

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/sri-lanka-government-blocks-critical-news-08-11-2011,41367.html>

Asia - Sri Lanka

Website register

Government blocks critical news websites, says they have to register

8 November 2011

Reporters Without Borders is appalled to learn that access to four leading news websites – [SriLankaMirror](#), [SriLankaGuardian](#), [Paparacigossip9](#), and [LankaWayNews](#) – has been blocked on the media and information ministry's orders since 6 November, a day after the ministry suddenly announced that news websites with "any content relating to Sri Lanka" needed to register without delay.

"We deplore this measure, which reinforces government control over online media," Reporters Without Borders said. "Several news sites had already been blocked by the government, and now this requirement to register with the information ministry poses an additional serious threat to the already limited online freedom of expression.

"We also condemn any attempt to control coverage of the ongoing 'White Flag' trial of former army commander Sarath Fonseka or to limit criticism of the government, no matter how virulent, for which journalists have been threatened. The information ministry must lift these blocking orders and rescind this new requirement. And we call on commercial telecom companies to stop blocking sites at the government's behest."

The announcement that news websites need to register with the media and information ministry and obtain accreditation came on 5 November, shortly after the secretary to the ministry, W.B. Ganegala, had accused certain websites earlier the same day of constantly defaming senior government officials.

It is not yet known how news websites are supposed to register or what sanctions they face if they refuse to comply. Some website journalists reportedly went to the ministry and requested registration forms only to discover that no procedures have so far been put in place.

The number of blocked sites has risen steadily in recent weeks. They include the Lanka-e-News site, which was blocked at the end of October by state-owned Sri Lanka Telecom (SLT) and privately-owned Internet service provider Dialog Axiata PLC without Lanka-e-News being given any explanation. Reporters Without Borders interviewed Lanka-e-News editor Sandaruwan Senadheera at the time (read the [interview](#)). The decision to block the site was upheld by a court today.

Sri Lanka is classified as a "[country under surveillance](#)" in the Reporters Without Borders report on "Enemies of the Internet" and is ranked 158th out of 178 countries in the Reporters Without Borders annual press freedom [index](#).
