

# Media Monitor

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2006 May - June



## Looking at Ourselves

Eighty seven per cent (87%) of Sri Lankan journalists believe that the Sri Lankan media is failing to provide accurate, balanced and fair information. Eighty per cent (80%) of Sri Lankan journalists believe that the media is biased toward one ethnic group or another.

More than 50% of stories in Sri Lanka are based only on one source.

Sinhala and Tamil newspapers use only selected sources for information.

The Sinhala and Tamil press is selective in sources used.

And 80% of journalists think their sources are not accurate or reliable. Only half of Sri Lanka's journalists are aware of the Code of Ethics. Only 11% of them have a copy of the Code of Ethics. Less than half of them have received training in ethics.

These figures and information are from a survey we conducted last year. We conducted a similar survey this year too. The results were again similar.

In this survey we asked the journalists, what they thought were the commonest of all news that is published. They said, in the order of most published news category, they are accidents, crime, public needs and what is said by political personalities. When asked, if they were to decide the order of news categories and how it would be, their order was, public needs first and then the peace initiative/process, with corruption and fraud coming thereafter.

When asked why there was a dearth of public service news reports, the answer was political pressure, business interests, state- and private-sector ownership issues, and then editorial decisions.

We did such a survey with editors too. According to them, the present news agenda starts from public needs and runs down as public needs, crime, corruption and fraud, accidents and others.

If the editors themselves were to decide the order of news categories, their order of importance would be public needs, the peace process, corruption and fraud and then accidents, they said.

They also said their editorial independence was restricted by institutional procedures, lack of resources, business interests and political pressure. According to them, the reason for the decline in public-service news was political needs, commercialization and state- and private-sector ownership issues.

In short, our reflection is as follows.

- We are not very much interested in our own professional standards.
- Within our media, there is no interest in public-service reporting that provides a voice to the voiceless, for diverse views and search for solutions.
- We do not have editorial independence. If there is editorial independence, public-service interest reporting would be given importance.
- Reasons for the above are seen as political and business interests and also institutional limitations.
- But, it was accepted that this situation should change. It was also accepted that the state media should first change to public service media.

Challenges and targets we face are clear. The next step is to collectively draft a path in facing the challenges and achieving the targets.

## Towards Public Service Media



Voices of Reconciliation

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மீள் நல்லிணக்கத்திற்கான குரல்





# CONTENTS

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- 4 Promoting Gender Equality in the News Room - some challenge  
Jacqueline Park

- 6 Killing of Students in Trincomalee and Our News  
Asoka Jayawardane

- 8 How a Sinhala Daily Covered the Killings of Trinco Students  
Rajith Keerthi  
Tennakoon

- 11 Training Needed- for Ethical Reporting  
Upali Tennakoon



- 12 There's No Media without Ethics  
Ariyananda  
Dombagahawatte

- 13 Do You Want Credibility as a Journalist?  
Johan Romare

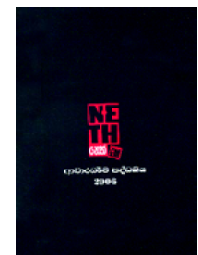
- 14 Sivaram personal notes from the fatel day



- 16 National Languages, News Media and Peace  
Sunanda Deshapriya

- 18 What Should Journalists Do?  
Christopher Warren

- 20 Unethical Commercial Ads That Promote Racketeers  
Jayantha Gamage



- 21 Sri Lankan Women Journalists Call for Gender Equity in Media  
Laxmi Murthy

- 23 Change Begins with You  
Mike Dobbie

- 26 Government Radio and the Tamil People  
K. Sivathambi

- 10, 29, 30 Other Side  
Asoka Jayawardane



# Promoting Gender Equality in the News Room - some challenges

Jacqueline Park



Not so long ago, journalism was an almost exclusively male profession. Female journalists were the exception and women were discouraged to enter journalism.

Today more and more women are employed as journalists. In some countries, women make up the majority of working journalists.

Despite the increasing number of women in the profession, there is a long battle ahead for women before their values and voices are equally represented in the media.

Around the world, there continues to be a disproportionate number of men in decision-making roles within news organizations.

There have been many improvements achieved by and for women in journalism, but many problems remain as yet.

Working Party, which was first established in 1992, decided that in order for the IFJ to adopt a realistic and effective equality working programme a survey of the current conditions of women journalists was needed.

Powerpoint – slides on women in Journalism and in the unions

A questionnaire was sent to IFJ member unions, which addressed three key areas:

1) *Statistics: Women in journalism and women in the union.*

2) *Equal Pay: Law and practice.*

3) *Portrayal of Women: An issue for the union.*

Answers were received from 39 countries representing almost 70% of IFJ members and 37% of the countries represented in the IFJ at that time.

Even though the sample is limited, the responses came from all regions and

Women journalists continue to be denied opportunities to cover some areas, particularly what are seen as traditionally male topic areas like sports, politics and defence.

Journalists' unions at national, regional and global levels have a responsibility to address these inequities.

Women journalists are aware that because their movement has been successful in many areas there is the danger that journalists' unions may feel that enough has been done to ensure equality in media even though inequities still remain. For journalists' organizations to improve the conditions for women journalists, they often have to reform their own structures – to ensure female

representation in the union's policy-making and governing bodies.

Some have adopted equality policies aimed at improving the status of women in the profession and in the union.

The International Federation of Journalists' (IFJ's) gender equity

this fact gives an indication of the status of women journalists the world over.

The consequence of this imbalance at the senior professional level is that women's values continue to be under-represented. Women's voices are limited.

On the other hand, an increase in the presence of women in newsrooms, and even in decision-making positions, does not guarantee that women will have more visibility in reports, that representation of women will be less stereotyped or, less still, that reports will promote gender equality.

The media cannot hope to present the truth to readers, viewers and listeners if women are sidelined as contributors. This is not only with regard to journalists, but also to the opinions that fill our newspapers.

Male professionals are referred to in media reports far more frequently than female professionals.

Women need to provide valuable, educated contributions to the debates in their society. We all need to seriously think about how to achieve this.



Women journalists continue to be denied opportunities to cover some areas, particularly what are seen as traditionally male topic areas like sports, politics and defence. This means that often women's perspectives in this area are missed.

Female journalists are more often likely to be ghettoised in traditional women's beats.

We need to find ways to overcome the entrenched male value system that dominates the profession.

Equal access to promotion, employment and assignments and reporting areas is the hot-button issue for women journalists the world over.

Promotions should not be based on gender, but on experience, productivity, capability and working achievement.

Advertising all available positions, rather than relying on word-of-mouth information, ensures that women will have access to promotions that are often publicised only in male circles and often informally.

men, we will never break into the boys' club.

We also need to look at keeping women in the media as it seems too many are leaving the profession disappointed. Virtually everywhere, women are leaving news organizations because they feel the road to the top is blocked by male establishments, with outdated ideas about the news, who make it and how it should be presented.

Women are also leaving because of salary differences, sexual harassment, sexist and stereotyped attitudes and fewer opportunities for promotion. According to a study conducted by my union in Australia, Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (1996), twenty-three per cent of women journalists interviewed stated that they had left their jobs due to discrimination.

Nearly forty-five per cent of women journalists interviewed by the American Press Institute and the Pew Center for Civic Journalism (2002) expected to be offered a job in another

We need access to child-care, flexible hours or part-time work, so we can better manage the competing demands of career and family.

Our choice to have children should not be an obstacle in the media workforce. Maternity and paternity leave, of an appropriate duration, is essential for job security regardless of family choices.

So where do we go for change?

To really improve gender equality we need the support of our unions to advocate such change. We need the support of all our colleagues at work, men and women, to campaign for change.

Unions and journalists' collectives are a valuable mechanism for change.

They are leaving not only because of lack of promotion but also because workplace policies don't accommodate family commitments and responsibilities.



Introducing transparent interview and selection procedures would ensure a fair promotions system.

Ensuring that both genders are present on selection panels ensures that there is more diverse perspectives on what are desirable skills and attributes when selecting candidates. Remember, like selects like. And if men keep selecting men to replace other

communications medium or leave the industry for good.

They are leaving not only because of lack of promotion but also because workplace policies don't accommodate family commitments and responsibilities.

We need our workplaces to understand our needs and family responsibilities, and to assist us, not impede us.

Indeed, our unions have a responsibility to address gender issues and take action to promote women's rights in the media workplace.

And we, as women, need to be active in the union collectives. We need to be there when the decisions are made; we need to make sure our agenda for gender equality is a central part of the union agenda. We need to be sure that when our union negotiators sit down with management that they are going to push for the things we care about.

Our unions need to be open to women – and to do this they must also consider their internal policies. If unions can establish gender equality internally, within the organization, it is far more



*Jacqueline Park,  
Asia-Pacific Regional Director,  
the International Federation of Journalists and  
Editor of the Walkley Magazine.*

# Killing of Students in Trincomalee and Our News

There were reports to say five youth were killed by an explosion in the city of **Trincomalee**, on 02<sup>nd</sup> January, 2006 around 07.50 in the night, near the Gandhi roundabout in close to the beach. A few more youth were seriously injured too.

All of them were Tamil youth and on the same day it was known they were students. On the following day, it was revealed at the medical inquest that they had died of gunshot injuries to their heads.

Colombo-based Tamil newspapers carried headlines the following morning to say the students had been killed by shooting in their heads. But the Colombo Sinhala and English media quoted security sources to report that the students died of a grenade explosion, and that they were carrying it when it exploded.

Sinhala media showed that when reporting these incidents, ethnic bias takes priority instead of media professionalism and media ethics. A short account on how all media in Colombo reported this incident is given separately.

## A brief review

by Asoka Jayawardane

This is how that news was reported in the Sinhala print media on 3<sup>rd</sup> January.

**Divaina** – lead story; Six tigers die from a bomb explosion while on the way to attack the army

**Lankadeepa** – lead story; Five students in Trincomalee who tried to plant a bomb die from an explosion

**Lakbima** – lead story; Five tigers die when the bomb they brought to attack the army exploded

**Dinamina** – front page, single column news; Five die of an explosion in Trincomalee

**Divaina** and **Lakbima** had no hesitation in making the youth “tigers”. **Divaina**, **Lakbima** and **Lankadeepa** reported the story of the bomb the youth were supposed to have carried, in three different ways. Except for the government-controlled **Dinamina**, all other newspapers reported the youth died due to the explosion from the bomb they carried.

The English newspapers of the Wijeya and Upali Groups, also carried the same news interpretations, with their own styles.

**Dinamina** said it was not revealed whether the bomb that exploded was carried by them or was thrown at them. It was this news that should have been published by any news editor, who believed the media has to carry the truth and nothing else.

The Tamil newspapers reported the news as follows.

**Veerakesari** and **Sudar Oli** reported the deaths were due to shooting. They also used witnesses to report the Army had shot at the youth. First, a group in a three-wheeler that passed that way had thrown a bomb and then the Army had fired, the reports said.

The government-controlled **Thinakaran** provided a 02 inch news story to say five people had died of a bomb blast in Trincomalee. No reason was given. These deaths had no value for this newspaper to gain more than 02 inches.

Neither **Divaina** nor **Lakbima** reported they were students. All newspaper offices knew they were students by then. **Divaina** and **Lakbima** hid that news from the public. Why? That is a question we must ask ourselves.

