



SRI LANKA

**Nine recommendations
for improving
the state of press freedom**

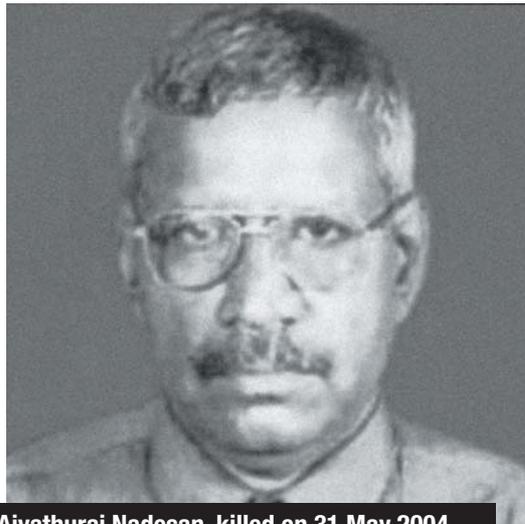
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A few months before his murder on 31 May 2004, **Aiyathurai Nadesan**, a correspondent in Batticaloa (the eastern part of the island) for several Tamil media, who received the prize for “Best Tamil Journalist” in 2000, had told Reporters without Borders: «We are always caught in the crossfire. It is very hard for us to check our information with both the security forces and the Tamil Tigers. And when a local news article is released from Colombo, we may face reprisals in the field.» His statements attest to how difficult working conditions are for journalists in Sri Lanka.



Aiyathurai Nadesan, killed on 31 May 2004

The circumstances surrounding the murder of Aiyathurai Nadesan—the first journalist killed since October 2000—are troubling and could threaten the fragile ceasefire signed at the end of 2001. In fact, the journalist’s colleagues and relatives suspect that men close to Tamil rebel leader Karuna committed this murder. The media minister Mangala Samaraweera recently acknowledged that some members of the Sri Lanka army had aided the Karuna group, which seceded from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) movement. Moreover, the latter have been exploiting this collusion between Karuna’s men and the army to go back on their peace process commitments.

Reporters without Borders fears that current tensions may plunge the country back into war. Such a failure would undoubtedly lead to new and very serious violations of press freedom.

Since last April’s victory of the United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA), headed by President Chandrika Kumaratunga, the

country has been going through a delicate period. Some doubts have been raised as to whether or not the ceasefire signed with the Tamil Tigers movement can be maintained.

During a fact-finding mission in Sri Lanka early this year, Reporters without Borders interviewed dozens of journalists. The majority expressed their apprehensions and frustrations in dealing with a situation that has become much too volatile for them to assert that press freedom is a given in the country.

Nearly 100 days after the new government was formed, Reporters without Borders has decided it was necessary to present Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse and President Chandrika Kumaratunga with a series of recommendations that may help to sustainably improve the state of press freedom in Sri Lanka. The organisation thereby hopes to relay the expectations of Sri Lankan journalists, particularly those of correspondents based in the provinces. Reporters without Borders also urges the international community—notably the Norwegian government, responsible for monitoring compliance with the current ceasefire agreement—to become more actively involved in ensuring the journalists’ safety and freedom. The LTTE must also adjust its attitude toward the media, so that members of the Tamil-language press can work more safely and freely.

Lastly, the organisation would like to make a recommendation to certain Sri Lankan newspapers who sometimes exploit the country’s ethnical and political tensions at the risk of stirring up hatred.

1. FIGHTING IMPUNITY

The absence of any in-depth investigation or trial following the killings or assaults of journalists has vastly undermined the government’s credibility in terms of its efforts on behalf of press freedom. Those who committed the murders of **Myilvaganam Nimalarajan**, **Aiyathurai Nadesan**, **Rohana Kumara**, **Nadarajah Atputharajah** and **Anthony Mariyanayagam** which occurred over the last four years—and those who hired them—have never been brought to justice. Reporters without Borders has repeatedly condemned this climate of impunity. It has become urgent for the government to take action.



