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Selvakumar was summoned to the TID for questioning



The arrest of Dhanushka Lakmal, an activist in the struggle



Questioning Renuka Maliyagoda, a teacher's union activist

This monthly report includes briefs on incidents related to press freedom and follow-up of previous incidents and relevant observations. We have also focused on new incidents related to freedom of speech and expression of people, new laws and the responses from the international community regarding legal reforms and relevant propositions. In September 2022, FMM observed 15 incidents relevant to the scope/criteria selected by FMM to monitor press freedom. They included five incidents related to the safety and security of the journalists and eight incidents related to the criterion of legal conditions. Two incidents were related to professionalism.

Incidents monitored:

1. Selvakumar Nilanthan, secretary of the Batticaloa Media Club, was summoned to the Colombo Terrorist Investigation Unit (TID) for questioning.
2. Former convenor of the Inter Higher National Diploma (HND) Students' Union Haritha Darshana jailed.
3. Valasingham Krishnakumar, president of the Batticaloa District Tamil Journalists Association, was summoned to TID and questioned.
4. The arrest of Dhanushka Lakmal, an activist in the struggle
5. The arrest of actress Damita Abeyratne, who was an activist in the Galleface struggle.
6. Gayan Maduranga, an activist in the Galleface struggle, was summoned to the TID for questioning.
7. Submitting a Cabinet proposal to introduce new laws to regulate electronic media.

8. Presenting a Bill to Parliament for the establishment of a 'Rehabilitation Bureau'.
9. Police attacked a protest march organized by the Socialist Youth Union and arrested 82 persons.
10. The government issued a gazette notification designating several areas of Colombo as high-security zones and it was challenged.
11. Questioning Renuka Maliyagoda, a teacher's union activist.
12. Interrogation of five bank trade union activists about participation in agitations.
13. A survey about journalists' professional rights and issues was conducted by the Free Media Movement.
14. Issuance of circular imposing restrictions on the use of social media by public servants.
15. Conducting an online conversation on RTI.

Table 1: Total number of incidents reported - September 2022

Covered criterion	Number of reported incidents
Safety and security	05
Legal conditions	08
Professionalism	02
Total	15

Safety and protection

An environment in the journalists can perform their duties with physical and mental integrity is a basic condition of press freedom. Also, to safeguard press freedom and freedom of expression, people must enjoy the freedom of expression through media and any other means without repercussions. Freedom for peaceful meetings, protesting and agitating are also included in the freedom of expression. Five instances of serious violations of these freedoms were reported in September 2022.

Table 2: September 2022: Safety and security of journalists - 5 instances

Criterion	Number of reported incidents
Psychological influence	05
Total	05

01. **Selvakumar Nilanthan, secretary of the Batticaloa Media Club, was summoned to the Colombo Terrorist Investigation Unit (TID) for questioning.**

The police, who came to Nilanthan's house on September 2nd, informed him to come to Colombo TID on September 14. Police recorded the names and National Identity Card numbers of all the family members. He was questioned regarding an alleged relationship with the former political chief

of LTTE Batticaloa, Thayamohan. Nilanthan has been questioned by the Sri Lanka Police on several occasions in the past few years.

Source: www.tamilguardian.com

02. **Valasingham Krishnakumar, president of the Batticaloa District Tamil Journalists Association, was summoned to TID and questioned.**

The police came to the journalist's house on September 7th and informed him to come to Colombo TID on September 14th. He appeared at TID on September 14th and no further information was revealed regarding the interrogations.

Source: www.tamilguardian.com

on September 24 to record a statement. She was questioned about the activities related to the public uprising that took place on July 9. She claimed that she was questioned about hijacking a train from Kandy to travel to Colombo, but it was not a hijacking, but a legally paid journey.

Source: twitter.com/JDSLanka

03. Gayan Maduranga, an activist in the Galleface struggle, was summoned to the TID for questioning.

On September 21, Gayan Maduranga was called to the Kirulapana Terrorism Investigation Unit and questioned about the activities related to the past struggle. He was informed to return to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) on September 30th. When he informed that he could not participate on that day, he was asked to come on October 3rd.

