



**Australian Government**  
**Refugee Review Tribunal**

# Country Advice

## Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka – LKA36766 – Virakesari  
Newspaper – Tamil – Airports – LTTE

28 May 2010

### 1. Please provide a profile for Veerakesari Newspaper. What kinds of articles does it print?

Please note sources also refer to Veerakesari as Virakesari. The spelling Virakesari has been used for this research response.

Virakesari is a Tamil language news media source. Editorial reports published by *Virakesari* during the period of 2009 to 2010 indicate that the paper represents and advocates the social and political concerns of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka.<sup>1</sup> A report dated November 2009 published by the Free Media Movement describes Virakesari as a “popular national Tamil news paper”.<sup>2</sup>

The Virakesari website is in Tamil. Limited information could therefore be obtained regarding the content of the website. The layout of the website indicates that the paper provides information on politics, news, business, classifieds and entertainment.<sup>3</sup>

### 2. Please indicate if it has a political profile.

Available information indicates that the Virakesari newspaper has a political profile in Sri Lanka. As stated above, recent editorial reports published by *Virakesari* indicate that the paper advocates the social and political concerns of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, reports indicate that journalists connected who have worked for the *Virakesari* have been abducted and assassinated.

In June 2009, Ms Krishni Ifham (also known as Krishni Kandasamy), a female journalist connected to the *Virakesar* newspaper was reportedly abducted, interrogated and released by unknown persons. On 29 June 2009, *The Hindu* reported that Krishni Ifham was abducted and questioned about articles she had previously written. According to the report Ms Ifham was ordered not to write and not to “cause trouble”. Ms Ifham was working at *Internews* at the time she was abducted but she is a former employee of *Virakesari*. The report states that “Ms. Ifham was the second journalist to be targeted after a recent furore over a much-talked

<sup>1</sup> ‘Sri Lankan daily calls for Indian role in resolving ethnic issue’ 2010, *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, 8 March, source: *Virakesari* - Attachment 1; ‘Tamil media praises speedy normalization of North Sri Lanka’ 2010, Sri Lankan Government News, 11 January - Attachment 2; ‘Sri Lanka paper urges government not to delay proposals to resolve ethnic issue’ 2009, *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, 21 September, source: *Virakesari* - Attachment 3; ‘Editorial urges Sri Lanka government to win confidence of Tamils’ 2009, *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, 24 June, source: *Virakesar* - Attachment 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ranjane, S. 2009, *Victims of “Expression Killings” Sri Lanka*, 18 November, p. 33  
<http://www.scribd.com/doc/22717255/Victims-of-%E2%80%98Expression-Killings%E2%80%99-> Accessed 28 May 2010 - Attachment 5.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Virakesari Online’ 2010, Virakesari Online website, 28 May <http://www.virakesari.lk/> - Accessed 28 May 2010 - Attachment 6.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Sri Lankan daily calls for Indian role in resolving ethnic issue’ 2010, *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, 8 March, source: *Virakesari* - Attachment 1; ‘Tamil media praises speedy normalization of North Sri Lanka’ 2010, Sri Lankan Government News, 11 January - Attachment 2; ‘Sri Lanka paper urges government not to delay proposals to resolve ethnic issue’ 2009, *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, 21 September, source: *Virakesari* Attachment 3; ‘Editorial urges Sri Lanka government to win confidence of Tamils’ 2009, *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, 24 June, source: *Virakesar* - Attachment 4.

about mysterious list naming a group of media personalities accused of being on the payroll of the LTTE”.<sup>5</sup>

A report dated November 2009 published by the Free Media Movement includes a “list of media personnel, media workers, artistes and cultural activists” who have been assassinated in Sri Lanka. According to report from 1985 to 2005 five journalists who had wrote for the Veerakesari newspaper have been assassinated. Descriptions of these assassinated journalists indicates that four of them were reporting on politically sensitive topics such as human rights violations and the military conflict. The report indicates that there are also unconfirmed reports that two other journalists linked to Veerakesari newspaper have been assassinated during the 1985 to 1986 period. Details provided in the report on the assassinated journalists indicates that the most of them worked as correspondents or as freelance journalists for Veerakesari along with other news sources.<sup>6</sup>

The Committee to Protect Journalists also reports on the assassination of Aiyathurai Nadesan, one of the Veerakesari journalists listed in the Free Media Movement report. The report indicates that Nadesan had worked for Veerakesari for 20 years and according to local journalists was sympathetic to the LTTE. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists Nadesan was most likely killed by military officials. The report states that:

