

# Military censorship of news in Jaffna?

(Tamil insight)

In what was seen as indirect military censorship of news in Jaffna, Jaffna-based Tamil newspaper editors were yesterday issued a stern warning by the army against publishing pro-LTTE news, a newspaper official said.

According to this official the army 512 brigade officers had told the editors of the Uthayan, Thinakural and Walanpuri newspapers, not to carry any LTTE related news including messages and speeches related to the upcoming LTTE Heroes Day week.

The official said they were now caught in the middle as publishing only pro government news would antagonize the LTTE and they were yet to decide on the next course of action.

"The LTTE is a terrorist group which is fighting against the government and carrying pro LTTE news should stop forthwith," a military official had reportedly told the three newspaper editors adding that such news would mislead the people and disrupt civil administration in the north.

The newspaper editors were also warned against carrying the annual Heroes Day speech by LTTE leader Vellupillai Pirabakaran on November 27.

The military officers of the 512 brigade had reportedly told the editors that stern action would be taken against them if they failed to comply with the latest guidelines issued by the military. While the military had frequent discussions with the widely circulated Uthayan newspaper this was the first time the other two publications were called in for a meeting with the military seen as a possible military censorship on news in Jaffna.

However when contacted military spokesman Prasad Samarasinghe, after speaking to the relevant official at the Jaffna 512 brigade, told the Daily Mirror the three Tamil newspapers had misunderstood the comments made by the brigade commander.

Brigadier Samarasinghe said there was no warning to the newspapers not to carry LTTE related news but simply an appeal to clarify rebel news with the army and get the military version of incidents which occurred in the peninsula.

The Military spokesman however admitted the 512 brigade commander may have spoken in an unfriendly tone forcing the three newspapers to see it as a threat. He stressed there was no restriction being imposed on the newspapers and that the Jaffna Security Forces commander had been informed of the latest developments.