How savage is it to report that the students who were shot dead had died due to a bomb they carried exploding? If that had happened in the South, how would these newspapers have reported the incident?

All Sinhala newspapers restricted their source of information to the Police and the Army. None of them had approached the people to gather more information.

Can a news report based on information provided by the Police, “the most corrupt institute” in Sri Lanka as perceived by the people, have credibility?

The following day, the Judicial Medical Officer (JMO) who conducted the medical inquest, decided the deaths were due to shooting. That confirmed the information provided by the people, the previous day.

If there was any editor who respected his own profession, s/he would have published the JMO’s verdict in his (her) report the next day and rectified the mistake done on the previous day. That is because the media is bound to provide the people with true and correct information. That is the duty of the media.





# How a Sinhala Daily Covered the Killings of Trinco Students

**Rajith Keerthi Tennakoon**

*Lakbima - 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 2005*

Filed by Tissa Raveendra Perera/Mangalanath Liyanarachchi

Headline - Five tigers die when the bomb they brought to attack the army exploded. Two critically injured, in hospital  
The contents of the report:

- Two were injured and five tigers killed, when a bomb they brought to attack a bus that carried navy personnel returning to the camp after duties, exploded
- Police have found another hand bomb
- When the police arrived, 07 were fallen at the place of the incident. They had been immediately hospitalized
- The bus carrying navy personnel was scheduled to pass that place at 08.00 p.m.
- The bomb that exploded was a hand bomb or one that had been improvised as a high explosive bomb

Source - SP Trincomalee, Kapila Jayasekera

*Lakbima - 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2005*

Headline - Tigers launch hartal in Trincomalee. Civil life curtailed. Tamil shops and schools closed. Tensed atmosphere in town.

The contents of the report:

- LTTE has declared a hartal in the name of the five dead tigers
- Normal life has come to a standstill
- Hartal was launched accusing the security forces of killing the five tigers
- Tamil shops and Tamil schools were closed
- With a tensed atmosphere, Sinhala parents had come to schools and taken away their children
- Although no rioting was reported, riot squads were positioned to strengthen security
- A navy bunker was attacked and set on fire. Two other abandoned bunkers were also set on fire
- Names of those who died and injured given
- Three of the dead were university students and security sources say they would have been trained to attack the security forces. Military spokesperson Brigadier Prasad Samarasinghe says although the LTTE is trying to pass the responsibility to the security forces, the security forces don't indulge in such low tactics
- The bodies were in the hospital and Tamil people were seen in a boisterous mood. Among them were relations of the dead and tiger activists

Source - SP Trincomalee, Kapila Jayasekera, Military spokesperson and "security sources".

**Specialities, shortcomings, violations of ethics and positive features of Lakbima coverage.**

*Lakbima (Jan 03<sup>rd</sup>)*

- (Target) "Bus carrying navy personnel after duty" - "tiger cadres" - "another bomb with the dead youth" - "A navy bus scheduled to pass this place" - "the hand bomb that exploded being one that was improvised as a heavy explosive bomb" are all comments without any basic qualifications.
- The statement that there was a navy bus scheduled to pass the place, which was denied by the Military spokesperson, Clearly, the statement did not mention a source.
- As there is very little probability of a hand bomb killing 05 persons immediately, the phrase "improvised as a heavy explosive bomb" is just an addition.
- Although it was known the youth were students, that fact had been deliberately dropped from the news item.
- The dead youth had been termed as "tigers" without any base.
- While only one party to the conflict, the police, had been quoted, other sources were fictitious.

*Lakbima (Jan 04<sup>th</sup>)*

- "Tiger cadres who died" - "Shops and institutes belonging to Tamil people" - "Parents came and took away children who came to the Sinhala schools" - "LTTE would have trained them to attack security forces" - "Bomb they carried had exploded" - "among the restless crowd were relations of victims and tiger activists" were all slapped in without any proof or evidence
- Nowhere in the report is mentioned that according to the Medical Inquest, students had died from gunshot injuries in the head.
- The word "students" is only used once in the report. That too in the part where the report says they have been trained by the Tigers. All such inclusions have no source of information and are very sensationally written.
- The report says, "Tamil shops and institutes have been closed due to the hartal". The implied message is that Sinhala and Muslim schools and shops had remained open. This is a false assumption.
- The report then says, Sinhala parents came and took away their children as the situation was unruly. This had been included to substantiate the earlier claim that only Tamil schools were closed which claim itself is false.
- In an attempt to cover the fact that the students had died of shooting in the head, the news report repeated SP Kapila Jayasekera's quote that the deaths were due to the explosion of the bomb which they carried.

**A comparison of the Lakbima coverage in relation to the incident as a whole**

- From among all Sinhala, Tamil and English reports on the incident, **Lakbima** carries the most number of unqualified news snippets, with no proper sources of information.



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*Lakbima - 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 2005*

*Five tigers die when the bomb they brought to attack the army exploded. Two critically injured, in hospital*

- The Editor/reporter ignores the fact that even the Army spokesperson denies a navy bus was to pass the place of the incident at that time. The inclusion of the news about the “navy bus” without any news source confirming it could therefore be a myth.
- The news reports do not provide any insight as to how the 05 youth who died were identified as “tiger members”. But the “tiger” label had been securely fixed on them.
- While all other newspapers identified the explosion as due to a hand bomb or grenade, Lakkbima alone mentioned about an “improvised high explosive bomb”. The phrase “improvised high explosive bomb” is rarely used in defence reporting and this perhaps could be the first time it was used. The most probable assumption is that the Lakkbima editorial coined such a phrase to substantiate the news, as it would never be believed a hand bomb could kill 05 persons, injuring 02 others.
- The restless, tensed situation that prevailed in the Trincomalee town on the following day, was reported as a “hartal declared by the LTTE for tiger youth who died”.
- The report implies that it was only Tamil people who joined the hartal and the Sinhala and Muslim people were thereby inconvenienced.
- Lakkbima is the only newspaper that did not acknowledge the fact that the youth who died were students.
- Lakkbima is the only newspaper that says 02 university students were trained by the LTTE. It is included more as a comment by the editorial.
- News on the situation that prevailed at the time of the inquest is reported with the statement “the behaviour of the relations of victims and LTTE activists was unruly” to justify the claims made in the Lakkbima coverage of the incident.

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*Lakbima - 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2005:*

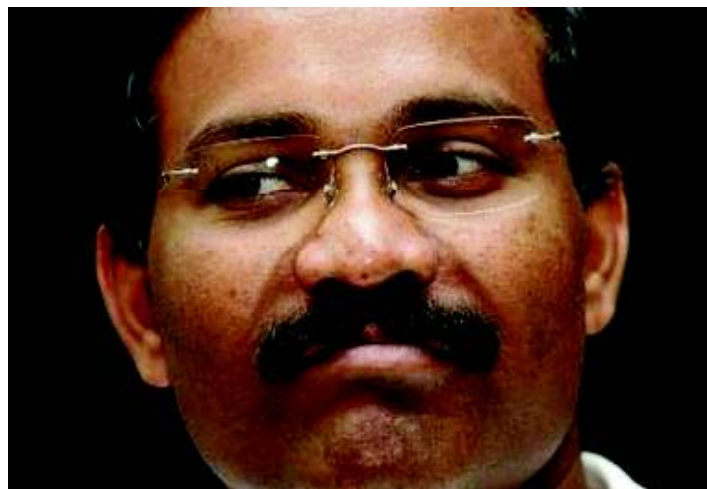
*Tigers launch hartal in Trincomalee. Civil life curtailed. Tamil shops and schools closed. Tensed atmosphere in town.*

- Lakkbima avoided any mention of the medical inquest into the deaths. This is a clear violation of the right of the reader to know the truth and details of information. It is impossible to assume that a newspaper, which had access to information regarding the atmosphere at the place where the medical inquest on the deaths was held, had no access to the verdict of the inquest.

It only proves the newspaper had intentionally withheld all important information relevant to the incident from the readers.

# Death of Thamir Selvam and Defence News Sources

Asoka Jayawardane



Anuruddha Lokuhapuarachchi

**H**ow should journalists report a war? Should it depend on a single source? Should it be only one contending party? Or should both parties be used? Should independent sources be used too? In fact, good journalism uses all such sources for its coverage of war.

In a situation where such sources are not available, what could journalists do? Should they restrict themselves to information from government sources or the LTTE and present sketchy information as truth, unearthed by them?

Let us study this news. On 21<sup>st</sup> morning, a heavy blast was heard from a place in Mannar under LTTE control. The government security sources said it was from a bomb laid for a convoy of vehicles that was carrying a leader. They also said, it is suspected LTTE political section head Thamir

While covering this news the Lankadeepa newspaper created a headline story that suggested the death of Thamir Selvam as confirmed. This news story said 18 LTTE cadres along with 02 leaders had been confirmed dead.

Lakbima said an LTTE convoy was attacked, and added that according to information available 27 including tiger leaders had died. Accordingly, there had been not only a heavy explosion, but also an attack.

Divayina said – 17 Wanni Tigers had died from a heavy bomb blast. Unofficial reports indicate Thamir Selvam had died in the blast, it said. The implied news is that, the death of Thamir Selvam is certain. On the day following the incident, which is the day prior to the report, TV news showed Thamir Selvam walking along with Anton

The state-owned Dinamina carried an essay on Thamir Selvam's profile in its front page. This too implied that Thamir Selvam was dead. Both TV channels owned by the state carried the death of Thamir Selvam as their main news story.

Selvam was in the convoy. The security sources informed those journalists who keep contact with them that the bomb was to target Thamir Selvam.

No newspaper queried as to how the security sources came to know the details.

The news that Thamir Selvam had died from the explosion, spread like wild fire, based on this information that had no witnesses, was not confirmed and was only speculative. Most Sunday (22<sup>nd</sup>) newspapers could not carry this news. Therefore, the newspapers had one whole day to clarify the information and carry it on Monday. On the same day, the LTTE had denied the news.

In any war, the warring factions organize misinformation flows. In trying to get news across as soon as possible, journalists should be careful not to get caught in such misinformation. One step is to cross-check with the opposing party. And still, if the news has to be carried, it could be limited to confirmed facts.

Balasingham. Yet the Divayina defence writer opted to maintain that Thamir Selvam had died.

The state-owned Dinamina carried an essay on Thamir Selvam's profile on its front page. This too implied that Thamir Selvam was dead. Both TV channels owned by the state carried the death of Thamir Selvam as their main news story.

Just like Prabhakaran who walked back to life after the media in the South killed him with the Tsunami, Thamir Selvam too walked back to life.

Wouldn't the editors who fabricate such news stories feel sorry about themselves, even if they don't feel sorry about readers who get fooled by their stories?



# Training Needed for Ethical Reporting

Upali Tennakoon

**Are you satisfied with the way the media Code of Ethics, introduced by the Editors' Guild, is being practised within media institutes?**

This Code of Ethics was introduced by both the Editors' Guild and the Press Complaints Commission. The Press Complaints Commission follows violations of this Code of Ethics in its workings. Most Editors are familiar with this Code of Ethics. Also, copies of this have been given to all media institutes. At the Editors' Guild, no follow-up has been done to find out how journalists have been influenced by this. Publicity given to the Code of Ethics by other media institutes has generated an interest in the Code of Ethics among journalists.