Source: www.facebook.com

04. Questioning Renuka Maliyagoda, a teacher's union activist.

Renuka Maliyagoda was informed to come to the Colombo Criminal Investigation Division

05. Interrogation of five bank trade union activists about participation in agitations.

Five members of the National Savings Bank branch affiliated with the Lanka Bank Employees' Union were summoned to the Criminal Investigation Department for investigation of those involved in the recent anti-government agitation. Malaka Liyanage, Ryan Wickramatunga and Shehan Kariyapperuma were called on September 26 and Oshan Buddhika and Damith Saranga on September 27.

Sources: twitter.com/JDSLanka

twitter.com/JDSLanka

Legal conditions

Eight incidents under the criterion of legal conditions related to press freedom were observed during the month of September. They included proposals for legal reforms and imposing new laws. These instances indicate an attempt from the side of the government to specifically restrict press freedom.

Table 3: September 2022: Legal conditions - 08 instances

Indicator	Number of reported incidents
Legal actions	04
Imposing new laws	02
Proposals for legal reforms	02
Total	08

01. Former convenor of the Inter Higher National Diploma (HND) Students' Union Haritha Darshana jailed.

Haritha Darshana was produced before the

Colombo Fort Magistrate on September 2 regarding an allegation of participating in a demonstration on May 21 challenging a court order. He was remanded until the 16th. But the lawyers representing Haritha

point out that such an order was not delivered to him. He was granted bail on the 16th and the case will be called again on the 28th.

Source: lankatruth.com

02. The arrest of Dhanushka Lakmal, an activist in the struggle

Kankanamge Dhanushka Lakmal, a resident of Nittambuwa, who was active in the Galleface protests with his wife and child was arrested by the Bemmulla Police on 03rd September and after being produced before the Gampaha Magistrate's Court, he was remanded until 05th September. He was released on bail on the 5th. He was accused of attacking the house of the Chairman of Aththanagalla Pradeshiya Sabha on May 9th. Dhanushka claims that there is video evidence that he was at the Galleface on May 9.

The next hearing was scheduled for October 6.

Source: theleader.lk

03. The arrest of actress Damita Abeyratne, who was an activist in the Galleface struggle.

Actress Damita Abeyratne was arrested on September 7th during a protest campaign near the Parliament roundabout. She was detained at the Fort Police Station and was remanded until the 14th. Police said she was arrested on charges of trespassing into the Presidential Secretariat and holding an illegal meeting. On September 12, the case was called by motion and the court ordered her release on two sureties of Rs 500,000 each.

Source: www.newsfirst.lk

04. Submitting a Cabinet proposal to introduce new laws to regulate electronic media.

On September 22nd, Minister of Mass Media Bandula Gunawardena submitted a proposal to the cabinet for a Broadcasting Authority Bill for the regulation of television, radio and new media. A cabinet sub-committee chaired by Justice Minister Wijedasa Rajapaksa was appointed for that. It was further proposed to design a code of ethics for electronic media.

Source: www.youtube.com

05. Presenting a Bill to Parliament for the establishment of a 'Rehabilitation Bureau'.

On September 23, 2022, Minister Wijedasa Rajapaksa presented a Bill to Parliament for the establishment of a 'Rehabilitation Bureau' amidst strong opposition to the draft from political parties and civil society. The main allegation against the bill was that the activists of the people's struggle would be detained in the camps for long periods under the guise of rehabilitation. Centre for Policy Alternatives and several other parties filed fundamental rights petitions in the Supreme Court challenging the draft.

