

Free Media Movement

Monthly e bulletin of FOE rights violation in Sri Lanka

May 2008

1. 1st June – Hate speech monger to head state controlled radio

Hudson Samarasinghe who was appointed as the Chairperson of State controlled Sri Lanka Broadcasting Cooperation (SLBC) called for the death of senior journalist Poddala Jayantha. This outrageous incitement to murder and violence by Hudson Samarasinghe was made June 8th during a breakfast radio talk show he participated in called "Isira". Poddala Jayantha is the General Secretary of Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association (SLWJA), which is the largest journalists' organisation in the country.

2. 2rd June – Ministry of Defence v attacks independent media

The editorial posted on www.defence.lk run by the Ministry of Defence (http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20080531_04) on 31st May 2008 leveled dangerous charges against number of newspapers, the FMM and its former convener Sunanda Deshapriya and Sunday Times Associate Editor and noted defense columnist Iqbal Athas.

3. 5th June – Forth Journalist attacked in Kathankudi, Batticloa

On 5th June journalist M.A.C. Jalees of kathankudi, Batticloa was assaulted by political party supporters and his camera was taken away. Earlier journalists T.L.M. Joufer Khan, M.S.M. Noordeen, Moulavi S.M.M. Musthapha were either threatened or assaulted in the same area. All these journalists belong to Muslim community and Kathankudi Journalists Association.

4. 8th June – Peaceful protest attacked

Two protests campaigns organized by Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) on 8th and 9th June was attacked by gangs unleashed by local politicians of the governing party. This protest was organized under the theme of *hands off democracy; defend people's freedom of expression rights and right to protest*. According to the JVP this attack was led by ruling party politicians in the area. To engage in peaceful protest and dissent is a right guaranteed by the constitution. This right has been reassured by the Supreme Court on many occasions as a right to freedom of expression.

5. 9th June – Pressure to tone down criticism during EU visit

Reporters Without Borders reported that the government reportedly put pressure on the owners and editors of several independent dailies, including *The Nation* and *The Daily Mirror*, to dissuade them from publishing critical or embarrassing articles during a visit by a European Commission trade delegation from 9 to 11 June.

6. 10th June – A threatened journalists list circulated

Alleged government hit list containing the names of 27 journalists has been leaked to foreign diplomatic missions in the country, UNP's free media spokesman Dayasiri Jayasekara told a press conference. Most of the journalists named in the list come from

media that does not toe the government line. Government denied the allegation as a canard.

7. 12th June - Trade union protest attacked

Supporters of governing Sri Lanka Freedom Party assaulted trade unionists protesting railway fare hike. The attack took place on 12th June in front of the Colombo Fort railway station while Union leaders were leaving after a protest. Supreme Court has on several occasions has reiterated that peaceful protests should not only allowed but should be encouraged an exercise of freedom of expression rights.

8. 13th June - printing press owner Jesihran tortured

E-qulity printing press owner and manager of www.outreachsl.com Jesihran who has been in TID custody since 6th March told court on 13th June that he was tortured by the TID officers several times On 23rd June he told the court that he was tortured again because of his statement to the courts on 13th and broke down in the courts. On 28th June the Supreme Court ordered the Terrorist Investigation Division to produce press owner Vetrivel Jasiharan before the Colombo Judicial Medical Officer within one week.

9. 14th June - Another journalist threatened

Another well-known journalist received a death threat on 14th morning from an unknown caller. Former deputy Editor of the Sunday Leader, Editor of monthly magazine Montage and leading investigative journalist and South Asia co-coordinator of International News Safety Institute (INSI) Frederica Jansz received the death threat at approximately 11.30am. Within the month of May there were two attempts to intimidate her for her reporting.

10. 16th June - Unknown persons visited journalist house

A journalist who was named in the list of 27 had been receiving the death threats recently. 25th of May 2008 onwards, it was reported to FMM. One individual who came in a motor bike had looked for him. On the 16th of June 2008, two other unknown individuals came to his residence in Piliyandala and searched for him.