Governments, politicians and political parties come and go. Journalists should not go behind them as stooges. They have to be very careful in their work about state security and people's safety. For all that, the media should have a Code of Ethics.

**Provincial journalists claim that ethics are violated at times by those in media institutes and therefore they should be given a training. How do you react to this, as the Editors' Guild?**

Provincial journalists have at times told me about that. There are provincial journalists who work according to the Code of Ethics. But most look only for the news value. They just write and send what they have written to the main office.

Governments, politicians and political parties come and go. Journalists should not go behind them as stooges. They have to be very careful in their work about state security and people's safety. For all that, the media should have a Code of Ethics.

There is a suggestion that the Editors' Guild should amend the Code of Ethics every year. The Editors' Guild is planning to appoint a Committee to study what needs to be included anew in the Code of Ethics and then take them for discussion.

All in all, there are journalists who are interested in and work according to this Code. There are also those who think a Code of Ethics is not necessary. All of them need attention. It is within that context that one could be satisfied with the practice of the Code of Ethics.

**Do you think the media does not necessarily need a Code of Ethics?**

How a Code of Ethics for the media is practised depends on the interest paid by journalists. Yet, any profession should have a Code of Ethics especially the media. Our media works for the country, for the people. For such work, a Code of Ethics is absolutely necessary.

Now with this national issue in our country, there is also a terrorist problem. There are people's aspirations. Peace has to be promoted. So, journalists have to work very carefully.

Competition among newspapers is also a factor. The editorial at the main office should also look into the reports of provincial journalists. It is important that they are edited according to the code. Honestly, we have to strive to work according to the code and that needs training. Then not only the readers but also provincial journalists and editorial staff would develop credibility with the newspaper. That is important.

**During a discussion between the FMM and the Press Complaint Commission, members of the Commission noted that editors generally don't like to carry corrections. Is this true?**

That situation has arisen at times. But often editors have published Press Complaints Commission decisions. The issue is about publishing a summary with the statement instead of carrying the whole statement. But the Press Complaints Commission should take the responsibility for getting their decisions published. These could actually be settled through negotiations with newspapers and that's important.

**Isn't there a discussion within the Editors' Guild, when their own Code of Ethics is being violated?**

Attention is being paid to improving the skills of journalists, apart from amending the Code of Ethics. Such a programme is already being carried out through the Press Institute. The Editors' Guild expects to remove obstacles that hinder work in an independent atmosphere and also to provide journalists with training on, and an understanding about, the Media Code of Ethics.



*Upali Tennakoon,  
the President of the Editors' Guild and the  
Editor of Rivira newspaper,  
interviewed by Athula Vithange.*

# There's No Media without Ethics

Ariyananda Dombagahawatte

**As an editor, do you think the media should have a code of ethics?**

My stand is that the media should have a code of ethics. For any society, there has to be a code of ethics. If there are no codes of ethics, the media will not survive. But that should be to keep the media moving forward and not to turn it round. We know that in the past society was disturbed by the media on many issues, as it did not have a code of ethics. In a war situation, our journalists did not know how to cover ethnic conflicts to restore a peaceful environment. A lot of damage was done due to that. Therefore, to improve the media field, there has to be a code of ethics.

It's true there is a code of ethics formulated by the Editors' Guild. But as far as I know the journalists have not been made aware of it. We don't find ethics being practised simply because they are formulated or because they were discussed here or there. It is also very doubtful whether editors themselves practise them in their own newspapers.

**Isn't there a code of ethics for the media now, formulated by The Editors' Guild?**

It's true there is a code of ethics formulated by the Editors' Guild. But as far as I know the journalists have not been made aware of it. We don't find ethics being practised simply because they are formulated or because they were discussed here or there. It is also very doubtful whether editors themselves practise them in their own newspapers. I therefore feel ethics would have to be discussed broadly with journalists, before formulation. There is no point in giving them wide publicity, if they are not practised in our media. Therefore, a broad dialogue on this should be started within media institutes.

On the other hand, the Code of Ethics formulated by the Editors' Guild is limited to the print media. This should extend to the electronic media too. There is a need to embrace the media, as a whole.

**Is ignorance on ethics, the only reason for their breach by journalists?**

Those who enter the media don't do so after a training. And that is a major reason for the breach of ethics. Also, some journalists do it quite unconsciously. It is quite evident when reports on the ethnic conflict are perused. Some reports tend to heighten ethnic divisions. During the immediate past, there was a war situation in the country. Our journalists are not aware how a war should be reported. The media is accused for their coverage on rape and child abuse. Lack of training on conflict reporting is another reason for the breach of ethics.

**Provincial reporters claim their factual reports get distorted after they reach the media office. As an editor, how do you see this?**

I don't accept that, but there are accusations. It couldn't be a lie anyway. But that's why I maintain it is better to train those within media institutes than training amateur journalists. That would be an answer to the provincial reporters. On the other hand, provincial reporters too need a good formal training. They also blunder at times. Media institutes cannot go after provincial reporters to supervise them. We too have problems when their reports affect people.

But we have to trust provincial reporters, we have a responsibility towards them and that's why we publish their reports.

If there had been good training these errors wouldn't have arisen. And in Sri Lanka, we don't have full-time provincial reporters. They are mostly part-time reporters. It's time we promoted them to full-time provincial reporters. It is only through trained people that we could solve the issue of breaching of ethics.

**Isn't there complaints against editors that erroneous reports are not corrected immediately?**

There is a school of thought – quite ignorantly though – that the newspaper would lose its credibility and respect, if it goes on correcting news reports regularly. I personally feel that is wrong. We have a responsibility to accept what's wrong and ask for forgiveness for having wronged. I think it is not morally right to avoid correcting something wrong, because the newspaper may lose its credibility. This situation has arisen due to shortcomings in how news is collected. We don't have the habit of cross-checking news. News is often published on trust and due to friendship. There is no motivation to ask the other party for their comments on the news. This happens due to lack of awareness in our media.



*Ariyananda Dombagahawatte,  
Editor of the Sunday Lankadeepa and a Trustee  
of the Free Media Movement, interviewed by  
Athula Vithanage*



# Do You Want Credibility as a Journalist?

Stay away from party politics. And don't do the politicians any favours

Johan Romare

**C**redibility is the epicentre of good journalism as all other aspects of professional journalism spin around it. Even the best interviewer in the world, the most creative storyteller or the most thorough researcher is lost without credibility. If the public has little reason to trust the journalist, it doesn't matter how good the story is, or how well it is presented. Without credibility journalism is dead.

So what gives credibility? A Sri Lankan journalist trained in the west some decades back remembered one of those catchy formulas that journalism handbooks are so fond of:  $a+b=c$ , meaning that accurate and balanced reporting creates credibility. True enough, as there are few things more damaging to journalism than badly checked "facts" and stories that are one-sided.

As a regional news editor some years back, I spent quite a number of hours on the phone with angry readers who had found inaccurate articles in the paper and argued that "if you can't even get those simple facts correct, how can we trust your paper at all?". Very often the inaccuracy was on minor fact like the spelling of names, which shows how important it is to check every statement in order to gain credibility. The same argument goes for balanced reporting. There is always more than one side of a story (and often more than two), and to remain credible we have to make sure that we include them.

But the formula  $a+b=c$  is not hundred per cent valid. Unfortunately, as it is quite a catchy one it is not enough to get your facts right and the story balanced to stay credible

as a journalist. To be credible you have to be independent as well. And you have to be perceived as independent.

A professional journalist is working on behalf of the public; not the politicians, not the private companies, not the NGOs and not the religious leaders. One of the main roles of a journalist is to make sure that those with power are held accountable to those with less power. And to make sure that the stories of those with less power are told. To be able to do that year after year, we have to be independent from all interest groups in the society. Otherwise, we might end up being megaphones of various interest groups, which is hardly what journalism is about.

But how far do you have to go in order to be independent? I've met journalists who are not even accepting a chair on the board of their children's scout associations in order to stay independent. The argument goes like this: "If I'm part of the scout board, how can I write a story on scouting and be perceived as independent?"

The key word here is "perceived". To be independent and to be viewed as independent are not necessarily the same thing. It is possible, and highly likely, that a professional journalist can write a balanced and accurate story on scouting, even if she is active in the scout movement. It is

even possible, but quite unlikely, that the same journalist can write a balanced and accurate story on corruption in the scout movement, and at the same time be part of it.

The question however is how the readers will perceive the journalist. Will the readers trust the journalist who is writing on an organization he or she is part of? Hardly. We all know that it's far more

difficult to be objective of something you are part of. So if this is the case with the example on scouting what about being a member of a political party?

The answer is simple. To be active in party politics is a no-go area for professional journalists. At least if you want to stay credible. Credibility is about trust, and who would trust a journalist who is also active in politics?

What is more complicated is that it's not enough to stay away from party politics for a journalist. To stay credible we have to keep the politicians at arms length as well, which is difficult since we have to have a professional relationship with them to do our job.

Some years back, I was the local correspondent for a regional paper, covering a small town on an island off the Swedish East coast. It was a fantastic job, since I reported on each and every aspect of life in town. My office door was always open, and I had a lot of visitors coming by to discuss one issue or another. Of course, the local politicians dropped by as well, to share their latest ideas and try to persuade me to cover them.

The answer is simple. To be active in party politics is a no-go area for professional journalists. At least if you want to stay credible. Credibility is about trust, and who would trust a journalist who is also active in politics?



*Johan Romare ,  
Journalist and fojo representative to the  
Sri Lanka Press Institute.*

See page 22

# Sivaram

## personal notes from the fatal day



I was at home at Kurunagala after 12 continuous days in Colombo. My wife and I were about to go to bed, having watched a film with the family. It was around 10.45 p.m. when we switched off the TV.

My mobile phone rang. It was not unusual to get a call at that time of the night. The last such call also came from a journalist in Puttalam a day before Sinhala and Tamil New Year. On that occasion, a journalist had been remanded on charges of trespassing because he took photographs of a hotel being built by a powerful politician on the reservation of an important reservoir. The caller wanted the Free Media Movement (FMM) to phone the Inspector at the Head Quarters of the area police and also to release a press statement.

On this occasion, it was Buddhika on the other side of my phone. His voice was trembling, and through it came the fearful message. Sivaram had been abducted some 30 minutes ago. Buddhika is an FMM activist working part-time on monitoring freedom of expression violations. Journalists have known Buddhika as the point person of FMM to be contacted in any emergency.

The news of Sivaram's abduction came as a huge shock. Sivaram *alias* Taraki has been known as a prominent voice in the Sri Lanka media landscape for well over a decade. He was one of the best politico-military commentators in the two-decade-old ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, which began on account of unresolved grievances of the Tamil peoples in Sri Lanka, giving birth to one of the most talked about and ruthless armed struggles in Asia, led by Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Sivaram who hailed from a wealthy family in Eastern Sri Lanka dropped out from university to become a full-time cadre of the leftist radical Tamil militant group called PLOTE in the early '80s. He left the movement after some difficult years, got married and settled down in Colombo, and took to journalism. At the time of his death he was the senior member of the editorial board of Tamil Net.

