

Sri Lankan Government Seals Bank Accounts of Mawbima Newspaper

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The latest move by the Sri Lankan government to seal the bank accounts of Sinhala language weekly *Mawbima* has been slammed by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) as part of a concerted effort to silence critical voices.

According to an IFJ affiliate, the Free Media Movement (FMM), *Mawbima* has been under increasing pressure from the government, culminating on March 13, when the government sealed the accounts of publisher Standard Newspaper Private Limited, effectively halting the publication of the newspaper.

"This is a blatant violation of press freedom and seems to be part of a methodical approach by the Sri Lankan government to intimidate independent media into submission," said Christopher Warren, the president of the IFJ, the organisation representing more than 500,000 journalists in over 115 countries.

The FMM reports that bank accounts of all other business establishments partly or fully owned by the Standard Newspaper Private Limited group owner Tiran Allas, have also been sealed.

This is the last in a long list of attacks on *Mawbima*, which has reportedly published regular investigative articles exposing massive corruption prevailing inside the government ministries and state institutions.

On November 24, 2006, *Mawbima* female journalist Munusamy Parameshawary, 23, was detained, and has been held by the Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) without charge for more than 100 days.

On February 24, the government, in a live television broadcast, attacked *Mawbima* and its owner Tiran Allas, for criticising government policies, and two days later, after four hours of interrogation, TID officers arrested Dushantha Basnayake, a director of Standard Newspapers Private Limited.

"According to all reports, *Mawbima* stood firm against these intimidation tactics and did not change its editorial policy, now the government has abused its power to shut *Mawbima* down completely," Warren said.

Furthermore, latest reports from the FMM reveal that Tiran Allas, was summoned to the TID on March 14 and was told to report to the police on the morning of March 15.

The IFJ stands in solidarity with our colleagues at *Mawbima*, and urges the Sri Lankan government to cease these intimidation tactics, unfreeze the bank accounts, follow due legal process in the case of Dushyanatha Basnayake and allow him adequate defence in a court of law, and to release Parameshawary, who has now been in TID custody for 111 days without charge.