11.18th June -Defence Ministry sets out Guidelines for Media (Self)-Censorship

In a recent editorial posted on the Defence Ministry website, the Ministry has set forth its views and suggested guidelines with regard to reporting of military-related matters. According to these censorship guidelines, the media should not:

1. Be critical and analyse military strategies
2. Scrutinise promotions and transfers within the military
3. Question military procurements and tenders
4. Espouse/ discuss anti-war positions

12.20th June - News website editor & news editor questioned

Officers of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) visited the offices of www.lankaenews.com on 17th June 2008 and questioned its Editor Sandaruwan Senadeera and News Editor Benet Rupasinghe for three and half hours over a war related story and their sources. Lankaenews.com is one of the eight media institutions recently named by Sri Lanka Ministry of Defense as being treacherous and partial to terrorists. The Editor of Lankaenews.com has been receiving threatening phone calls and hate mail for over than a year because of its independent news coverage.

13.22nd June - Former freelancer abducted and released

Former freelance journalist of the Tamil daily Thinakkural, Thiruchelvam Thirukumaran was abducted from Dehiwela last Sunday and released next day. The abduction had been carried out on Sunday evening after a police team had come to inspect the apartment in which he was living. The abductors had arrived in a white van in police uniform shortly after the police had left.

14. 24th June - pastor attacked in east

A Christian pastor, the Reverend Fernando from the Methodist Church in Ampara was attacked yesterday by three men in Ampara, Eastern Province, Sri Lanka, while returning home from a church group meeting in Uhana. He is currently receiving treatment for his injuries in hospital. It is clear he was attacked not on any personal reasons but for his religious activity. Religious freedom of Christian minorities has been under attack for some time in certain areas of Sri Lanka. The attack comes four months after a Home Guard in uniform shot dead Pastor Neil Edirisinghe, on 17 February.

15. 26th June - State media levels dangerous allegation against SLPI

State controlled Sinhala language newspaper 'Dinamina' considered as one of the mouth pieces of the government said in a lead story that "the police intelligence has received information saying that a group of members connected to LTTE were sent to Norway through Denmark under the Journalist label by the Sri Lanka Press Institute" This story was completely incorrect and planted to discredit and incite violence against the institution.

16.27th June - military cuts off CDMA phones in Manner

Military cuts off all CDMA phones used in Manner district for more than a week. Journalists of the area complained that they were unable to send their reports and photos in time because phone lines are cut off.

17.28th June - government bans phones with GPS facility

The government has banned the use of phones with Global Positioning System facility, purportedly for national security by prohibiting the Global Positioning System (GPS) facility, 'Ravaya' reported. According to this ban, the import and sale of GPS-enabled mobile phones will not be allowed, and the facility will be deactivated in phones already having it. According to an executive officer of a mobile service provider, they have deactivated the GPS following a directive by the Defence Ministry.

18.30th June – Journalist Tissainayagam case put off

The Colombo Chief Magistrate, on 30th June made order to continue the detention of journalist J.S.S. Tissainayagam, V. Jesiheren and Valarmadi Vaduvel with the Terrorist Investigation Division (TID). The magistrate in his order stated that the suspects were detained by the TID on detention orders of the Defence Secretary, and produced before in court on the pleadings of the suspects' counsel, and court had no jurisdiction to make order to remand them in prison. The case will be taken up on 5th September 2008 again

19. 30th June - Journalist assaulted in an abduction attempt

Former TNL News Director and currently Sri Lanka Press Institute (SLPI) employee Namal Perera and a friend was brutally assaulted on 30th June 2008. Mr. Perera and his friend, Mr. Mahendra Ratnaweera, a Sri Lankan national working at the British High Commission in Colombo, were driving between Narahenpita and Kirulapone at around 06:30 p.m. when they were waylaid. The assault took place on the busy highway, in the vicinity of an army installation, the government information department and the security checkpoint at the Narahenpita bridge. The assaulters attempted to abduct Mr. Perera, but were resisted, and both Mr. Perera and his friend were badly beaten in the ensuing fracas.