Sivaram was a Tamil nationalist with leftist ideals and pushed limits of press freedom in the South of Sri Lanka by expressing, at times, hard line Tamil nationalism in his columns written for an English daily. Widely read and travelled, having first-hand experience in the political-military struggle for a separate Tamil homeland, Sivaram was intellectually challenging and politically threatening to many exponents of hardline Sinhala-Buddhist groups. He tested, in a way, the tolerance in media discourse by betting his life with the columns he wrote.

Buddhika himself, who phoned me to tell the story of abduction, had become the target of a hate campaign unleashed by extreme nationalist forces over photographs he took of an anti-LTTE para - military group camp he published some two months ago. We all knew Siva as a friend and good news source and used to ask him whether he was taking precautionary measures against known threats to his personal safety whenever we met over a glass of beer or a shot of arrack.

Buddhika was at home, 12 km away from Colombo, where the abduction took place. Prasantha and Kusal Perera, two peace activists who were with Siva when he was forcibly abducted had phoned him. Buddhika in turn was making desperate calls around to see what FMM could do.

The phone rang without respite. The Convener of the FMM, Victor, also had got into the act, making calls and looking for any help.

We decided to do two things: Inform local and international media organizations about the abduction as much as possible, and inform his wife to see how we could make a complaint to the police.

FMM entrusted Buddhika to inform as many people as possible and to contact Sivaram's house immediately.

Kusal Perera, who was with Siva at the time of abduction, was too terrified to come out of his hideout that night. We contacted a Tamil parliamentarian and asked for help. He promised to get a lawyer to go to Bambalapitiya police if we could get Kusal Perera to give him an eye-witness account.

It was a near impossibility, given that Kusal Perera's phone had gone dead by that time. And to our dismay, the parliamentarian's phone too went dead after midnight.

By this time, the Colombo civil society had come to know that Sivaram had been abducted and our phones got jammed with incoming calls. People who called Bambalapitiya police to find out what had happened were told that no complaint had been made to that effect.

A prominent journalist who phoned the army commander to inform him about the incident had to explain to him who Sivaram was.

The only option left was to get his wife to make a complaint. Again it became difficult to get someone to go there, and it was left to Buddhika and two fellow journalists to drive up to Sivaram's house by 12.30 to bring her to the police station.

Finally a complaint was made.

Meantime, I was at home sitting at my laptop sending an urgent alert to press freedom organizations worldwide. At 11.15 p.m there was an explosion, probably a transformer



nearby going off and power went off. Working with candle light the first alert went out at 11.57 p.m. Batteries in my laptop and mobile were new, so I could work through the night.

For the next two hours my computer registered dozens of outgoing alerts to almost all international press freedom organizations. And they started to call back. The Committee to Protect Journalists, Reporters without Borders, BBC Sinhala service, Article 19 were among them. Some of them knew Siva personally.

We were hoping that if we could generate enough pressure on whoever had abducted him there might be some chance of saving his life by the morning.

Calls kept coming asking for more information until dawn. As the sleepless night passed away Champika Liyanaarachchi from Daily Mirror called me at home around 7.00 to share in our helplessness in the face of the ongoing political killings. And to talk about Siva.

She called me 30 minutes later to tell me the news that we didn't want to hear. She had overheard that a journalist doing the police roundup say something like a body had been found in the Talangama police area. She then saw him hang up. She got him to call back Talangama police to get it confirmed and breaking the news to me said "I hope it is not Sivaram".

Within a few minutes Asanga, a colleague at CPA and Buddhika were at the scene. Then came the confirmation. They had shot him dead. Our second alert, which said that journalist Sivaram was found dead, was out at 8.27 am.

Another round of phone calls ensured, radio and television stations carried the news quoting our release and Talangama police called me at home to find out the source of our press release.

His body was released to the family by the police and funeral arrangements were decided by them.

A number of the most prominent international press freedom organizations issued releases condemning and protesting at his death. We too sent out our third release on Siva in just two days.

We felt that it was all over and decided to meet in Colombo to see how best we could pay our last respects. An

initiative was already underway to organize a joint protest. A poster was planned, slogans decided and invitations sent from FMM too.

We buried Siva in Batti on 2nd May 2005. It was a simple ceremony. I spoke in Sinhala and appealed to stop all political killings on behalf of the Free Media Movement. That was the main slogan we decided upon.

Next day was the International Press Freedom day. Around a thousand people gathered to protest in front of the Fort Railway Station, Colombo. It became an anti-war gathering, more than a press freedom gathering. Journalists, artists, writers, trade unionists, peace and human rights activists, alternative groups were all there. We displayed our placards, marched peacefully, shouted slogans and held a short meeting. On Sivaram's name we showed that in order to defend the right to life, peace and democracy, we too could take over the streets, not just extremist groups. That was our tribute to Sivaram.

His killing shows that dark forces are out there lurking for the blood of dissenting voices. Sivaram was not just well known locally. His reputation as a knowledgeable and analytical journalist had spread internationally.

At the same time he was a traitor to some others. So he was killed.

The chronology of Free Media Movement's Freedom of Expression report (3rd May 2004-3rd May 2005) starts with this entry:

*May 2004: Sri Lanka Police raided the Colombo home of journalist, Mr. Sivaram Dharmeratnam ("Taraki"), a political affairs columnist for English and Tamil papers published from*

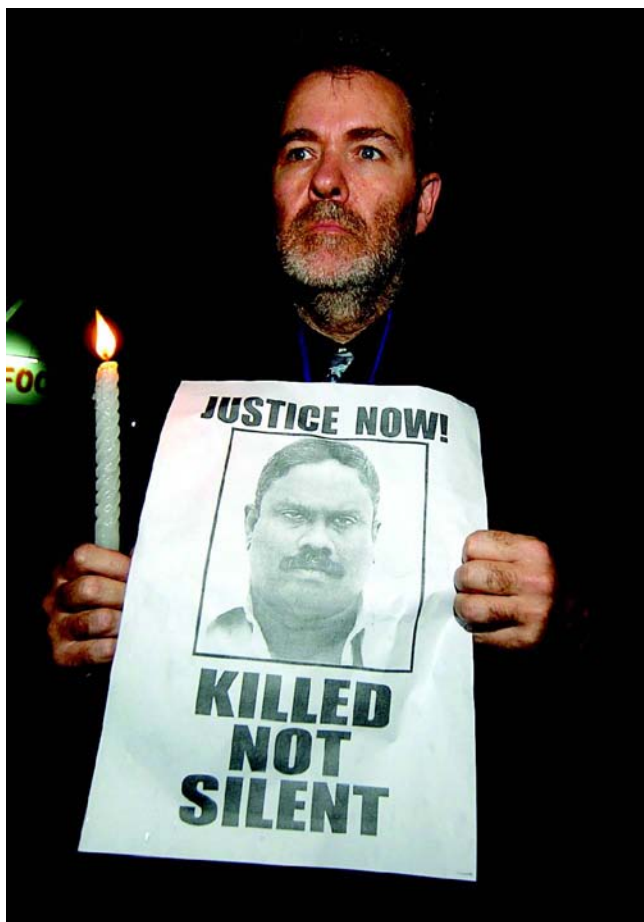
*Colombo and a member of Tamilnet's editorial board*  
The report ends with this entry:

*April 28 2005, veteran Tamil journalist and editor of the Tamilnet website, D. Sivaram (Taraki) was abducted and killed by unidentified gunmen while he was walking along the Galle Road in Colombo.*

His death is a grim reminder of times we journalists live in.

We are back at work and read many articles of Sivaram on the web, where he has left his footprints. He edited the most sought-after website on Sri Lanka and it is a fitting tribute that his memory lives on online.

sd



*Vigil on world Press Freedom Day : Remembering Journalists Killed. Photo by : Lakruwan Wanniarachchi*

# National Languages, News Media and Peace

Sunanda Deshapriya

Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural country. Its total population was 18.73 million at the time of the last census of 2001. Sinhalese are the largest ethnic community which accounts for roughly 75% of the population. Tamils account for 17% and Muslims 8% of the total population. No official statistics for the whole country is available because no census was done in the Northern Province for last twenty years.

Sri Lanka has been a country with conflictual relations within and between its two major ethnic groups for nearly five decades. Language is at the heart of the conflict from the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards. This root cause contributed to the development of a full - blown war between the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Sinhala is the mother-tongue of the Sinhalese community, while Tamil is the *lingua franca* of the Tamil community as well as of the Muslim community. Sinhala and Tamil are State languages while English is considered a link language. No survey has been done to determine the English literacy rate among the population but it is considered to be around 10%.

After the independence from the British in 1948, Sinhala-Buddhist revivalism took a political form, which was starkly evident in the 1956 election victory of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). The SLFP came to power on the promise of making Sinhala the official language in 24 hours. Tamil as a language was ignored. Although the Sinhala Only Act was born as an ethno-nationalist response to the domination of English in the public service, the resulting alienation of the Tamil language created systematic institutional discrimination against the entire Tamil-speaking population.

Only the Leftist parties had the foresight on the ethnic polarization that could be the result of the Sinhala Only Act. During the parliamentary debate on the Act it took the position of "one language - two countries, two languages one country", which has sadly proved an accurate prediction at the time of the last few decades of Sri Lanka's bloody history. Tamil grievances developed into a full-fledged Tamil nationalist movement for secession and autonomy, with language-based rights as one of the pillars of the movement.

The Jaffna Youth Congress, probably the most forthright anti-colonialist movement in pre-independence Sri Lanka espoused the policy of two national languages, making the Sinhala language compulsory in Tamil-medium schools in the North. Leading figures in Colombo schools like Ananda

College supported the same policy by introducing the Tamil-medium in their schools. Unfortunately, the Sinhala only Act in 1956 severely mitigated these valuable experiments in multi-culturalism.

One notes the efforts of the Government of Sri Lanka to introduce Tamil as a national language in 1957 which failed on account of the opposition by Sinhala nationalist groups.

Thus, as a result of the one-language policy, Sri Lanka was not able to develop a multi-lingual educational and cultural policy that would have resulted in the creation of a society which better understands and communicates with each other. Unfortunately, what we have today are two-polarized and mono-lingual language communities. Along with the Tamil language, English as well was pushed into a corner in the public educational system until recently. For instance, it is almost impossible to find a Member of Parliament from the Sinhala community who can understand and converse in Tamil. Neither a single Executive President since 1977 nor a single Prime Minister since Independence has had the ability to speak the Tamil language, since all of them were from the majority Sinhala community. Lamentably, Sri Lanka never had anything akin to the three-language policy in India.

A research conducted among the youth in Sri Lanka (2001) shows that only 5% of Sinhala youth have friends from other ethnic communities, the number of Tamil youth being 14% and the number of Muslim youth being 22%. Tamil and Muslim youth speak the same language.

## Language and mainstream media

Sri Lanka has media in all three languages, Sinhala being the prominent medium especially when it comes to the electronic media. There is no full-time terrestrial Tamil language TV channel from either the state-controlled media or private media, based out of Sri Lanka. Out of eight TV stations there are only two part-time Tamil language channels (one state, one private). The same is to some extent true for the radio stations as well.

The mainstream media is mainly concentrated in Colombo. There are four Sinhala dailies, four Tamil dailies and three English dailies published in Colombo. There are eight weekend Sinhala papers, four English and four Tamil. But there are four Tamil dailies and weeklies in Jaffna, the heart of the Northern Peninsula of Sri Lanka, where the circulation of Colombo-based newspapers is minimal.

