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<http://www.rsf.org/sri-lanka-training-session-for-tamil-01-08-2014,46739.html>

Asia - Sri Lanka

Media shackled

Training session for Tamil journalists disrupted

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Pro-government activists have disrupted media training for Tamil journalists for the second time in two months, this time a two-day workshop on technology safety in Colombo. Such repeated interference, often accompanied by death threats, is a regular occurrence for Tamil journalists.

The Sri Lankan authorities are trying to muzzle news organizations by denying them the right to training. The workshop, scheduled for 26 and 27 July and attended by some 15 Tamil journalists, was organized by the Sri Lanka Press Institute. It was halted when protesters arrived at the venue and threatened the organizers.

On their way to the session, the journalists were held up for several hours after being stopped by soldiers who accused their driver of transporting cannabis.

At a news conference, **Sunil Jayasekara**, coordinator and spokesman for the Free Media Movement, deplored the harassment of the Tamil journalists. He subsequently received seven anonymous death threats.

Benjamin Ismaïl, head of the Reporters Without Borders Asia-Pacific Desk, said: "*The Sri Lankan authorities must immediately halt their repressive policy towards the media, and towards Tamil journalists in particular. The latter are regularly targeted by the military since they are among the few journalists still interested in awkward issues such as extra-judicial executions, kidnappings, the military presence in the north of the country and land seizures.*"

Crackdown stepped up in response to demands for an investigation into war crimes

The crackdown on Tamil news organizations was stepped up after the UN Human Rights Council called in March this year for an investigation into allegations of human rights abuses between 2002 and 2009. At that time, Tamil journalists were understood to have begun investigating cases of child rape by troops in the north of the country.

An earlier training session on investigative journalism for Tamil journalists, organized by Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL) on 7 June, was interrupted on the orders of the defence ministry with the aim of preventing the journalists from assisting the UN investigators in their work. Thirteen Tamil journalists were forced to leave the hotel where the session was being held.

Shan Wijetunga, a senior TISL manager who has also received death threats, said training courses only appeared to be a problem for the authorities when they were attended by Tamil journalists.

On 1 July the defence ministry issued an order banning NGOs from organizing activities "beyond their mandate" such as "press conferences, workshops, training for journalists and dissemination of press releases". All NGOs that organized such activities were ordered to abandon them.

Despite the long list of violations of freedom of information recorded since the civil war ended officially in 2009, military spokesman Ruwan Wanigasooriya [said in a statement](#) two days ago: "There has also not been a single attack on journalists reported in the past few years."

Sri Lanka is ranked 165th of 180 countries in the [2014 World Press Freedom Index](#) compiled by Reporters Without Borders.

Photo: [Tamilguardian](#)
