. He has tended his resignation. Ruwan Ferdinanz has been working as the private secretary for former foreign minister and presently leader of SLFP(M) Mangala Samaraweera. Ruwan Ferdinanz played a key role in now defunct www.lankadissent.com before the killing of Sunday Leader editor Lasantha Wikremathinghe.

23. 26th July 2009: Sinhala language blogger threatened

<http://beyondframe.wordpress.com/> reported that another Sinhala language blog <http://taboosubjects.wordpress.com/> has received some threats because some posts and it had to delete those posts.

24. 26th July 2009: Gov print media institute file a case against news website

ANCL, the government controlled print media institution filed a court action against www.lankaenews.com claiming damages of Rs.100 million for a investigative column published on 15th Oct 2008. The case will be taken up on 23rd October 2009.

25. 26th July 2009: Adults only films banned

26. The government has decided to ban all movies that are labeled 'Adults only' says Minister of Cultural Affairs Mahinda Yapa Abeywardene. The minister further said

regulations on programs and publications that include obscene scenes would be toughened. He said present regulations would be amended to bring in tough laws that would enable severe penalties for offenders.

http://www.lankatruth.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2894:no-adults-only-films-hereafter-&catid=34:lead-news&Itemid=50

27. 29th July 2009: TV owner assault media worker

Owner of the Swarnawahini TV Jeewaka Edirisinghe had assaulted the head makeup artist Gamini Costa on 29th July 2009. The assault took place around 10.30 am and it was reported that Mr. Costa was not allowed to go out till 3.30 pm. Mr. Costa was hospitalised after the assault.

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