One daily newspaper is published by the LTTE in the areas of the Vanni held by them. They have a radio station and a TV production house. The LTTE runs its English and Tamil language Peace Secretariat website from Vanni.

It is obvious that Sri Lankan media is divided on ethnic lines. Sinhala-owned media establishments do not publish in Tamil. Tamil-owned news establishments do not publish in Sinhala. This is also more or less true for electronic media as well, with the exception of one large media group. State media, which constitutes the largest media establishment in Sri Lanka, is neither independent nor public-service - oriented. State media is oftentimes used by politicians to project parochial agendas. As the state power rests with the Sinhala majority in a majoritarian parliamentary system, all



*Prime Minister Bandaranaike addressing crowds gathered in support of Sinhala only Act, 1956.*

powerful state media have been under Sinhala ideological and political domination for the last 30 years.

As the Report of the Committee to Advise on the Laws affecting Media Freedom and Freedom of Expression (1995) notes, there is currently no equitable balance between the three language services of the state media. The report states:

*"Disparity in the service provided in the two official languages, is no mere technical denial of the constitutional rights but a serious deficiency in the process of trying to build a just and harmonious society. It is necessary that the law also articulate the principle that the state-run or public-funded media should at every level of its activities recognise and reflect the multi-ethnic, plural nature of our society and the issue of language rights."*

Another disturbing development is that, in the recent past, Tamil-speaking Muslims have started to look for their own media, mainly because of the bias in the mainstream Tamil language media. Within the same language group, political differences between the Tamil and Muslim communities as writ large in the issues of representation at the official peace talks, have started to manifest themselves in the media.

Sri Lankan newspapers of the three language media cater to sets of individuals who live in language silos that, in turn, colour their appreciation of national and world events. Though Sri Lanka is geographically small, the gulf that separates these language groups appears to be ever-widening, particularly between the Tamil readership and the rest. An analysis of the reportage of the North-East war demonstrates that these differences are not day-to-day mistakes. They are a reflection of deep ideological differences. For any lasting solution to the ethnic crisis to be meaningful these ideological differences need to be brought to the surface and addressed openly.

### **Community media**

There is no real community radio in Sri Lanka although the government has been very liberal with issuing licenses to commercial establishments. For the last 25 years, civil society organizations/universities have been waiting for licenses to start community radio stations. The community radio could have been a powerful example of serving the public interest of communities cutting across ethnic, cultural, political and religious barriers. For example, with its relative

**See Page 28**



# What Should Journalists Do?

Christopher Warren

Sometimes, as journalists, we spend a bit too much time complaining about how we're treated. What we need to do is less complaining and more action. We all know there is much in our media for us to be concerned at.

Here in Sri Lanka, a recent poll showed that 87 per cent of Sri Lankan journalists believe that the media is failing to provide accurate, balance and fair information. About 80 per cent believe the media is biased to one ethnic group or another.

This demonstrates a profound failure of confidence in ourselves. If we aren't confident in what we do, how can we expect the communities we serve to have confidence in us?

Our challenge is to reclaim the media for the values of journalism, to create a media space that we can work in, that encourages the practice of independent ethical journalism.

That battle to reclaim the media takes place on four fronts.



Uvindu Kurukulasuriya

First, we have to adopt a simple principle: Change Begins with me. We need to change ourselves. We have to embrace within ourselves the ethical principles, the public service values of journalism.

## Change begins with me

First, we have to adopt a simple principle: Change Begins with me. We need to change ourselves. We have to embrace within ourselves the ethical principles, the public service values of journalism.

It's a truism that within Sri Lanka, society is excessively and unnecessary politicized, both between and within ethnic and religious groups. As journalists, we are expected to take sides, to align ourselves with this group or that. And our work is expected to reflect that alignment.

As individuals, of course, we bring our views and opinions to our work. But that doesn't mean we have to make the transition to biased political partisanship.

We need to place the principles of our craft over politics.

Those principles are simple. They can be summed up in one word: Respect — Respect for truth. Respect for the public's right to know. Respect for the views of others.

We do our communities no favours when we mislead or when we conceal.

That's why, as journalists, each of us as individuals needs to accept our individual responsibility to:

- Commit to democracy, pluralism and tolerance

- Strive for quality – to do the very best we can
- Be accurate, balanced and honest – all the time

By internalizing within ourselves the principles of journalistic independence in everything we do, we can properly fight for journalistic autonomy within the media and within society.

## Learning and growing

The second front is professional development.

Journalism is a skilled craft. It requires continued training and education for us to keep up to standard. We need training in dealing with the challenges that society throws at us. We need to understand if we are to inform. We need to be educated if we, in turn, are to educate the communities we serve.

We need training in the skills of journalism, particular as the technological revolution is transforming those skills.

This requires a commitment from us as journalists to commit time and energy to training – both formal and informal. That is, through courses, through reading, through keeping up to date.



*Speech by Christopher Warren at Journalists Conference at Tholangamuwa. Warren is the President of the International Federation of Journalists.*

It requires a commitment from employers to provide the time and funding for training and development. And it requires them to respect the knowledge that we have.

And it requires a commitment from society through governments to provide the infrastructure for training.

The responsibility of employers

Third, we need respect and autonomy from our employers – both private and government.

This means they need to recognize the independence of journalists to carry out their job. They need to recognize the values of our craft.

This means that there are times when journalists – either individually or collectively – will disagree with their employer. There will be times when a journalist's ethics will clash with something their employer wants them to do. Employers need to accept that this is a necessary price they pay for quality journalism.

Although this principle is easy to grasp, it is not one that many employers naturally embrace. It can result in conflict and disagreement when employers fail to accept that journalistic independence also means independence from our employer.

That's why the IFJ encourages agreed documents on editorial independence that spell out the rights and the obligations of editorial staff – to our principles, our communities and our employers.

that we see in too many countries in Asia, including south Asia.

Yet, there has been never-ending harassment and intimidation by political forces, including governments of different political parties. Indeed, over the decades too many political forces have given the impression that they consider press freedom to be simply the freedom to agree with them.

What we need rather is to entrench within society the principles of that great French journalist Voltaire who said: "I disagree with what you say, but I will fight to the death for your right to say it."

The past few months have seen this harassment and intimidation move to a new level. Indeed, we can say that the murder of Sivaram Dharmaretnam earlier this year has taken it to a new, vastly more violent level.

Of course, words are one thing and deeds another. But there is no doubt that we have heard too many threatening words from too many political leaders. And in this climate, we should not be surprised that some have decided to turn those words into deeds.

It seems too short a step from threatening journalists to killing them.

The leaders of all the political movements have a responsibility for leading Sri Lanka back from this abyss. They need to recognize that entrenching a culture of a free

We need to place the principles of our craft over politics. Those principles are simple. They can be summed up in one word: Respect – Respect for truth. Respect for the public's right to know. Respect for the views of others.



And it's why employers need to recognize the rights of journalists to come together collectively in independent trade unions that can collectively bargain on both professional and industrial issues.

These challenges are exacerbated when the employer is also the government. That's why in government-owned media organizations, public service values have to be incorporated into charters that transform state-run media into public service media.

Governments must recognize that state-owned media are, in truth, held in trust for the public, not for the benefit of the government of the day.

#### **What about political forces?**

The fourth front of struggle is with the political forces.

A climate of true freedom requires a commitment by all political forces – both within government and without – to the principles of press freedom.

At one level, Sri Lankan journalists are fortunate that they have never had to endure the sort of absolutist repression

and democratic society is more important than the transitory spoils of office.

#### **Change begins with us**

Just as change begins with each of us as individuals, it begins with us as a collective.

Employers, governments controlling state-owned media, political forces.....none of them are going to change of their own volition. They will change because of what we can do to force change.

That's as true in Sri Lanka as it is in every country around the world.

That's why journalists in almost every country come together to form independent trade unions and associations of journalists and media workers. And that's why those organizations come together in the International Federation of Journalists – the global voice of journalists.

Here in Sri Lanka there are strong roots for collective action among journalists. The survival of the Sri Lankan

# Unethical Commercial Ads That Promote Racketeers

Jayantha Gamage

**T**he media's mission is to expose fraud and corruption. This is a revelation of deeds of some racketeers who manoeuvre media to further their ends.

"Sir I am a government pensioner. My daughter who has passed the A/L Exam applied for a job in response to an advertisement that appeared in the "Silumina". According to the advertisement, the job existed in the computer field, and the applicant was required to send Rs. 750 to get qualified to sit for a written test. We sent a money order to the value of the stipulated amount and waited for a reply. Nearly a month elapsed without any response from that end.

"Finally, I traced the address to a small room in a back alley of Mahara, Kadawata. It had a light board which read "International education consultation"". When questioned the occupant of the room about the appointment I was asked to wait for another month. So I waited without success. Then I went there again to find the office was gone. Sir, why do you allow such racketeers to use national papers to deceive the public?

This was a complaint made to the Silumina Editor by a government pensioner. Extortion of money by racketeers through placing advertisements in the print and electronic media is a longstanding practice in this country. Of late, this has assumed large proportions. Despite constant exposures by the newspapers they themselves have not rejected the acceptance of such fraudulent advertisements.

Advertisements are a crucial sector that contributes to the continued existence of media institutions. Numerically increasing newspapers and electronic media channels make way for a fierce competition among themselves to receive advertisements.

However, the absence of a constructive policy in accepting advertisements is a grave misconduct on the part of media institutions. Prevailing unemployment in the country provides fertile ground for racketeers, who promise young people employment opportunities as teacher trainees, computer assistants and so on.

When advertising these racketeers take care to give their organizations some resemblance of a government institution. "Programme for the institution of local educational and training canter - 2003 and The foundation for the development of international educational consultation and management" are two examples.

They insert a half or quarter page advertisements in newspapers, promising attractive wages and other benefits for successful applicants. Once a reply is received from a job seeker he is promptly informed by return post to send in a

money order to the value of Rs. 500, 1,000, or 1,500 along with the application.

If we set out responding to an advertisement appearing in the press, to trace the office of an institution with an authoritative title attached to it, we would certainly find a small room hidden somewhere in an insignificant back alley of a suburb. An advertisement of this nature appearing the weekend national press could attract thirty to forty thousand, unsuspecting job seekers. If a sum of Rs. 500 were collected from each applicant the bogus job provider could easily grab 15 million rupees. Once the money orders are cashed he would abandon the temporarily rented room and disappear.

For instance, the Silumina newspaper of 01.06.03, carried an advertisement calling applications from youth wishing to be trained as teachers under the programme for establishment of local educational research and training centers - 2003. 28,000 persons had responded to the advertisement, for which a fee of Rs. 200 was charged from each applicant. Money thus collected amounted to 5.6 million rupees. The transaction had taken place in a small room in Welawatte, obtained for rent temporarily. Money orders were to be sent to be cashed at the Wellawatte post office. When the officers of the fraud bureau, following an exposure made by a journalist raided the place, racketeers had already got away with a large sum of money in the form of cash. A sum of Rs. 2.8 million collected from applicants, still lies in judicial custody.

In response to a recent large-scale advertisement entitled Programme for 15,000 computer scholarships, the amount of money channeled to the Kollupitiya post office stood at Rs. 3.3 million.

