

Refugee Review Tribunal

AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

Questions

- 1. Was there a Communist newspaper called *Aththa*, in production during the period 1996-2003?**
- 2. Did it close down in 1995?**
- 3. Could it have continued on the Web?**

RESPONSE

- 1. Was there a Communist newspaper called *Aththa*, in production during the period 1996-2003?**

No reports were found that indicate that the Communist newspaper *Aththa* was in production during the period 1996 to 2003. The sources consulted indicate that *Aththa* was closed down in 1995 [see Question 2 for reports]. It apparently reopened in 2003 [see Question 3 for reports] and was still in operation recently.

- 2. Did it close down in 1995?**

The sources consulted indicate that *Aththa* was the official organ of the Communist Party of Sri Lanka. It had several clashes with the government during its thirty years of publication, and was apparently closed down temporarily on a few occasions, before closing completely in 1995.

Only two brief references were found which mention the final closing date of *Aththa* as 1995. However no references were found after that year to the paper being in operation, until 2003. This seems to support the fact that it closed in 1995.

A list of newspapers and periodicals in Sri Lanka, from a Sri Lanka information website, mentions the years of publication for *Aththa* as 1965 to 1995 ('Newspapers in Ceylon')

(undated), Sri Lanka Genealogy website, <http://www.rootsweb.com/~lkawgw/newsceylon.htm> – Accessed 6 December 2005 – Attachment 1).

A June 1995 situation report by *Inform*, the Sri Lanka information monitor, compiles the headlines from various newspapers for that month. One from *The Island* states simply: “No more Aththa” (‘Situation report: News headlines’ 1995, *Inform: Sri Lanka Information Monitor*, June – Attachment 2).

Other reports indicate that *Aththa* had been threatened with closure, or closed temporarily, on several previous occasions. There were also occasional incidents of violence against persons who worked for the paper.

A February 1993 report states that *Aththa* had been closed down “for allegedly failing to pay taxes”. A media analysis commented that the government had used inspections of tax records “to put pressure on newspapers critical of its policies” [other reports indicate, however, that *Aththa* was still running in 1994] (‘Authorities shut Sri Lanka newspaper’ 1993, *Reuters News*, 7 February – Attachment 3).

An August 1992 report states that a cartoonist for *Aththa*, Jiffrey Yoonus, was “stabbed as he left work, after an unidentified group, one brandishing a pistol, threatened to kill him...if he drew any more cartoons of President Ranasinghe Premadasa” (‘Police question three Sri Lankan journalists’ 1992, *Reuters News*, 23 August – Attachment 4).

The 1993 Human Rights Watch report on Sri Lanka mentions restrictions on press freedom, including that of *Aththa*, during 1992:

A number of legal actions designed to limit freedom of expression were taken against journalists in 1992. Most recently, editors of *The Island*, an independent English-language newspaper, were told by Criminal Investigations Department (CID) investigators that criminal charges for defamation of the President might be filed against the paper for printing an article on August 20 entitled “Gang threatened death if I drew cartoons of President.” The article quoted a letter from Jiffrey Yoonus, a well known cartoonist of the opposition paper *Aththa*, to the Inspector General of Police with details of an attack he suffered on August 18 when armed thugs assaulted him and warned him to stop drawing political cartoons.

In April, *Aththa* itself faced charges for printing accusations made by a former Deputy Inspector General of Police, Premadasa Udugampola, about government complicity in death-squad activity. *Aththa*’s editor and publisher were indicted under Article 26 of the Emergency Regulations for “causing hostility, ill-will and contempt of the government.” Both were acquitted on November 10, but Senior State Counsel A.R.C. Perera indicated that the Attorney-General would appeal the decision...

(Human Rights Watch 1993, ‘Sri Lanka’, *Human Rights Watch World Report 1993* – Attachment 5).

A recent article by Wijesinha mentions that *Aththa* was also banned in 1983 after racist riots which the government accused it of fomenting (Wijesinha, Rajiva 2005, ‘Understanding the past’, *The Lanka Academic Vol.6 No 24*, 7 November, <http://www.theacademic.org/feature/131371506095698/index.shtml> – Accessed 8 December 2005 – Attachment 6).

3. Could it have continued on the Web?

No references were found to an internet version of *Aththa*, but reports do indicate that *Aththa* was revived in 2003. One report indicates that there were moves by provincial governments to suppress the sale of *Aththa* in late 2003. Other reports from 2004 and 2005 mention the paper and seem to indicate that it is still operating.

An August 2003 report on the funeral of veteran political cartoonist Jiffry Yoonus comments that he had made his reputation drawing for *Aththa* before it was banned, and had recently done a cartoon for the newly revived paper:

Mr. Yoonus who shot to fame with his witty cartoons in the *Aththa* newspaper which he served for nearly three decades, made his debut in 1952 at the Lake House group's Thinakaran newspaper...