Nadesan had been harassed and threatened before his death because he had criticized the government and security forces, according to CPJ research. On June 17, 2001, a Sri Lankan army officer summoned Nadesan for an interrogation and threatened the journalist with arrest unless he ceased reporting about the army.<sup>7</sup>

Reports also indicate that *Virkesari* news editor, Sri Gajan unsuccessfully ran for a seat in Jaffna District in the 2010 Sri Lankan general election.<sup>8</sup> A report dated 11 April 2010 by *Sunday Times* reports that Sri Gajan campaigned as a member of the ITAK (Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi) party.<sup>9</sup> However, two other reports state that Sri Gajan ran under the United National Party.<sup>10</sup>

### **3. Please provide the street address of this newspaper.**

The address of the newspaper could not be found in the English language sources consulted. A Tamil speaking Tribunal Officer could not find an address on the *Virakesari* website.

### **4. Is there any evidence to suggest that people were detained at airports and questioned at length about their involvement with the LTTE, in October 2009?**

On 19 May 2010, *ABC News* reported that according the Edmund Rice Centre all of the 11 asylum seekers returned to Sri Lanka in the past year have detained by police and some have been assaulted. The Edmund Rice Centre have also claimed that “at least nine asylum seekers

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Female journalist abducted by unknown gang and released: Police spokesman’ 2009, *Colombo Times*, 25 June - Attachment 7; Reddy, B.M 2009 ‘Shock over journalist’s abduction’, *The Hindu*, 29 June - Attachment 8;

<sup>6</sup> Ranjane, S. 2009, *Victims of “Expression Killings” Sri Lanka*, 18 November, pp. 30, 33 -34 & 42  
<http://www.scribd.com/doc/22717255/Victims-of-%E2%80%98Expression-Killings%E2%80%99>- Accessed 28 May 2010 - Attachment 5.

<sup>7</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists (undated), ‘Aiyathurai Nadesan’ <http://cpj.org/killed/2004/aiyathurai-nadesan.php>- Accessed 28 May 2010 - Attachment 10.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Nine journalists in the fray for General Election’ 2010, *Sunday Observer*, 28 February - Attachment 11; Fernandopulle, N. 2010, ‘Celebrity winners and losers’, *Sunday Times*, 11 April  
[http://sundaytimes.lk/100411/News/nws\\_15.html](http://sundaytimes.lk/100411/News/nws_15.html)- Accessed 28 May 2010 - Attachment 12

<sup>9</sup> ‘Nine journalists in the fray for General Election’ 2010, *Sunday Observer*, 28 February - Attachment 11; Fernandopulle, N. 2010, ‘Celebrity winners and losers’, *Sunday Times*, 11 April  
[http://sundaytimes.lk/100411/News/nws\\_15.html](http://sundaytimes.lk/100411/News/nws_15.html)- Accessed 28 May 2010 - Attachment 12.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Nine journalists in the fray for General Election’ 2010, *Sunday Observer*, 28 February - Attachment 11; ‘Contest in Colombo a battle of the goliaths’ (undated), *The Nation*  
<http://www.nation.lk/2010/02/28/politics.htm>- Accessed 31 May 2010 - Attachment 13

returned to Sri Lanka by the Howard government were killed”. The report contains the following relevant information:

Immigration Minister Chris Evans says the Federal Government has a “major problem” returning asylum seekers who have been involved with the Tamil Tigers.

Phil Glendenning, the director of the Catholic Church’s Edmund Rice Centre, has recently returned from Sri Lanka and says the country is in danger of becoming a police state.

“We found that of the 11 people removed to Sri Lanka over the course of the last year or so, that all of them had been arrested at the airport,” he said.

“Some of them had been bashed, assaulted. One man has permanent hearing damage, another has had sight damaged.”

Mr Glendenning says those arrested are asylum seekers sent home from Australia.

“[The Australian Government sent them back] and gave them a guarantee of their safety. The thing is they arrive at the airport; they’re immediately handed over to the CID, which is the Sri Lankan police,” he said.

“The difficulty here is that there is a view in Sri Lanka that anybody who left the country through an unauthorised manner, of unauthorised means, is an LTTE sympathiser and if they are Sinhalese people who left, then they must therefore be traitors.

“That’s the assumption. People have been put into prison and held there and the key thing is here that detention can be indefinite. There are people who were removed from Australia at the beginning of this year who are still in prison.”