An extensive publicity campaign launched through electronic and print media announced that the reputed Tech Sri Lanka Institute had planned to establish 8,000 computer centres to provide 48,000 job opportunities while the Varuna Group and Infotech Institutes would provide 19,500 and 59,450 job opportunities, respectively.

Thus the amount of money they collected from the unemployed youth in the country exceeded 400 million rupees.

None of these Institutions provided anybody with employment. Even after this large scale racket was exposed by the Silumina, they still resort to continue this deception. Tech Sri Lanka Institute, in the pretext of helping Tsunami-affected children used fraudulently the name of national child protection authority to camouflage its large-scale money-grabbing project.

When a customer who brings an advertisement to be inserted in a newspaper is questioned by the media institution to ascertain the genuineness of the facts stated therein, he has other places to go and get his job done without any difficulty. Therefore, no media institution would question a customer.

Although computer training centers in thousands exist in the country, not a single one has got itself registered with the vocational training authority. Nor does the authority take any interest in enforcing legal requirements. The same is true with the media institution when accepting advertisements.

**Advertisements are a crucial sector that contributes to the continued existence of media institutions.**



# Sri Lankan Women Journalists Call for Gender Equity in Media

Laxmi Murthy

**T**he small coastal town of Beruwala in Sri Lanka witnessed a historic Summit of women journalists on 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> March. More than 70 women journalists representing the Federation of Media Employees Trade Unions (FMETU), Sri Lanka Working Journalists' Association (SLWJA), Free Media Movement, Sri Lanka Tamil Media Alliance (SLTMA) and the Sri Lanka Muslim Media Forum (SLMMF) came together to discuss issues of concern.

The Summit was organized by Sri Lanka's Centre for Policy Alternatives in conjunction with the Voices of Reconciliation Program with the assistance of Canada's Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society (IMPACS) through funding from CIDA and Ausaid, and with the support of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

Delivering the opening address, Jacqueline Park, Asia-Pacific Regional Director of the IFJ emphasized that journalists' unions at national, regional and global level have a responsibility to address gender inequity. Equal access to promotion, to employment and to assignments, is the hot button issue for women journalists the world over, she said.

Highlighting the crucial role of the journalist organizations, Park said, "Women journalists are aware that because their movement has been successful in many areas there is the danger that journalists' unions may feel that enough has been done to ensure equality in media even though inequalities remain," she said.

Park pointed out that in order for journalists' organizations to improve the conditions for women journalists, they often have to reform their own structures – to ensure female representation in the union's policy-making and governing bodies. "Our unions need to be open to women – and to do this they must also consider their internal policies. If unions can establish gender equality internally, within the organization, it is far more likely to have success promoting gender issues externally," said Park. "Taking simple steps to make it easier for women to be involved are necessary. For example, holding family-friendly union meetings on a Saturday in a park, rather than at night during the week, when many women will be required at home with children," added Park.



*Participant of the Female Journalists Conference*

In "*Invisible or Too Visible: The Paradoxical Portrayal of Women in the Media*", Laxmi Murthy, Program Manager with the IFJ outlined some of the issues with the skewed representation of women in the mass media, and put forth some suggestions to redress the imbalance. The discussion that followed revealed many common concerns for Indian and Sri Lankan women journalists.

The interactive session "In conversation with Sri Lankan Women in Media" saw a lively discussion between participants and senior women journalists, including Nishani Dissanayake, Hana Ibrahim and Thewa Gowry. Besides sexual harassment at the workplace, a concern that repeatedly cropped up was the issue of what was termed "sexual favouritism", or women employees gaining privileges on the basis of sexual favours rather than on merit or seniority. The discussion moved from condemning women who might take such a path to upward mobility, to understanding the power dynamics at workplaces that excluded women from positions of power.

Laxmi Murthy, also a member of the Network of Women in Media, India, presented the work of the Network, which aims to provide a forum for women in media to share information and resources, exchange ideas, promote media awareness and ethics, and work for gender equality and justice within the media and society. The Vishakha guidelines on sexual harassment at the workplace issued by the Supreme Court of India in 1997, and its implications for women journalists were also discussed. The need for such legislation in Sri Lanka emerged as a pressing need.

Group discussions on issues such as: The key gender equity issues for journalists in Sri Lanka; priorities in order of importance; barriers or obstacles to achieving these priorities; a strategy and action plan to achieve them. Issues that emerged were familiar concerns for all women media professionals: lack of access to promotions, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, rumour-mongering, hostile work environment, lack of security for night shifts and lack of access to professional training and avenues for skill development. The journalists present endorsed the "Charter Of Gender Equality For Media and Journalism in Sri Lanka".



*Laxmi Murthy,  
Journalists and  
the South Asia Coordinator, IFJ*

**See Page 22**

## Promoting Gender Equality....

Continued from page 5

likely to have success in promoting gender issues externally.

Like the situation of women in the media workplace, increased numbers of women in influential roles within a media union will further encourage the advocacy of women's rights in the media. Unions should actively pursue women as valuable advocates for change in order to gain as much support as possible.

How can we make our unions more representative of both women and men? Taking simple steps is necessary to make it easier for women to be involved, for example, holding family-friendly union meetings on a Saturday in a park, rather than at night during the week, when many women will be required at home with children.

Some unions establish women's committees that guarantee time and energy are dedicated to the promotion of gender rights, regardless of other preoccupations within the union.

Similarly, some unions ensure that a minimum number of women are on the board or executive positions of the organization. For example, the rules of my own union in Australia require that one-third of the decision-making positions are filled by women. Similarly, the IFJ requires that one-third of participants to IFJ workshops and trainings are filled by women. (*Speech by Jacqueline Park at the Female Journalists Conference at Beruwala at March 2006.*)

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## Do You Want Credibility as a Journalist?...

Continued from page 13

One day, one of the local politicians burst into my office with an election poster in his hand. "Machan" he said, "this is the first poster printed for the upcoming local elections, isn't that a good story!"

Obviously he wanted some free publicity for his campaign. And obviously he was asking me for a favour, using a friendly approach. The man was quite influential in town, and was in a position to do me one or two favours if I had asked him. But my answer was no, since I saw no public interest in his poster.

It would have been easy for me to publish a picture of the poster with a short caption. It would have kept the politician happy, and it would probably have made it easier for me to cover his campaign later on. (And it would have helped me to ask him for a favour if I had wanted to). But I refused to do him the favour, which made him leave the office a bit annoyed.

While he left the office annoyed, I remained with my credibility. What to publish and what not to publish is an independent editorial decision. If editorial decisions are made as favours to politicians, credibility is lost. And that is the end of journalism.

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## Sri Lankan Women...

Continued from page 21

The charter sets out the minimum standards, principles and actions needed to underpin gender equity in the media in Sri Lanka and outlines a practical program of action to support the achievement of equality in media workplaces, journalists'

## What Should Journalists Do? .....

Continued from page 18

Working Journalists Association as the largest organization of journalists. The collective trade union action of the Federation of Media Employees Trade Unions in defending the rights of all media workers. The campaigning of the Free Media Movement to defend and extend press freedom. The work of the Tamil and Muslim organizations in advancing rights of journalists from minority communities.

The strength of this diversity provides avenues for activity for many journalists. And I know these organizations have often worked together in a true spirit of solidarity for press freedom and journalists' rights.

Yet, we have to acknowledge that we can do more. We need to think how to strengthen the links both practically and organically.

We need to recognize that too many journalists stand aloof from any of these organizations. We need to think of steps that will engage the entire journalistic community.

We need to admit that too many journalists remain divided along ethnic and religious lines. As a craft committed to pluralism and tolerance, we need to bring journalists together.

And we need to acknowledge that too many journalists are excluded from these structures. In fact, it is the poorest and most powerless provincial journalists who are most likely to be missing out. Collectivism enables the strong to help the weak. But it is precisely here that we are failing and we need to think about how to link provincial journalists in the all-island journalistic community.

So, where do we go from here?

This historic meeting gives Sri Lankan journalists an opportunity to build on our strengths to address these weaknesses.

This, in turn, provides the means to encourage and promote a society that embraces our core beliefs: respect for truth, respect for the public's right to know and respect for each other.

So we need to agree on precisely what it is we agree on. That's why a combined declaration is important. It provides a focus we can build our strength around, a shared set of beliefs we can campaign around.

More than testing journalism, it provides a test for Sri Lanka. It provides a template for a free media in a democratic society. It makes clear what we hold ourselves to as journalists. And it makes clear what we expect from our employers and the countries' political forces.

It's a big challenge. But there is one thing we know as journalists: if we don't do it for ourselves, no-one else will do it for us.

(*Speech by Christopher Warren at Journalists Conference at Tholangamuwa on September 2005.*)

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organizations and the media itself. To view the full charter please click ([www.voicesofpeace.lk](http://www.voicesofpeace.lk))

The coming together of women journalists across ethnic divides that for decades have fractured Sri Lanka's social and political life, was an unprecedented landmark in the island's history. Forging unity as professionals and working collectively to achieve gender equity were indeed encouraging.

# Change Begins with You

**Mike Dobbie**

**W**hy would a newspaper gloat over the death and destruction of the Boxing Day Tsunami? The day after the disaster, one Sri Lankan paper carried a story that boasted the headline "Huge Damage to Tigers - 1200 Sea Tigers Perish".

The story gleefully reported the impact of the waves on military camps in areas of eastern and northern Sri Lanka controlled by the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (a February 2002 cease - fire agreement has halted two decades of war).

The story appeared within hours of 31,000 Sri Lankans being killed and 443,000 made homeless. Not only was the

While two incidents were assaults on TV crews covering political rallies, a more bizarre act was the alleged assault on the news director of the SLBC by its chairman's own security guards, following a heated debate over SLBC's coverage of the campaign. According to the Free Media Movement, SLBC's news director had ensured a coverage that favoured the ruling party's presidential candidate.

Bias isn't confined to election campaigns. Monitoring of Sri Lanka's media shows that more than half of all newspaper stories cite only one source and both Sinhala and Tamil press are highly selective in the sources they use.

Sri Lanka's journalists know the score. According to a survey conducted in mid-2004 for the International Federation of Journalists' (IFJ) research report *On the Road to Peace*, 87 per cent of Sri Lanka's journalists believe the country's media fails to provide accurate, balanced and fair information. Four out of five journalists believe the media is biased to one ethnic group or another. Worse still, 80 per cent of journalists don't believe what sources tell them, complaining that they are no accurate or reliable.

A lack of journalist training is part of the problem. Only half of Sri Lanka's journalists are aware of their professional

**A lack of journalist training is part of the problem. Only half of Sri Lanka's journalists are aware of their professional code of ethics; barely 11 per cent have a copy of the code and less than five per cent have never received ethics training.**

story repugnant, it was likely wrong. The Tigers claimed only six of its personnel had been killed in the tsunami. While the truth is not known, and certainly wasn't sought in the reporting, inflammatory stories like this demonstrate the gulf between partisan propaganda and credible journalism.

As the country tries to rebuild itself from the civil war and the tsunami's destruction, misleading and sensationalist reporting hampers these efforts. And despite the cease-fire, ethnic, political and religious chauvinism still results in death.