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In the case of Aiyathurai Nadesan—a correspondent for the Tamil-language daily *Virakesari* and the *IBC Tamil* radio service—Reporters without Borders fears that the regime is not enlisting sufficient resources to identify the perpetrators and put them on trial. Some Sri Lankan newspapers have pointed out that no minister has publicly condemned the journalist’s murder. That does not augur well for the attitude of the police in this case. On the other hand, the Tamil movements—notably the LTTE—are actively rallying around this crime, as well as the killings of other personalities from the eastern side of the island. The LTTE recently announced that «the killing of intellectuals, journalists and friends of the Tamil people is abominable (...). These actions are bound to lead the people of this island into a period of calamity and destruction.» On 26 June, the news website, *www.Tamilnet.com*, claimed that the «People saw Nadesan’s murderers in broad daylight in Batticaloa. But no one came forward to identify them because the killers are working with the security forces.»



Journalists demonstrating after Nimalarajan’s murder in 2000

In the opinion of an official of the Free Media Movement (FMM) —a Sri Lankan journalist organisation—the murders of Karuna’s opponents, particularly that of Aiyathurai Nadesan, may have been possible because of protection provided by the Sri Lanka army.

Reporters without Borders fears that the impunity enjoyed by those involved in Aiyathurai Nadesan’s death may have very gra-

ve repercussions on the country’s future.

On multiple occasions, the organisation has denounced the persistent impunity surrounding the killing of Myilvaganam Nimalarajan, a *BBC World Service* Sinhala and Tamil media correspondent in Jaffna. Despite the repeated efforts of the examining magistrate, and the occasional efforts of the police, those who ordered the crime, and carried it out, have never been tried. There is no longer any doubt that the police are either unable, or unwilling, to conduct an investigation and gather physical evidence.

In the case of **Rohana Kumara**, editor of the Sinhalese-language weekly *Satana* (“Battle”), Reporters without Borders showed in a report published last March that the government had committed a great deal of resources in order to prevent any light from being shed on the case and to protect those who ordered the crime—obviously high-ranking officials. Certain witnesses and suspects were, in turn, eliminated. The organisation remains convinced that some members of, or individuals close to, the Presidential Security Division (PSD) are implicated in this murder committed in September 1999, as well as in other attacks on journalists.

Reporters without Borders is calling for the creation of an independent Special Investigation Unit with judicial powers to reopen inquiries into crimes against journalists. The Unit could be supported by some funds provided by the international community. The organisation urges the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), the army and the Attorney General’s Office to fully co-operate so that these murders—all of which have gone unpunished—can be solved.

2. PUTTING AN END TO THREATS

In Sri Lanka, cases involving murders of journalists have almost always been preceded by direct death threats. Since early 2003, Reporters without Borders has noted a significant increase in the number of intimidations. During the election campaign, some journalists were upbraided by leaders or militants of the campaigning parties—notably the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)—which is now a member of the incumbent United People’s Alliance party.

On 3 May of this year—World Press Freedom Day—some police officers, under du-



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bious circumstances, conducted a search in the home of **D. Sivaram**, editor of the online news service *Tamilnet.com*, known for exposing abuses committed by the security forces. The police claim to have found explosives in the journalist's residence. D. Sivaram, who is also a regular contributor to the Tamil service of the *BBC World Service*, maintains that he received several threats during that same period: «I have no intention of abandoning my job of reporting the news but I am afraid of possible reprisals from paramilitary groups. The government must do its job and ensure our safety.»

Some journalists told Reporters without Borders that armed groups planned to retaliate for *Tamilnet.com's* coverage of the elections and the recent secession of the group led by Karuna.



Sivaram «Taraki» who created the news website, tamilnet.com

The authorities seem to have resumed their harassment practices against journalists or media known for their investigative reporting and outspoken criticisms. The number of journalists assaulted since Chandrika Kumaratunga took power speaks for itself. In 2000, the authorities admitted to at least 29 news professional assault cases. In 22 of them, impunity still prevails. For example, after being threatened several times and the target of a murder attempt, **Lasantha Wickramatunga** witnessed a police search of the Colombo-based offices of his newspaper, *The Sunday Leader*, on 28 March 2004.

