

Media freedom faces serious danger: Bishop

Colombo, 23.11.2007

Condemning the attack on the Sunday Leader press as a brazen criminal act, Colombo's Anglican Bishop the Rt. Rev. Duleep de Chickera in a hard-hitting statement yesterday warned that the continuing trend to silence the independent media had reached dangerous proportions.

The Bishop said:

"The well planned and executed arson attack on the Sunday Leader Press came as a shock to the nation. This must be seen as yet another calculated attempt in a trend to stifle the free media of this country.

The act and the hidden forces behind it must be vehemently condemned by all peace loving and democratic minded citizens of Sri Lanka.

"The continuing trend to silence the independent media has already reached dangerous proportions. A media that can freely voice dissent, advocate the freedom of expression and the right to information and engage in a discourse of critique, is indispensable for the well being of a democratic and civilised nation at all times; it is absolutely crucial in times of violence, war, social suspicion and instability.

"The people of our country must take serious note that if brazen criminal acts of this nature are allowed to occur with impunity then we have no one else to blame but ourselves for the growing chaos and destruction. I consequently call upon all responsible Religious Bodies and Groups of Sri Lankans to condemn this act and call for a free investigation and indictment of the perpetrators. We do well to remember that a free Media is an indispensable service to us and to the integrity and dignity of the Nation. The least we can do when such persons come under attack is to express our strong disapproval and ensure the Media of our solidarity. To the extent that we remain silent this trend of impunity and violent intolerance will be interpreted as complacency and will soon engulf us all.

"Given the location of the press and the circumstances of the attack there is little doubt that the Police should be able to track down the perpetrators without delay. The President's personal initiative for a prompt investigation as well the availability of competent Police Officers enhanced by the prevailing climate of sophisticated intelligence and tight security must lead to successful Police investigations. On the other hand the inability to identify the perpetrators in spite of all these advantages will clearly signal to the whole country the involvement of a more powerful force and even suggest connivance in the attack.

I therefore urge the IGP and Police authorities to discharge their duty by the public and to ensure a speedy investigation. The Police are also obliged to ensure security for the staff and property of the Sunday Leader and Irudina Newspapers and all other Media personnel. They must be allowed to function as a crucial part of our society without intimidation or subjection to harassment, visible or subtle.