...Though he had been keeping away from work during the last couple of years due to ill-health, **the *Aththa* which was republished recently had insisted that he bring back the famous 'Appuhamy' character through his cartoons once again.**

His widow Ms. Zainab Yoonus told the *Daily Mirror* that officials at *Aththa* had sent home all the necessary stationery requesting Mr. Yoonus to continue drawing his cartoons for the paper he served loyally.

Accordingly, he had created a cartoon for the first issue a few weeks ago saying 'Appuhamy makes a comeback', but sadly it was to be his last cartoon, Ms. Zainab said (Uvais, Ramesh 2003, 'Jiffry's last stroke with "Appuhamy"', *Daily Mirror*, 30 August, <http://www.rootsworld.com/~lkawgw/jyoonus.htm> – Accessed 6 December 2005 – Attachment 7).

A July 2003 article from the Sri Lanka paper *Sunday Observer* comments that *Aththa* "was revived two weeks ago" (Samaranayake, Ajith 2003, 'The contours of a generation', *Sunday Observer*, 13 July, <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2003/07/13/fea05.html> – Accessed 6 December 2005 – Attachment 8).

A media situation report on Sri Lanka mentions that in September 2003 "the sale of the Communist Party newspaper 'Aththa' (The Truth) and the purchase of the newspaper by provincial libraries has been prohibited by provincial leaders" ('Media situation report, Sri Lanka. May 2003 to April 2004' 2004, *International Freedom of Expression eXchange*, <http://ifex.org/en/content/view/full/59774/> – Accessed 6 December 2005 – Attachment 9).

Other reports from 2004 and 2005 mention *Aththa*:

1. The 2004 edition of *Europa* lists *Aththa* among its weekly periodicals, stating it has a circulation of 28,000 (Europa 2004, *South Asia 2004*, Europa Publications, London, p.485 – Attachment 10).
2. An AOL digest of highlights from the Sri Lankan press mentions *Aththa* briefly as one of its sources, stating that the "former official publication of the Communist Party of Sri Lanka... maintains its left-wing stance". It is said to be published weekly and have a circulation of 10,000 ('Highlights: Sri Lankan Press' 2005, *AOL CountryWatch*, 4 August, http://aol.countrywatch.com/aol_wire.asp?vCOUNTRY=161&UID=1630707 – Accessed 6 December 2005 – Attachment 11).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Search Engines

Google search engine <http://www.google.com.au/>

Databases:

Public	<i>FACTIVA</i>	Reuters Business Briefing
DIMIA	<i>BACIS</i>	Country Information
	<i>REFINFO</i>	IRBDC Research Responses (Canada)
RRT	<i>ISYS</i>	RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State <i>Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.</i>
RRT Library	<i>FIRST</i>	RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. 'Newspapers in Ceylon' (undated), Sri Lanka Genealogy website, <http://www.rootsweb.com/~lkawgw/newsceylon.htm> – Accessed 6 December 2005.
2. 'Situation report: News headlines' 1995, *Inform: Sri Lanka Information Monitor*, June. (CISNET CX10265)
3. 'Authorities shut Sri Lanka newspaper' 1993, *Reuters News*, 7 February. (FACTIVA)
4. 'Police question three Sri Lankan journalists' 1992, *Reuters News*, 23 August. (FACTIVA)
5. Human Rights Watch 1993, 'Sri Lanka', *Human Rights Watch World Report 1993*.
6. Wijesinha, Rajiva 2005, 'Understanding the past', *The Lanka Academic Vol.6 No 24*, 7 November, <http://www.theacademic.org/feature/131371506095698/index.shtml> – Accessed 8 December 2005.
7. Uvais, Ramesh 2003, 'Jiffry's last stroke with "Appuhamy"', *Daily Mirror*, 30 August, <http://www.rootsweb.com/~lkawgw/jyoonus.htm> – Accessed 6 December 2005.
8. Samaranayake, Ajith 2003, 'The contours of a generation', *Sunday Observer*, 13 July, <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2003/07/13/fea05.html> – Accessed 6 December 2005.
9. 'Media situation report, Sri Lanka. May 2003 to April 2004' 2004, *International Freedom of Expression eXchange*, <http://ifex.org/en/content/view/full/59774/> – Accessed 6 December 2005.
10. Europa 2004, *South Asia 2004*, Europa Publications, London. (RRT Library)
11. 'Highlights: Sri Lankan Press' 2005, *AOL CountryWatch*, 4 August, http://aol.countrywatch.com/aol_wire.asp?vCOUNTRY=161&UID=1630707 – Accessed 6 December 2005.