On April 29, Sivaram Dharmeratnam, 46, a senior editorial board member of Tamilnet.com was found shot dead in Colombo, hours after unidentified men had abducted him from a restaurant. On August 12, journalist Relangi Selvarajah and her husband were killed by unknown gunmen in a daylight attack. Relangi worked for the government-owned Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC). Two weeks later, the security guard at Tamil newspaper Sudaroli's printing press was killed when grenades were hurled at the door of the building. Journalist Iliya Abdulla, proofreader Kamalanathan and a visitor were injured.

In just one week during the election campaign for a new national president, there were three attacks on journalists.

code of ethics; barely 11 per cent have a copy of the code and less than five per cent have never received ethics training.

Slowly though, Sri Lankan journalists are working for change. In November, five leading journalist associations, including those representing Tamil and Muslim journalists, came together to sign a media charter committing their members to developing a democratic and pluralist media culture and to protect their professional rights. The charter includes a two-year action timetable.

The charter notes that responsibility for ethical conduct rests with media professionals "who should be responsible for drawing up codes of ethical conduct and who should establish credible and accountable systems of self-regulation". However, the existing code of conduct is currently under review by a panel that includes only one journalist.

The media charter also demands legal guarantees for freedom of expression, press freedom and freedom of association. It seeks the creation of an independent media complaints commission, freedom of information laws, and a single national body for journalists. The charter also wants editorial independence protected by agreements with state and private media.

The journalist associations' commitment is not isolated. Coincidentally, a public campaign for public service values in Sri Lankan media has begun, aimed at uncoupling state-owned media from direct political control and improving the quality of journalism. And a prize program has been initiated to promote journalistic excellence.



*Mike Dobbie, former managing editor of shares magazine (Fairfax). He recently spent three months in Sri Lanka under the Asia Alliance program, supported by the Myer Foundation.*

**See Page 30**



# Under the Endless War

Anuruddha Lokuhapuarachchi / REUTERS

01 - Woman crying near the coffin of 16 years old Tamil boy Pukiyarasu Baskaran, at the Kanniya village in Trincomalee, eastern Sri Lanka, April 23, 2006. After the funeral villagers fleeing from village, they believe Baskaran was killed by government soldiers, but the army denies this. His body was recovered near one of the Claymore explosion sites called Mihindupura on Friday night. Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers rejected a deal on transport of their commanders on Saturday that could have allowed peace talks with the government to go ahead, as more violence raised fears of renewed civil war.

02 - A Sri Lankan Tamil woman Rani Rajan, crying next body of her nephew Pukiyarasu Baskaran, who was killed by unidentified gunman in Trincomalee, eastern Sri Lanka, April 22, 2006. Ethnic clashes rocked Sri Lanka's northeast on Friday after mine attacks blamed on the Tamil Tiger rebels killed at least three in a wave of violence that has raised fears of a return to civil war.

1

2



03 - Dhanushi Nayanika, a nine-year-old ethnic Sinhalese girl, cries next to the coffin of her father, Thilak Dhammika, in Kalyanipura village, outskirts of Walikanda, north-eastern Sri Lanka, May 31, 2006. Nayanika and two other children lost their fathers after the massacre of 12 construction workers by suspected Tamil Tiger rebels on Monday.

04 - Sri Lankan soldiers search as hands tied bodies of 12 ethnic Sinhalese civil construction workers assassinated by suspected Tamil Tiger rebels in village of Omadiamadu on the outskirts of Welikanda, northeastern Sri Lanka, May 30, 2006. Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels warned on Tuesday a European Union ban that diplomats say will freeze their assets would shake the island's teetering peace process, but said they remained committed to a truce.



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Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.  
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

05 - An elderly Sri Lankan woman grieves in front of war memorial as respect of fallen soldiers during a commemoration ceremony of over 22000 dead soldiers in two decade long civil war with Tamil Tiger rebels in national war memorial in Mailapitiya, outskirt of Kandy, June 7, 2006.



5



# Government Radio and the Tamil People

There is an enthusiasm in the present day world about the use of the media. The primary aspect of the activity of the media is the connection between the media and culture. The media are used in relation to the marks in culture. The propagation of the media is lessened if it does not proceed along culture.

Due to this very reason the culture of the people is important to the media. When culture is mentioned language and religion play an important place in it. Religion has been occupying an important position in post-colonial undeveloped countries. In our country too Buddhism has got an important place. The Radio or the TV is relevant to people who cannot go to a temple or religions place.

Although it is true the printed media have achieved some progress in Lanka, the radio as an electronic medium covers the whole country. In the remote areas the radio takes the place of the TV. Due to that very reason the radio takes some position of importance.

I propose to find out what the radio has done to the Tamil people in the last 20-25 years.

Whatever our politicians may say, the sense of a unitary state comes to the citizens on the basis of the share they get in the country. Instead of presenting negative matters, truth must be declared for the purpose of identifying the problem. With this background it is necessary to put forward some particulars between the broadcasting service and the Tamil people. Let us not relate private broadcasting services to these statements.



*Prof. K. Sivathamby,  
Social Scientist, Critic, Activist  
in the Field of Art and Culture.*

There are two main transmissions in the Tamil channels. One of them is the national services. The other is the commercial service. The commercial service too is in two parts. One is the "Thendul" service and the other is the commercial services. What should be important at the national level is the national service. What is its position? The Tamil national service has no channel of its own. The channels in the Tamil commercial service are used for the Tamil national service too. The national service morning transmission starts at 5.00 a.m. and ends at 8.00 a.m. From 8.00 to xx there is the transmission of the Muslim service. Later, the Tamil commercial service too is transmitted through the same channel. The national service starts at 6.00 PM and goes on till 11.30 xx again. During this period there are two transmissions of news, the B.B.C. and the "Thamil Osai" programme. At the same time, anti-Tiger transmissions from Europe are broadcast from 7 to 8. From 8 to 9 are Muslim programmes. In this manner many matters are made clear when the allocation of time is examined.

1. There is no educational transmission in the Tamil medium.
2. Particulars about village cultivation are broadcast at 9.20 p.m.
3. No programmes of dramas.
4. Not even one is allocated for Karnatic music.

This is not all. If there are cricket matches, transmission of the Tamil national service is suspended from morning till evening and on some days till night, and cricket commentaries are broadcast on that wavelength. When matches are played in Australia the evening programmes are suspended and if they are played in western countries the forenoon programmes are suspended.

When the administration of the Tamil national service is considered, there is one post of a director. There are no sections for programmes like those devoted to drama and women. The selection of discs of Karnatic music is done by a



clerk. So far as the announcers are concerned there are a large number of them and it is difficult to find out who are permanent, part-time or full-time. Some of them have not even heard Karnatic music.

The national service must be considered before the commercial service is examined. This service not well heard in the North and the East. This has been the condition that had prevailed even from its inception. Important religious festivals were broadcast through the national Tamil service. Important religious occasions like the festival of the carts at the Nallur kovil, the carts festival at Munneswaram, the Maha Siva Rathri, the Tiruketheeswaram were broadcast live. There is information that a regulation has been imposed that a sum not less than Rs. 50,000 must be paid at present for such broadcasts. But I am not aware of the true details. There were no live broadcasts in the Tamil national service from the Kovils like those of Tiruketheeswaram and Munneswaram on the last Sivarathri night. Traditions that had lasted for years were terminated last Sunday night.

There is another important matter. There is no information available on the journalistic competence of the officers in charge of these programmes. Even a direct discussion of it is in a sad state of affairs. Comparatively how many journalists

commercial service had a recognition in India is not sound. Media persons like Sivapathasundaram, V.N. Balasubramaniam, N. Shanmuganatha, S. Parannilla Raja and V.N. Navasivayam had a high recognition. Sivabalasunderam's book on the radio "The art of broadcasting" written in Tamil also received a prize from India. Well-known Karnataka musicians who came to Lanka tried to bring out a concert of theirs through the Tamil national service.

It is true to say that this situation started due to problems that arise in politics. There is another fact too. When great media persons retired through the administration, new appointments were not made systematically. Typists have got appointments as programme producers and programme directors. The Tamil medium has no provincial services as the Sinhala service has. The provincial transmission available in Jaffna is available for use by the military. The south-east service started in the East recently. We do not know its effects. Is this the kind of communication link that the government expects to establish with the Tamil people?

Is there no one who thinks about this? There is something that should be recorded about the commercial service. It is the Tamil and Hindi service which earn foreign exchange

This is not all. If there are cricket matches, transmission of the Tamil national service is suspended from morning till evening and on some days till night, and cricket commentaries are broadcast on that wavelength. When matches are played in Australia the evening programmes are suspended and if they are played in western countries the forenoon programmes are suspended.

are there directing the Subharathi programmes in the Sinhala national service, and how many Tamil journalists are there in the Pavan Tamil programme?. In the political programmes of the Tamil service, words used in the JR era are used in introducing the President and the ministers. (i.e., His Highness the president). A eulogistic language is used in referring to the president and the ministers. We do not blame the journalists for it. If they do so their jobs might be in danger. There will be petitions against them, some say.

The question that arises from this is: What is the communication available to the Tamil people, whether they be Christian or Hindu?

In the 1960s there was a great gap between the ordinary Tamil people and the broadcasting service. However, there was no such gap in matters like drama, music and literature. Could things happen in this manner if the government had some feeling about the public acceptance there was among the Tamil people for these matters? The present state of affairs can be realized if it is compared with what had prevailed 20-25 years ago. It will also be possible to realize its seriousness, through that.

From the 1950s until 1975-1985 when the radio came to Torrington Square the Tamil national service was on the world Tamil Propaganda plane. Many people today do not know about the high standard that prevailed in it. Some had wrong kinds of thought too. The view that the Tamil

for the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation. It is this Tamil commercial service which South Indian people listen to mostly. Even now people of South India listen mostly to this commercial service. It is not necessary for the government to spend for the development of the Tamil commercial service. A part of this profit made will be adequate for the purpose. A good management is enough for the purpose. But does that happen?

For what purpose is the commercial service channel used in the serviced called Tandul? Are there no other channels for cricket matches? What politics runs through this?

This is a country which has been interested in languages and religions for a period like 50 years. What does not respect the Tamil people, language and culture? The present-day Tamil people go to private broadcasting channels like "Suriyan" and "Shakthi" for news. Another example is that the obituary notices too, which were generally important in the Lanka Broadcasting Service, are handed over to private broadcasting channels.

There is an English saying that the cart should not be sent before the horse. A matter that I humbly declare to the politicians, who discuss it, can the need for unitarians be pointed out in sectors like language and culture. Otherwise, there is no room at all in the democracy mentioned by these politicians for the idea that one should submit oneself in one's own country. Are not the founts of separatism clear?

freedom from the state-owned Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation, the Uva community radio station has been a positive development in this regard. However, provincial journalism that cuts across language lines and serves different language communities does not exist in Sri Lanka.

### **The language of identity and violence**

It is said that the link between language, media and violence is symbiotic. That is, the violent actions elicit certain responses from the media, which can in turn, shape the violent actions themselves. State media, alternative media and media of non-state actors are in a continuous struggle to win public support for their actions through the use of language.

Failing to use language accurately, impartially and responsibly may reinforce negative stereotypes. The challenge is therefore to present members of different gender, ethnic, racial, religious and other identity groups fairly and accurately by carefully choosing words, and avoiding clichés and generalizations.