Source: www.cpalanka.org

06. Police attacked a protest march organized by the Socialist Youth Union and arrested 82 persons.

On September 24th, 79 persons were arrested for participating in this protest and they were released on police surety after they were presented to the Colombo Judicial Medical Officer. Eranga Gunasekara, Samali Mandira and Koswatte Mahanama Thero were produced before Maligakanda Magistrate's Court and they were released on bail of Rs. 200,000 each. Seven protesters were hospitalized due to police attacks. Attorney-at-law Sunil Watagala stated that the police were illegal and that fundamental rights petitions would be filed on behalf of all the arrested protesters.

Source: www.youtube.com

07. The government issued a gazette notification designating several areas of Colombo as high-security zones and it was challenged.

Under section 2 of the Official Secrets Act, the President issued this extraordinary gazette notice No. 2298/53 on September 23, prohibiting demonstrations or meetings without the prior written permission of the Inspector General of Police or the Senior Deputy Inspector General of Police in charge of the Western Province. in the areas named by the gazette notification.

A number of organizations including the Bar Association of Sri Lanka protested the gazette notification and the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka issued a statement emphasizing that such high-security zones could not be designated as per the Official Secrets Act. The commission further pointed

out that it was a violation of the fundamental rights of citizens.

Source: www.newsfirst.lk
www.newsfirst.lk

08. Issuance of circular imposing restrictions on the use of social media by public servants.

On September 27th, the Secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration, Home Affairs, Provincial

Councils and Local Government M.M.P.K. Mayadunne issued this circular imposing restriction on the use of social media by public employees. The circular states that commenting on social media by a government official without following the provisions of Chapter XLVII, Section 6 and 7 of the second category of the Establishment Code was an offence that would lead to disciplinary action. The trade unions strongly protested the circular.

Source: www.bbc.com

Professionalism

Journalists having a good education, their working conditions, use of international guidelines by journalists and editorials, self-censorship, the autonomy of journalists promoted by trade unions and associations, journalists' understanding of their role, and recognition of the media profession are included under the indicator of professionalism. Two developments that come under this criterion were reported in September.

Table 4: September 2022: Professionalism - 02 incidents

Indicator	Number of reported incidents
Service conditions of Journalists/ recognition of the autonomy of Journalists by Trade Unions and Associations	02
Total	02

01. A survey about journalists’ professional rights and issues, was conducted by the Free Media Movement.

This survey aims to present a wide range of questions to the journalists about the professional problems faced by them in Sri Lanka and inquiring about their professional rights, and publish a report by analyzing the data.

Source: FMM

02. Conducting an online conversation on RTI.

On the occasion of International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAI), Sri Lanka Press Institute organized this online dialogue on “Five Years of Right to Information in Sri Lanka, 2017 - 2022” on September 26 from 04 to 5.30 p.m.

Source: SLPI

Table 5: Press freedom incidents reported to FMM from January 2022 to August 2022

Covered criterion	January 2022 to August 2022		2022 September
	New Incidents	Developments of the previous incidents	
Safety and Security	50	-	05
Legal conditions	80	21	08
Independence of media	06	-	-
Professionalism	04	-	02
Structural conditions	14	01	-
Total	154	-	15

[FMM Press Freedom Reports - from January 2022 from here](#)

Postscript: FMM recognizes press freedom as a human right based on national and international conventions and judgments. Freedoms of thought, conscience, religion and knowing others' opinions are human rights. On that basis, FMM identifies press freedom as a collection of the following ten components. 1) Freedom of thought 2) Freedom of having opinions 3) Freedom of expression 4) Freedom to meet peacefully 5) Freedom for information 6) Freedom of audiovisual recording and storing records 7) Freedom of publication 8) Press freedom 9) Freedom of the electronic media 10) Freedom of the internet. These freedoms are inter-connected, and blocking one freedom disturbs the enjoyment of all other freedoms. Therefore, FMM also emphasizes that misuse of these freedoms in an irresponsible and hateful manner is a wrongful practice.

These monthly reports are prepared by FMM based on the study and analysis of information available for the organization. For this analysis, FMM uses criteria selected through seven internationally recognized elements that cover the ten components mentioned above.

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