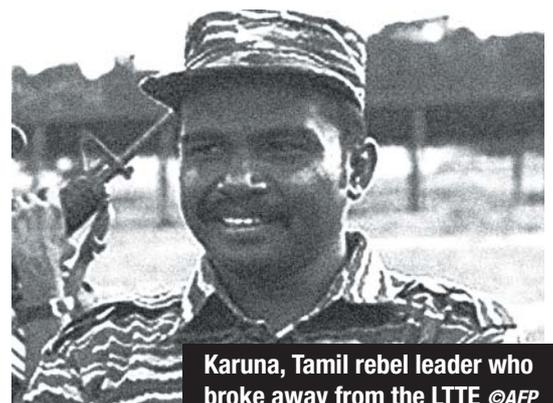
In the aftermath of Nadesan's murder, eastern Sri Lankan journalists were afraid that a new wave of violence would break out. Two correspondents in Batticaloa fled the area to go into hiding in Colombo. Both

Ramasamy Thurairatnam, a correspondent for the *Lakehouse* press group and the *Tamilnet.com* news website, and **Shanmugam Thavarajah**, who works for the daily newspaper *Thinakural*, had received ominous visits in their homes and could sense that a vice was tightening around them. Despite these threats, they had helped organise funeral arrangements for their colleague Nadesan. They claim that their lives are in danger because Tamil warlord Karuna's supporters have formed genuine death squads whose job is to eliminate LTTE officials and those who support them. Local journalist associations have expressed their deep concern. The BBC's Tamil and Sinhalese services have stopped broadcasting reports from their correspondents in eastern Sri Lanka due to fear of reprisals.

Since 25 June, **Thanthiyan Vedanayagam**, correspondent with the Tamil-language daily *Thinakural* in Batticaloa, has been in hiding. He published a report on the press conference held by one of Karuna's former supporters, who claims that she had been under army protection.

Intimidations have also been occurring in northern Sri Lanka. Last November, **Velupillai Thavachelvam** of the Tamil-language daily *Virakesari*, was taken in for questioning by a secret service officer. Before releasing him, the officer threatened him, saying: "People like you had too much freedom under the Ranil government...but now the President is in charge and we can do what we like with you." Early this year, a journalist of the Tamil-language daily *Eelanaadu* received an anonymous letter threatening his life. Written in red ink, it read: «If you don't listen to us...»

Then, on 28 March—this time in Colombo—a grenade was thrown on the home of **Renor Silva**, general manager of the broadcasting group *Asian Broadcasting Corpo-*



Karuna, Tamil rebel leader who broke away from the LTTE ©AFP



ration (ABC). A guard was wounded and several vehicles damaged during that night attack. Its purpose had likely been to intimidate the general manager, who has been defending his five FM stations against the hostility of then Media Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar. Last February, the Ministry had informed ABC that the station's licence to operate a television channel had been cancelled.

In July 2003, these tensions had induced the incumbent regime to form an Investigative Committee charged with preparing a report on press freedom in eastern and northern Sri Lanka, for the purpose of improving the journalists' working conditions. Since then, the current government appears to have forgotten that this Committee even exists.

Reporters without Borders is calling for an emergency session of the Investigative Committee created at the initiative of the Sri Lankan Minister of Defence to inquire into the attacks on journalists committed in the northern and eastern parts of the country. The organisation would like specific measures to be taken in order to ensure the safety of journalists in Batticaloa.

3. THE CEASEFIRE MONITORING AUTHORITY NEEDS GREATER POWERS

«The people of Jaffna—especially journalists—do not trust the Sri Lankan security forces. They are fully prepared to present their complaints to the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), which is recognised as a neutral force. But this Monitoring Mission has no mandate whatsoever to deal with human rights violations,» explained **Uma Rani** of the Tamil-language newspaper *Valampuri*. **S. Radayan**, the editor of the newspaper *Eelanadu* confirmed this lack of power: «We published photos of an army vehicle that had caused an accident. We received death threats written in Sinhalese. So the management decided to submit the matter to the Norwegian Monitoring Mission. But nothing happened. We went to the mission because we distrust the police.»

Since February 2002, when the government and the LTTE signed the ceasefire, the press has assumed the role of an observer in terms of the parties' compliance with this agreement. However, the Norwegian

authorities have never publicly condemned the attacks on journalists by either of the disputing parties, even though the text establishing the SLMM specifies that any violation must give rise to an inquiry and that the local media must be kept informed of the ceasefire compliance-monitoring process.