In Sri Lanka, for example, the media is grappling with language to describe aspects of the socio-political context after a ceasefire agreement. Words like community are conflated with ethnicity and minority. False lines between language media create further difficulties for the sensitive use of language. Often, communal tensions become ethnic hatred and minor disputes become ethnic conflagrations when reported in the vernacular press. Definitions of "majority" and "minority" are often twisted to fit a certain argument – minority in the Sinhala press is often used pejoratively to undermine the legitimacy of "other" communities. Conversely, the use of the term "majority" in the Tamil media to represent the Sinhalese community is often unreflective of the diversity of opinions and political ideologies that are interwoven in its fabric.

Colloquialisms also present problems for the media. "Minority" in Sinhala is *suluthara* but most of the time media and politicians use *sulu* meaning small. Terms used to describe a member of the Muslim, Tamil or Burgher communities in the Sinhala language are *thambiya* or *marakkalaya*; *demala* and *lansiya*, respectively. Words like *demalun* referring to the Tamil community and *marakkalayo* referring to the Muslim community are derogative. When the word minority itself is problematic, usage of *sulu* is insensitive and discriminatory. There are no respectable nouns to describe minority communities in the majority community language, Sinhala. In Sri Lanka, not only for minority communities but also for almost all castes other than the so-called highest caste, govigama, there are derogatory terms. Language reflects and reinforces this social political hierarchy, creating a vicious circle.

Stereotypes and the bedevilling of communities are inevitable results of long-drawn ethnic violence. A Tamil suspected of any crime is automatically labelled a terrorist, while a Sinhalese is given the benefit of the doubt in Sinhala newspapers. Tamil, terrorist, LTTE – words that cannot be used interchangeably – are often conflated in the same news report.

Due to the emotional nature of political violence, including terrorist actions and the responses those actions elicit, the use of language by the media plays a key role in either inflaming or managing violent conflict. Media creates the foundation in societies to understand, address and prevent the emergence of, and regression into, violent conflict. Insensitive and careless use

of language can undermine efforts at conflict resolution and in countries such as Sri Lanka, inadvertently prevent the process of creating a plural and democratic polity and society.

### **Using English?**

Curtailling efforts to address these gaps and implementing creative media reform initiatives is the severe lack of English language proficiency amongst journalists in Sri Lanka, which prevents them from using the knowledge resources widely available on the web, internet and through leading international journalist and media organizations. Learning English was regarded as something contra-nationalistic by the subaltern youth after the Sinhala only culture, resulting in the decreasing number of learnt English even as a means of subversion.

In Sri Lanka, language determines socio-political discourse as well. While the peace discourse takes place mainly in the English language, nationalist discourses are mainly taking place in Sinhala and Tamil. For instance 80% of peace research and publications by Colombo-based research advocacy NGOs remain in English, a recent survey has found. There is no peace discourse which is carried out simultaneously in all three languages.

### **Looking to the future**

To transcend the myopia of language policies in Sri Lanka requires us to envision multi-cultural and poly-lingual media frameworks that reflect the aspirations of all communities.

Some urgent steps needed for this transformation are reflected in the Memorandum of Recommendations released by the Official Languages Commission (OLC) in June 2005. Sections 4.1, 4.10, 4.12, 4.14 and 4.20 dealing with language training and English as a link language are of particular importance to media reform in Sri Lanka.

Though Tamil was declared an official language by the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution in 1987, the following 19 years have seen little in the form of using the legislation to engender Tamil language rights in Sri Lanka. This must change. The media must act as a harbinger of the societal change necessary in Sri Lanka by adopting multi-lingual policies that encourage journalists to learn Sinhala, Tamil and English in order to frame news accurately, impartially and fairly.

However, English is making a slow comeback. After 1996, many schools have introduced English as a medium of studies. Institutions such as the Sri Lanka Press Institute (SLPI) have, in the past, conducted English courses for journalists, but these courses need to move from an *ad hoc* basis to those that are in keeping with the recommendations set out by the OLC report mentioned above.

We can only wonder what Sri Lanka might have been if the Sinhala Only Act was not passed in 1956 and both Sinhala and Tamil languages were elevated to be at par with English. Perhaps a media culture more tolerant of difference and celebrated diversity would have emerged. Perhaps all communities would have seen their aspirations and voices in the state media. State media itself may have been more responsive to the unique and shared concerns of all communities in Sri Lanka, which would have been a multi-cultural and multi-lingual country in their real sense.

It is never too late to enact change. While the shortsightedness of the previous decades will take longer to heal, the media can and must nurture the social transformation needed to help Sri Lanka along its tryst with peace.

We, the media, need to speak the language of peace in Sinhala, Tamil and English if we want a future free from violence.

## Wimal, Chandana and Media

"Irudina" newspaper recently published an article dealing with the lineage of Wimal Weerawansa of the JVP. The article that took the form of an exposure had to say that Mr. Weerawansa belonged to an oppressed caste in the island.

Even the change of his name was considered in the article a matter that needed questioning. The sentence that mentioned about the caste was the article's headline printed in large bold letters.

Clearly, the purpose of the article was to defame Mr. Weerawansa.

Mr. Weerawansa is known for his anti-media stand. Also it is true that he directs ethically unacceptable attacks on his political opponents and social activists who do not share his views. Nevertheless, attacks based on one caste and the change of family name run counter to accepted values of journalism.



The media should refrain from leveling attacks on people, making use of their birth, caste, and religion race, or health problems.

If we were to effect a change in our media culture, it is necessary to evoke an effective dialogue and a system of self-criticism.

Notwithstanding the claims of refraining on moral grounds from mentioning about an alleged illness which Mr. Weerawansa was said to be suffering from, the account of symptoms cited in the article makes diagnosis possible. Furthermore, the article contains some references to Mr. Weerawansa's mother and sister, without any relevance whatsoever.

Thus, the said newspaper either indulges in self-deception or in deceiving its readers. Because it tries to hide its unethical practice behind the cover of media ethics.

This goes to show that Mr. Weerawansa, like many other leaders in the country, is seeking to get rid of his caste label. Although the JVP does not recognize the existence of a caste oppression in the country Mr. Rohana Wijeweera took care to do away with the caste label attached to his surname. His real name was Don Nandasiri Wijeweera, and not Rohana.

Changing the name to remove the caste label is a right of citizens. There are millions in our country who face social injustice due to the caste label attached to their surnames.

"The Lanka" is a JVP-oriented newspaper. In its October - 2 issue it too carried a similar report regarding Chandana Suriyabandara, once a journalist and the present UNP

organizer for Senkadagala. The article described him as a person of outlandish dissension with no rightful claim to the name of Suriyabandara.

Thus he is not only accused of assuming a name, which he is not entitled to, but is also called a mull, because of his mixed origin. This is a violation of good traditions of media culture.

This is a misconduct totally unacceptable for a newspaper published in a country with communal diversity. It not only disseminates the myth of a pure Sinhala race but also ridicules a section of the local public.

What is the ethical norm of this paper when stating that it does not reveal the name of the said person's sister for ethical reasons, while disclosing the identity of the brother. Both papers, The Irudina and The Lanka take refuge behind the word "morality" to deceive their readership.

The media should refrain from leveling attacks on people, making use of their birth, caste, and religion race, or health problems.

If we were to effect a change in our media culture, it is necessary to evoke an effective dialogue and a system of self-criticism.



# Tiger Hartal and Sinhala Hartal



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A hartal was on in Trincomalee from January 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup>. Most Sinhala newspapers dubbed that “hartal” as the “Sinhala” hartal. But not all Sinhala people supported that hartal. The best example for that is, even the JVP parliamentarians opposed it. Newspapers reported that he was beaten by those who organized the hartal, when he went to distribute a pamphlet against the hartal.

(The chauvinist Tamilnet first reported the JVP MP was assaulted by Sinhala people when he went to organize the hartal. On the following day, the Tamilnet carried a correction by the MP)

Nevertheless, most Sinhala newspapers preferred to call it a Sinhala hartal. It is common knowledge that the hartal was organized by a racist Sinhala organization.

When pro-Tamil organizations call a hartal, these Sinhala newspapers call it a “Tiger” hartal. These newspapers have no hesitation in naming the organizers as “Tigers”. It could be correct or wrong. The question therefore is, why these

newspapers don’t call them “Tamil” hartals.

The reason is, when a hartal is named a Sinhala hartal, it is justified without question. It is accepted as “legitimate”. When named a “Tiger” hartal, it does not happen that way, it’s different. Then it derives some legitimacy. Does this mean these newspapers are biased? In real terms, the hartal should be named after its organizers in newsreports. Or the objective of the hartal should be given as the name. An example could be “Hartal against the killing of navy personnel” or “Hartal against the killing of students”.

If it is necessary to introduce the names of organizers behind the hartal, then it would have to be a feature writing and not a news report. That is how conflict-sensitive reporting should use “words”. All incidents should have a common standard. “Tiger” hartal (if not called for by the LTTE) and “Sinhala” hartal are not facts. They are reviews. “Facts are holy and reviews are independent” is a valuable lesson in journalism that these news coverages have vulgarized.

## Change begins with you....

Continued from page 23

In addition to the public appeal, in-house training programs are underway for Sri Lankan journalists. I spent three months in Sri Lanka as part of the Myer Foundation’s Asia - Alliance program, conducting workshops for journalists. The training uses Australian examples to demonstrate practical solutions to the issues confronting Sri Lankan journalists, including the Media Alliance’s code of ethics and model charter of editorial independence, The Sydney Morning Herald’s rules on sources and accuracy, and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s code of practice. Other examples included the 2003 Colombo Declaration on public broadcasting values, The Seattle Times diversity checklist for journalists and editors, and The New York Times corrections policy and handbook of ethical journalism values and practices.

The Ravaya independent newspaper has just concluded five months of training that resulted in it adopting a charter of editorial independence, a house code of ethics, corrections policy and guidelines for investigative reporting, and a checklist to ensure diversity of sources, balance and fairness.

The IFJ is conducting additional training as part of UNESCO’s campaign to promote public service media and the European Commission’s Towards Public Service Media project. The training introduces public service media values to encourage quality ethical reporting, editorial independence, and to ensure that the media is responsive to community needs.

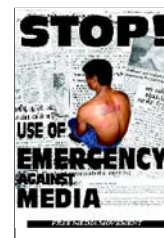
The feedback on the training has been overwhelmingly positive. “Up until now I thought I was a real journalist. But I had not been exposed to training on ethics or an understanding of the role of the journalist in society. I realize I have to re-learn my profession,” said an SLBC journalist.

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Rajesh Dunganna

#### Inside Back Cover



Vincent Jayam -  
Jaffna Journalist after  
a Police assault.

# Journalists Lead the Struggle

A year has elapsed, since King Gayendra put his iron boots down on the democratic rule of Nepal in February 2006. The conspiracy of King Gayendra also curbed media freedom.


From then onwards, journalists and the media took upon themselves the struggle to re-establish democracy.

In March 2006, in a protest that was held in Kathmandu, 13 journalists were arrested. This photo which shows the arrest of Kanak Dixit the Editor of the South Asian magazine "Himal" by security forces, was taken by photo journalist Rajesh Dunganna.





# STOP!



# USE OF EMERGENCY AGAINST MEDIA

**Protect journalists' rights:**

**Free Press**

**Journalists arrested**

**Journalists arrested**

**FREE MEDIA MOVEMENT**

[illegible]**FREE MEDIA MOVEMENT**