

Army commander warns newspaper to censor Defence columns

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05th August 2008, Colombo, Sri Lanka: It has been reported to the our organisations that Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka had told staff journalist Indika Ramanayake of Lankadeepa news paper that he would not cooperate with the newspaper if did not stop the two regular and defence related columns. The regular columns in question are a defence analysis by Duminda Sanjeewa in Sunday Lankadeepa and a Sinhala translation of the security situation column by Iqbal Athas, associate editor of the Sunday Times.

Lt. Gen. Fonseka had made the statement when staff journalist Ramanayake had called him on 5th of August to seek his permission to obtain certain information from another officer.

We, five media organisations strongly condemn the reported warning by the Army Commander.

Our organisations consider this incident as an indirect intimidation aimed at media censorship. When a military officer of highest order such as army commander makes such a request it automatically becomes an indirect order and creates fear among the journalists mentioned. Further this request, or rather order, is a breach of the people's right to information. This is the context we express our disappointment over this incident.

Our five media organisations urge Army commander to change his hostile approach towards the media and to accept the democratic right of the people to hold and express different opinions and interpretations on any public interest issue including the war. If media has to change the manner of reporting at the whims and fancies of military or any other officer then it will not be free media but gagged media. In democratic society journalists first obligation is to truth and to nothing else.