

# MEDIA UNDER ATTACK

The following record of incidents of harassment and intimidation of the media and of journalists and other media personnel in 1992 has been compiled for PRAVADA by INFORM.

- *Lakdiva*, a Sinhala weekly which began publication on January 26, 1992, complained that the state-controlled press, radio and television had refused to accept advertisements announcing the release of their first issue;

- In February, two journalists from the Sinhala daily, *Dinamina*, complained that Policemen at the Police post at the Colombo South Hospital in Kalubowila had attempted to assault them when they went to investigate reports of an attack on detainees at the detention centre at Talawila, Ratmalana;

- On March 6, the Inspector General of Police issued an order prohibiting Police officers from giving information on any matters 'other than crimes and accidents' to journalists;

- **Sena Vidanagama**, a freelance photographer covering the Opposition protest march, 'Pada Yatra', and a freelance journalist, **Chitral Soysa**, were set upon by some persons during the march on March 31;

- The *Sunday Times* of April 5 and *The Island* of April 8 published statements by former DIG P. Udugampola; the Sinhala weeklies *Lakdiva* and *Ravaya* as well as the fortnightly *Yukthiya* carried similar reports. The offices of the *Sunday Times*, *Aththa*, *Yukthiya* and *Lakdiva* were visited by the C.I.D.; journalists, members of the editorial staff, printers, lay out artists and other members of the office staff were questioned as to the origin of the documents quoted by these newspapers in writing these reports.

- On April 10, the editor and publisher of *Aththa*, **L.B.Wanigasekera** and **W.Dharmadasa** were indicted in the High Court of Colombo under emergency regulation 26(a) and (e) on the charge that they had brought the government of Sri Lanka into hatred and contempt, and attempted to create dissension and/or ill feeling among citizens of Sri Lanka by publishing the Udugampola affidavits. The case came up in August and hearing was put off for September 21;

- **Meegala Mudiyanse**, the editor of the cinema Journal *Sakvithi* was stabbed at his office in Kohuwela, a Colombo suburb, by unidentified persons on 28th April 1992.

- In April, the Supreme Court awarded **N.K.M.Senanayake**, the owner of **Nawamaga Printers** the sum of Rs. 25,000 as compensation on finding that his fundamental rights had been violated by the closure of his press by the Mount Lavinia Police; he was also asked to seek redress in the district court for damage to his machinery and equipment caused during the period of police closure;

- On May 7, **Dharshana Pannagala**, an Assistant Producer at the state-controlled T.V. station, the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation, complained that he had been assaulted by the Police on duty at the Sugathadasa Stadium in Colombo while on an official assignment;

- On May 16, **Athula Bandara**, a freelance journalist for the *Lankadeepa* in Anuradhapura, complained of having been assaulted by **Shantha Premaratna**, an Opposition Provincial Councillor;

- The *Sunday Times* of May 17 reported that the offices of a newly approved T.V. transmitting station, *East-West*, had been raided and 'immobilised' on a government directive on May 15;

- On May 19, **Sunanda Deshapriya**, editor of *Yukthiya* was indicted in the High Court of Colombo for criminal defamation of the Inspector General of Police and other Police officials by the publication of the Udugampola affidavits;

On July 10, Deshapriya was served with indictment under Section 480 of the Penal Code with regard to publication of affidavits said to be from former DIG Udugampola in the *Yukthiya* of April 12, 1992. He was allowed Rs. 50,000 personal bail; trial was fixed for October 19, 1992;

- On May 26, *Rajaliya* editor **Prem Landewela** was attacked by three men on Sir Ernest de Silva Mawatha, who stopped the car he was travelling in, pulled him out and assaulted him;

- On May 29, the editor of *Rajaliya*, Prem Landewela, was indicted before the High Court of Colombo on two counts, punishable under Section 20 of the Penal Code with regard to material appearing in the *Rajaliya* of April 30, under the heading 'Inhuman Killings by Black Cats in the Central Province': he is charged with 'attempting to excite feelings of disaffection, hatred and contempt of the Government of Sri Lanka' and of 'creating or attempting to create disaffection and discontent among different



sections of the people of Sri Lanka'. Mr. Landewela was allowed bail of Rs.5000; trial was fixed for August 28, and on that date hearings were put off for November 24; 24 persons including several high-ranking Police officers have been listed as witnesses;

- On May 29, journalists who visited the 'Demala Maha Seya' in Polonnaruwa, along with a fact-finding team of Buddhist monks, to investigate complaints regarding excavations presently being carried out there, said they had been debarred from entering the site;

- On June 10, the government announced that it had decided not to permit the opening of any further private T.V stations in Sri Lanka;

- On June 21, former President Jayawardena sent a letter of demand for Rs. 390 million to the Lake House group, Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd., for publishing two defamatory articles in the issues of the *Sunday Observer* of May 10 and June 14, 1992, On July 5, The *Sunday Observer* published an apology, 'unreservedly withdrawing the false and defamatory statements' and tendering an 'unqualified apology' on behalf of the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd., the *Sunday Observer* and its editor, **H.L.D.Mahindapala**. The former President accepted this apology and said he would not proceed with legal action against the newspaper group or its Editor.