Norwegian diplomats in discussions with the LTTE

Shortly before he was murdered, Aiyathurai Nadesan had deplored the multiple ceasefire violations. In the 30 May 2004 issue of the *Sunday Virakesari*, he had written: «In the last 60 days, 20 crimes and 35 murders were committed in the district of Batticaloa.» These violent acts perpetrated by rival Tamil groups are seriously jeopardising the peace process and the journalists' work. In this instance, Aiyathurai Nadesan is thought to have lost his life because of his support of the LTTE's positions. The Tamil Tigers are also involved in various crimes, abductions and in sustaining a climate of fear.

The majority of Sri Lankan journalists interviewed by Reporters without Borders are urging that the ceasefire agreement be revised in such a way as to allow the SLMM to monitor human rights violations and more effectively protect journalists and the general civilian population.

Reporters without Borders urges the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission to consider monitoring the state of human rights as its top priority. The organisation recommends that such a task be carried out in co-operation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Sri Lankan human rights organisations.

4. ENSURING THE AUTONOMY OF THE STATE-OWNED MEDIA

Newly appointed Media Minister Mangala Samaraweera made a staggering initial impression when he publicly stated, on 15



June 2004, that the main task of the state media was to attack the state's main opposition party. As one of Chandrika Kumaratunga's close supporters, the Minister had already held the same office from 1994 to 2001. Public reactions were immediate. The FMM, a journalist association, stated: "These words violate all accepted traditions and standards in the democratic world with regard to an independent state media." Meanwhile, the European Union (EU), called for the Colombo government to act swiftly to transform the state-owned media into a public services group.

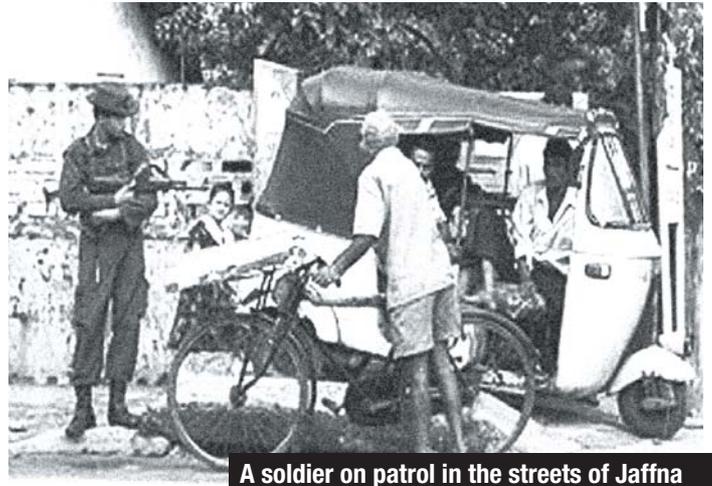
These statements do not augur well for the government's attitude toward the independence of Sri Lanka's state-owned media, which are known to be vastly exploited for political purposes. For decades, each successive regime has imposed a new management and party line explicitly endorsing the actions of the ruling party.

News coverage of the last election campaign by the state and private media was unfair. The state media, which have been controlled by President Chandrika Kumaratunga since November 2003, have extensively conveyed the ideas of her party and those of her political allies. To put an end to this abusive use of the state media, the Independent Electoral Commission even took over the country's state television and radio on 29 March 2004. In a recent report, the EU revealed that Sri Lankan state television had devoted 68% of its election coverage to the Alliance headed by Chandrika Kumaratunga.

Reporters without Borders is calling for a short-term plan to establish state media groups that will operate independently of the political authorities. The organisation would like the Media Minister to recant his recent statement about the role of the state-controlled media.

5. PREVENTING THE VIOLATIONS COMMITTED BY THE SECURITY FORCES

«As long as the occupying army's rifles are pointed at the population and are not being used to defend the people, there will be no free press," **S. Radhayan**, director of the Tamil daily *Eelanadu*, told Reporters without Borders. There have been constant acts of violence and tensions between the press and the security forces ever since the Sri Lanka army recaptured the Jaffna Peninsula in 1996. Prior to the army, Indian troops and the LTTE had also committed press freedom violations as they passed through the city of Jaffna. «During the war, it was difficult to gather and publish news. Security forces and Tamil paramilitary groups would accuse us of supporting the Tigers. The LTTE suspected us of supporting the army.» asserted **K. Mailnadan**, founder of *Uthayan*, Jaffna's most popular daily.



