

merely speak Aryan and Dravidian Languages. He says emphatically that Eelam Tigers are of the same blood as his. With the same breath he regrets the Indo-phobia, that was built up in stages in Sri Lanka today, by political chauvinists. He is alive to the socio-cultural and historical connections Sri Lanka has with India when he asserts that India cannot be an idle on-looker, as the love

and affection for India is in our blood and should be reciprocated.

And the soldier, it has to be reiterated, is part of our state. Shouldn't we all, politicians and the rest, learn from this soldier and salute him if he is still alive or, if not, his memory?

DOCUMENT

COMMITTEE TO PROTECT JOURNALISTS

*The International Committee to Protect Journalists has written to the President expressing its concern over threats made to Iqbal Athas and the staff of **Yukthiya** over their reporting of certain aspects of the war in the North. We reproduce this letter below.*

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The Committee to Protect Journalists is deeply concerned by a recent campaign of harassment and intimidation directed against members of the Sri Lankan news media. While our records indicate that this is sadly not a new phenomenon, the latest round of threats is especially alarming both for its severity and its sustained nature.

Iqbal Athas, defense correspondent for the *Sunday Times* of Colombo, has been the most conspicuous target of these threats. On October 10, the *Sunday Times* published a lengthy article by Mr. Athas on Operation Yal Devi, a recent Sri Lankan army offensive on the Jaffna Peninsula, revealing the number of casualties sustained and weaponry lost. Mr. Athas says that beginning that evening he received several threatening phone calls, including one in which the caller asked him whether he was "trying to teach the army how to do its job," and another in which the caller threatened to kidnap his three year-old daughter if he continued writing "false reports" to subvert "the good deeds of the Army Commander [Lt. Gen. Cecil Waidyaratne]." And following the publication of Mr. Athas' article, the Army Commander himself reportedly told *Sunday Times* publisher Ranjit Wijewardena that "Eelamists" [Tamil separatists] in his news organisation deserved to be "burned on tires".

It is our understanding that Mr. Athas wrote to Gen. Hamilton Wanasinghe on October 18, and that the General subsequently promised Mr. Athas that he would speak to Lt. Gen. Waidyaratne and that his safety would be assured. However, those promises were undermined by the delivery of a funeral wreath to Mr. Athas' home on November 6, addressed to his wife and bearing the names of two army units which participated in Operation Yal Devi.

Two other newspapers have also received threats in connection with Operation Yal Devi. After running a front page story about the intimidation campaign against Iqbal Athas, the Colombo tabloid *Yukthiya* claims to have received a phone call in early November warning its staff to "be careful" and to refrain from criticizing the military. Bernard Soysa, former General Secretary of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), recounts a similar episode regarding an article he co-wrote in Mid-October on the loss of life and equipment in Operation Yal Devi. He says the day after the article was published in the LSSP organ, *Sama Samaja* an anonymous caller told him, "You'll be finished before the end of November." According to Mr. Soysa, his contacts have informed him that a faction within the military will take action against their perceived opponents, and that these actions will be timed to coincide with the birthday of Velupillai Prabhakaran, leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), on November 26.

As a nonpartisan organization working to defend the rights of journalists throughout the world, the Committee views the threats against Mr. Athas and the staffs of *Yukthiya* and *Sama Samaja* as flagrant violations of the right to "seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media," guaranteed under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations. We therefore call upon Your Excellency to safeguard their right to operate in an atmosphere free of harassment or intimidation. We further respectfully ask that the threats in question be fully investigated and that appropriate action be promptly taken against any and all responsible parties.

Thank you very much. We welcome your comments.

William A. Orme
Executive Director