However since the columnist referred to in Mr.Jayawardena's letter had not responded to the earlier letter, the former President sent on July 10 a letter of demand for Rs.100 million to Dayan Jayatilaka as the author of a defamatory article published by the *Sunday Observer* under the pen name Anuruddha Tilakasiri. Up to the end of July, the letter of demand could not be served as Jayatilaka's whereabouts were not known. On August 30, the *Sunday Times* reported that the former President had informed Mr. Jayatilaka's mother that he would not be proceeding with the case as Mr.Jayatilaka had been the victim of assault at the altercations which broke out at the Kobbekaduwa funeral.

- On July 1, a few hours before the Opposition 'Sound Protest' (Jana Ghosha) *Reuter* photographer **Anurudhdha Lokuhapuarachchi** was manhandled by a gang of thugs while he was taking photographs of the President's House in the Colombo Fort; his camera was grabbed and the film roll taken away from him.

- *Lankadeepa* journalists **Arundel Wijeratna** and **Indraratna Balasuriya** were assaulted by Police officers while covering the Opposition 'Jana Ghosha' campaign in Colombo;

- *Ravaya* photographer **Sudath Malaweera** had his camera grabbed by security officials while covering a meeting ; his film roll was taken away and destroyed.

- On July 21, three newspapers, the *Lankadeepa*, the *Divayina* and *Yukthiya* published an interview with Udugampola; subsequently, the three journalists concerned, **Chulawansa Sirilal**, **Sunanda Deshapriya** and **Daya Lankapura** were questioned by the CID as to the venue of the interview and the whereabouts of Udugampola.

- On July 26, *Lankadeepa* journalist Chulawansa Sirilal said he had been threatened and assaulted by some persons at Nittambuwa during the public meeting held to felicitate Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike on the 32nd anniversary of her election as Prime Minister;

- On August 4, American journalist **John Colmey**, correspondent for *Asiaweek*, was questioned by the CID in connection with some 'illustrated material' found in his possession. According to the government spokesman Bradman Weerakoon, this material, 'if published, could have brought the government into disrepute and caused disaffection'. Mr Colmey left the island soon after this incident.

- On August 7, a group of journalists covering the launching of the DUNF petition campaign calling for the resignation of the President were set upon by a gang of thugs armed with knives and pistols near the Railway Station in Fort, Colombo.

**Srilal Gomes**, photographer for *The Island* said he had been threatened and prevented from taking photographs of the event; *Visnews* correspondent **Varuna Karunatilaka** was hit on the head with a pistol and his video recorder was damaged: the camera flash gun of Associated Press correspondent **Dexter Cruz** was snatched away by the attackers; *Reuter* photographer **Sudath Malaweera** had his camera flash gun taken away from him.

In a complaint made to the Fort Police, DUNF leader Athulathmudali named Colombo Municipal Councillor U.L. Seneviratne as having been present at the railway station on that occasion; on August 10, Mr Seneviratne denied this story.

The attack was condemned by many groups including the journalists' associations; on August 20, members of the Foreign Correspondents' Association walked out of the weekly Cabinet press briefing as a gesture of protest against what they

termed 'the failure to take action against those responsible for the attacks on journalists'.

On August 28, five suspects in the attack were remanded and on the 29th, the For Police held an identification parade in which one person, **K.H. Gamini Sandanayake Peiris** was identified by eye witnesses to the incident. All five persons were granted bail.

On August 11, restive crowds at the funeral of Major General Kobbekaduwa in Colombo attacked government personalities; among those injured in the attack was **Dayan Jayatilaka**, Associate Editor of the *Lanka Guardian*.

- A vehicle belonging to *The Island* was also set upon and attacked during the melee outside the cemetery on August 13, at the funeral of Brigadier Wimalaratne.

- On August 17, **Jiffry Yunoos**, cartoonist for the Communist Party paper *Aththa*, was threatened by a gang of about fifteen persons who entered his house while he was watching television in the evening; the gang broke some windows of the house and also damaged a trishaw that belonged to Yunoos' son.

On August 18, as he was walking home in the evening, Yunoos' was attacked by three persons, one of whom had a razor knife in his hand; Yunoos suffered injuries as a result of the attack, and had to receive medical care in hospital.

Yunoos identified some of those who came to his home as well as two of the persons involved in the attack on the 19th.

On August 20, the Borella Police, to whom Yunoos had addressed his complaints regarding both incidents, produced one of those suspected of the second attack, Justin Jayaratna; he was granted bail. On August 24, a second suspect, Sunil Siriwardena, was arrested.

On August 25, Yunoos was once again threatened at his home, while he was photographing the premises in order to have a record of the damage. On August 27, while waiting for an identification parade for the second suspect, in the premises of the Chief Magistrate's Court in Colombo, the first suspect Jayaratna threatened Police officials, Prisons officials and Yunoos himself. Both suspects were remanded until September 2.

- In a letter addressed to the Inspector General of Police and dated 18 August, Yunoos set out the incident of the 18th including the gist of the threats addressed to him. On August 20, *The Island* published a piece quoting from the letter, titled 'Gang threatened death if I drew cartoons of President'; the editorial staff of *The Island* was questioned by the CID with regard to the publication of this piece and told that investigations regarding the possibility of a criminal defamation procedure were under way.

On September 9, the editor of *Raavaya*, was noticed to appear before the Parliamentary Privileges Committee with regard to a news story concerning Mr. Choksy, M.P. The inquiry is scheduled for September 24. *Raavaya* has since then been served with three other summons before the PPC. ■

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