A soldier on patrol in the streets of Jaffna

Most of the journalists admit that the army's attitude has obviously improved, but some stressed that tensions are often related to officers' personalities. **Velupillai Thavachelvam**, President of the Jaffna Journalists' Association, reported that in October 2003, army officers failed to give a series of incidents the attention they deserved. When they came forward to express their outrage over the assault by police of four reporters—including **K. Ithayapavan** of the daily *Valampuri*—representatives were told by an officer that journalists who are surrounded by a hostile crowd should "assume the consequences of any actions taken by



the police.» At the same meeting, the officer reasserted that members of the press were not allowed to photograph members of the security forces. Several news photographers from eastern and northern Sri Lanka complained to Reporters without Borders about the hostility shown to them by the military, police and paramilitary personnel.

Many Tamil journalists object to being treated differently than their Sinhalese colleagues. In January 2004, Ven. Udagama Sri Buddharakkhitha Thero, one of the senior Buddhist leaders of Sri Lanka, visited the city of Jaffna. The security forces forbade Tamil journalists—who constituted the majority of the city's journalists—to use cameras or cell phones to cover the arrival of the religious dignitary. Yet their Sinhalese colleagues travelling with the monks were under no such restriction. When **Velupillai Thavachelvam** of the newspaper *Virakesari* attempted to follow the Sinhalese journalists, Major D. M. Dissanayaka threatened his life: «If you come any closer, I'll kill you.» The army explained that the officer had merely tried to prevent the journalists from filming the event. Velupillai Thavachelvam had already been wounded in December 2003 by a grenade thrown by a policeman in Nelliady (near Jaffna). The circumstances surrounding this assault are still unknown.

This distrust is also evident in Tamil-speaking journalists' inability to access military information. In the Jaffna Peninsula, the army continues to impose the same drastic restrictions on civilians—particularly journalists—concerning the High-Security Zone (HSZ) which covers almost one-third of the region. Warning signs at the entrance of the HSZs inform that the soldiers will shoot first and question later. On several occasions, members of the press were denied access to public facilities located within this zone, such as the cancer hospital. «The only information we can obtain on what is happening in the military zone comes from the rare civilians who live there, and even they are afraid of reprisals if they were to tell anyone,” explained **Saravanabhavan**, director of the *Uthayan*, a Jaffna-based daily.

On the other hand, the army recently began to offer translation of its press releases into Tamil, thereby facilitating the work of Tamil journalists, very few of whom can read Sinhalese.

Reporters without Borders urged the Sri Lanka army and police to conduct internal investigations and take disciplinary action whenever members of the security forces threaten, bring in for questioning, or assault journalists while they are simply doing their jobs. The organisation would also like the army to regularly inform the press of any operations in progress and to provide access to civilian facilities in the HSZs.

6. THE LTTE MUST ACCEPT PLURALISM AND CRITICISM

The highly secretive Velupillai Prabhakaran has headed the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) movement since its creation in 1976. The LTTE, a political and military organisation, is initially took to arms to create a separate state for Sri Lanka's Tamil population. Since 2002, the LTTE has been taking a softer line and campaigning for greater autonomy within the Sri Lankan state. Popular with the Tamil community inside the country as well as abroad, the LTTE nonetheless remains an intolerant armed group that has eliminated dozens of Tamil opponents, including some journalists. Although its political wing leader, SP Tamilselvam, told Reporters without Borders that «press freedom was respected» in Sri Lankan territories controlled by the LTTE, the threat is no less real. LTTE's leadership often has an outdated notion of journalistic practices. According to our information, SP Tamilselvam is expecting Tamil journalists to ask questions only about topics on the agenda when foreign delegations visit with LTTE officials in the Vanni. Tamilselvam informed Reporters without Borders that this information was inaccurate: “They are free to ask any questions as long as time permits.»



A meeting between journalists and LTTE officials

Since the signing of the ceasefire agreement, information has circulated more



freely in the eastern and northern parts of the country. Tamil-language newspapers are circulating more or less freely, and LTTE's publications are being distributed without any major impediment within the zones under government control.

