

Following is a recent press release, issued by the Free Media Movement (FMM), on the question of freedom expression in state-controlled media institutions.

FREE THE MEDIA

The FMM strongly condemns the misuse of the state owned electronic media and the Lake House group of newspapers by the People's Alliance Presidential candidate, Mrs. Chandrika B. Kumaratunga. The FMM has been informed that the mainstream independent media too has come under strong government pressure to restrict free and fair reporting of the election campaign in the aftermath of the assassination of UNP presidential candidate, Mr. Gamini Dissanayake.

The incidents stated herewith reminds us of the worst practices of the former UNP regime. The FMM unreservedly condemns restrictions placed on the media by the present Government which proclaimed media freedom as one of its main promises.

1. After 17,000 copies of the *Ceylon Daily News* and 25,000 copies of the *Dinamina* of 28.10.94 had been printed, the PA Government had given orders to stop the printing. The lead stories were re-written by non Lake House staff.

2. Strict orders have been given by the PA Government to Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation, Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation, Independent Television Network and Lake House Group of Newspapers not to publish stories that implicate the LTTE in the assassination of Mr. Gamini Dissanayake.

3. Certain stories that were to appear in the Lake House Group of Newspapers implicating the LTTE had been pulled out under pressure from authorities.

4. The state owned electronic media have been used for blatant election propaganda of the PA Government.

5. The Chairman of the SLRC Mr. Vasantha Raja is blatantly conducting a personal campaign using his authority as Chairman to slant all news coverage in favour of the PA.

The duties of the Chairman which are clearly stated in the SLRC act restricts the Chairman's functions to policy making. The Director General is the Chief Executive Officer.

The Chairman using SLRC in the form of an interview by an outsider to counter various personal allegations made by opposition politicians publicly against him is unprecedented for the Chairman to perform the duties of an interviewer which is not part of the responsibilities entrusted to him.

6. The SLBC on its morning news bulletin of October 24 1994, reported that Mr. Anton Balasingham of the LTTE had told the 17 journalists who were in Jaffna to cover Peace Talks, that the LTTE is not responsible for the assassination of Mr. Gamini Dissanayake. No journalist of that team either met or spoke to Mr. Balasingham. When questions were raised at the Cabinet press briefing on this blatant broadcast by the SLBC, the Minister of Information, Tourism and Aviation Mr. Dharmasiri Senanayaka promised an immediate inquiry. Up to date no action had been initiated to investigate this incident.

The Free Media Movement calls upon the PA Government to immediately refrain from interfering with the private owned media and misusing the state owned media. It also calls upon all groups and individuals interested in protecting media freedom to write to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Information, Tourism and Aviation expressing their protest on this grave infringement on media freedom. ■

It is a terrible, and inexorable, law that one cannot deny the humanity of another without diminishing one's own: in the face of one's victim, one sees oneself.

James Baldwin, *Fifth Avenue, Uptown*".