However, the LTTE has been regularly attacking the Tamil-language weekly *Thinamurasu*, which has close ties with another armed group, the Eelam People's Democratic Party, the EPDP. In August 2003, armed members of the LTTE burned thousands of copies of the weekly in the eastern part of the island. The weekly, which has one of the largest circulations of the Tamil-language press, regularly exposes human rights violations—especially executions and abductions—committed by the LTTE. T. **Baskaran**, *Thinamurasu's* editor, had informed Reporters without Borders at the time that his newspaper was “the only Tamil-language paper to report human rights violations (...) We must pay the price of our independence, because the LTTE expects all Tamil news media to say nothing about its violence. Those who don't obey are harassed.” The Norwegian mediators intervened in this matter, but failed to sustainably modify LTTE's position.



Prabhakaran, LTTE's leader, signs the ceasefire agreement

Some Muslim journalists confirmed the risk taken by anyone openly critical of LTTE's party line. According to **M. P. M. Azar**, «To cover the Tamil Tigers' activities is a risky business for journalists in the provinces. So we cannot write anything openly critical of the LTTE. To survive, we have to devote some space to them in our newspaper.» A reporter with the Muslim community newspaper *Navamani* claimed that the LTTE prevented Sinhalese and Muslim journalists from entering one of their camps near Sampur (in eastern Sri Lanka), while allowing Tamil journalists. When Reporters without Borders asked him to elaborate on this in-

cident, SP Tamilselvam replied that he was going to check into this information.

Some journalists interviewed by Reporters without Borders denied that LTTE had any sort of stranglehold on Tamil journalists. **N. Vidyadharan**, former director of the Jaffna daily *Uthayan*, explained: «We conducted several exclusive interviews with LTTE's leaders. They never insisted that we should address any particular subject. Sometimes the LTTE wants the media to cover their activities. But that's normal, because our Tamil readers want to know what the Tamil Tigers are doing.”

Recently, a Tamil journalist confided to Reporters without Borders: «It isn't by choice that some journalists are praising Prabhakaran. A large number of them do it out of fear and that's why the majority of the Tamil media don't mention the human rights violations committed by the LTTE.» Likewise, Nadesan had explained to Reporters without Borders that «sometimes we must keep silent in matters involving the LTTE.” Thought to have close ties to the Tamil Tigers, Nadesan explained that all Tamil journalists must practice self-censorship as far as the LTTE is concerned.

The ceasefire also paved the way for the Tamil Tigers to consolidate their media presence on the island. In January 2003, the LTTE obtained a licence to operate a FM radio station in the northern Jaffna Peninsula. The government in Colombo allowed the station to acquire two new transmitters.

Reporters without Borders is urging LTTE's political leaders to fully guarantee the exercise of press freedom in the zones under its control and to be more accessible to journalists. The organisation is demanding an end to the threats and harassment targeting media critical of LTTE's actions.

7. PROTECTING THE RIGHT OF MUSLIMS TO PRESS FREEDOM

Journalists of the Muslim persuasion, speaking in Tamil, are demanding greater recognition. «We want Tamil-language media, not Tamil media,» a Muslim journalist from Batticaloa explained to Reporters without Borders. The recent incidents revealing the strained relations between the Tamil and Muslim communities have persuaded journalists to formulate more radical demands.



They are openly blaming the LTTE for marginalising and even oppressing them. The Muslim community press is opposed to the plan for self-determination proposed by the LTTE in November 2003. «Our rights will be restricted—freedom of speech in particular,” one Muslim journalist maintained.

In 1996, after having worked forty years for the Tamil-language press, **M. P. M. Azar** launched the weekly publication *Navamani* for the Muslim community of eastern Sri Lanka. «We are still suffering, because our rights are not yet recognised in the ceasefire agreement. It is the duty of Muslim journalists to defend this right,” he asserted. With a distribution of several thousand copies, the Tamil-language magazine has had to contend with violent reactions. In December 2003, the magazine offices were doused with chemicals and most of the equipment was burned. The police have not yet identified the perpetrators.

Mohamed Fowzer, director of the newspaper *Muslim Kural* (“The Voice of Muslims”), also claims to be a defender of Muslim interests. «The Tamil and Sinhalese newspapers are oblivious to Muslim expectations. Our newspaper wants to do something about this. We are engaged in a media war against the Tamil media,» contended Mohamed Fowzer.

As of 2003, the threats against some Muslim journalists became more insistent. The *Muslim Kural* correspondent in the Puttalam district received a death threat late that year and went into hiding in Colombo. A few weeks later, the editorial staff also received anonymous death threats: «We are going to kill you. How can you say that about our leader?» quoted the correspondent, reacting to an editorial criticising an agreement between the head of the LTTE and a leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress. *Muslim Kural*'s director also reported to Reporters without Borders that some of his newspaper vendors had been assaulted in Batticaloa by LTTE militants.

Reporters without Borders is asking the Sri Lankan government, the Tamil media owners and international community to create conditions which will foster the development of media capable of adequately representing the Muslim minority.

8. ENSURING THE SAFETY AND INDEPENDENCE OF PROVINCE-BASED CORRESPONDENTS

«The majority of journalists based in the provinces—particularly in the eastern part of the country—need to work at two jobs, because it is virtually impossible to live on the salary paid by the national media,” explained **Shan Thavarajah**, General Secretary of the Eastern Sri Lankan Journalists’ Association. Media owners have been alerted to this situation, which is jeopardising the correspondents’ independence. Nadesan, for example, was also an officer in the tax department.

Several correspondents in the provinces notified Reporters without Borders of the threats made against them after an article which they had written, and which was published in their newspaper under their byline, had first been modified by the editorial staff in Colombo. «Our stories are rectified, thereby jeopardising not only our credibility, but our safety,» clarified one correspondent with a Tamil newspaper in the capital.

The journalists interviewed also brought to Reporters without Borders’ attention the dangers to peace and professional credibility posed by the differences in content from one publication language to another. Indeed, the Sri Lanka media publish in three languages: Sinhalese, Tamil and English. Very few press groups offer an edition of the same publication in all three languages. The governmental group *Lakehouse*, and the LTTE, each publish versions of their daily papers in Sinhalese and in Tamil.

Reporters without Borders urges the Sri Lankan government, press owners and the international community to actively lend their support to correspondents based in the provinces, especially in northern and eastern Sri Lanka. The organisation is requesting that a training programme be implemented for these journalists, whose work is essential as part of the ceasefire agreement. Reporters without Borders also asks state and private media owners to respect journalists’ and other media workers’ right to associate and to form trade unions.



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9. PUTTING A STOP TO HATE-MONGERING IN THE MEDIA

Reporters without Borders deeply regrets that some privately owned and state-owned media have been fostering a dialogue of hatred between the various communities.

The organisation noted the publication of hate-mongering statements in some Sinhalese newspapers. During the last election campaign, certain accounts of meetings held by the extremist Buddhist clergy party, Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU)—particularly those featured in the *Lankadeepa* and *Divaina* dailies—thus appeared without warning, despite the fact that they contained racist slurs against both the Tamils and the Muslims.

Stereotypes and manipulation also frequently occur in press coverage of the strained relations between Muslims and Tamils. In June 2002, communal riots in the eastern district of Muttur had split the two communities apart. The Muslim newspapers claimed that the LTTE had instigated the riots. The Tamil media, notably the Internet website *Tamilnet.com*, accused an unknown Muslim organisation—Ousama Group—of having orchestrated these acts of violence. Furthermore, LTTE members threatened the correspondent of the Muslim community newspaper, *Navamani*. A crowd attacked the residence of **P. Sathsivanandam**, correspondent of the Tamil newspaper, *Virakesari*, and threatened to kill him. A rumour had been spreading that some Tamils had raped a Muslim woman. Despite police intervention, the journalist lost his professional equipment. On 23 June of this year, P. Sathsivanandam's home was again raided by a group of unidentified vandals after he presented a report on the Tamil-language *BBC World Service* about the tension between the Muslims and Tamils in Muttur. Since that date, the journalist and his family have been in hiding, for fear of additional reprisals.

Unfortunately, the journalistic community has been experiencing the strong ethnic component of the Sri Lankan press as a grim necessity. In a report published in 2003, Sanjana Hattotuwa of the Centre for Policy Alternatives wrote: «Many newspaper staffs perceive ethnicity as immutable and innate (...) The media in Sri Lanka often exacerbate existing communal and eth-

nic tensions by playing on the nationalist and religious emotions of the people.»

Reporters without Borders is calling for the Press Complaints Commission, set up in February 2003, to be endowed with investigative and punitive powers that can be applied against media which transmit hate messages. The organisation is asking publishers and editors-in-chief to operate according to international journalism code of ethics and to draw up a national code of ethics with the consensus of all journalists' organisations, rejecting any incitement to violence.