...”The people are put into prison; the court process is that they’re heard in the prison. The magistrate continues to postpone the cases to a later date, no legal arguments are taken and so you get the situation of it just rolling forward.

“On the ground, those who are in the community, there’s a danger of being regularly abducted and it’s quite an established fact that groups like Reporters Without Borders have attested that Sri Lanka is not safe.”

...”I think the position taken by the Minister yesterday in urging caution about returning people who would be seen as being involved with the LTTE is a very wise one,” he said.<sup>11</sup>

On 13 April 2010 Bruce Haigh, a retired Australia diplomat who formerly served at Australia’s Colombo post, reported that it has been the practice of the Australian government to share information with the Sri Lankan government about the identities of Tamil Sri Lankan nationals applying for asylum in Australia. Haigh stated that:

For many years it has been a requirement of the Australian government to seek a security clearance from the Sinhalese police for Tamils seeking refugee status in Australia. When I was posted to the Australia High Commission in Colombo I could see no sense in the arrangement. It was best ignored for all it did was to put the family of the applicant in jeopardy.<sup>12</sup>

*ABC News* has also reported on Bruce Haigh’s comments that the Australian government continues to share the identity details of Tamil asylum seekers with the Sri Lankan authorities:

...former Australian diplomat, Bruce Haigh, whose postings included the Australian High Commission in Colombo, has criticised ASIO and the likely basis for the intelligence assessment on the five Tamils.

He says the process is flawed.

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<sup>11</sup> Vincent, M. 2010. ‘Returned asylum seekers killed, jailed: advocate’, *ABC News*, 19 May <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/05/19/2903429.htm> - Accessed 31 May 2010 – Attachment 16

<sup>12</sup> Haigh, B. 2010, ‘The AFP gets close to the edge of the law’, Online Opinion website, 13 April <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=10281> – Accessed 22 April 2010 – Attachment 17

“When I was in the High Commission in Sri Lanka one of the things we were asked to do by the Australian Department of Immigration was to check out refugee applicants to make sure that they didn’t have an adverse security background”

“That entailed going to the Sri Lankan police, the Sinhalese police, and seeking a police clearance which was absolute nonsense because if these people were on the other side in a civil war, why would you go to just one party and ask them about the security rating of somebody applying for refugee status.”

“So it was always going to be and always has been a flawed process and that’s what’s happened in this instance I’d say.”

Mr Haigh says ASIO would have continued that practice of speaking only to Sri Lankan authorities.

He says he believes the group would have been found to have Tamil Tiger connections and therefore would have been deemed to be a terrorist threat.<sup>13</sup>

## Attachments

1. ‘Sri Lankan daily calls for Indian role in resolving ethnic issue’ 2010, *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, 8 March, source: *Virakesari*. (FACTIVA)
2. ‘Tamil media praises speedy normalization of North Sri Lanka’ 2010, Sri Lankan Government News, 11 January. (FACTIVA)
3. ‘Sri Lanka paper urges government not to delay proposals to resolve ethnic issue’ 2009, *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, 21 September, source: *Virakesari*. (FACTIVA)
4. ‘Editorial urges Sri Lanka government to win confidence of Tamils’ 2009, *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, 24 June, source: *Virakesari*. (FACTIVA)
5. Ranjanees, S. 2009, *Victims of “Expression Killings” Sri Lanka*, 18 November, p. 33 <http://www.scribd.com/doc/22717255/Victims-of-%E2%80%98Expression-Killings%E2%80%99> - Accessed 28 May 2010.
6. ‘Virakesari Online’ 2010, Virakesari Online website, 28 May <http://www.virakesari.lk/> - Accessed 28 May 2010.
7. ‘Female journalist abducted by unknown gang and released: Police spokesman’ 2009, *Colombo Times*, 25 June. (FACTIVA)
8. Reddy, B.M 2009 ‘Shock over journalist’s abduction’, *The Hindu*, 29 June. (FACTIVA)
9. Committee to Protect Journalists (undated), ‘Aiyathurai Nadesan’ <http://cpj.org/killed/2004/ayathurai-nadesan.php> - Accessed 28 May 2010.
10. Nine journalists in the fray for General Election’ 2010, *Sunday Observer*, 28 February. (FACTIVA)
11. Fernandopulle, N. 2010, ‘Celebrity winners and losers’, *Sunday Times*, 11 April [http://sundaytimes.lk/100411/News/nws\\_15.html](http://sundaytimes.lk/100411/News/nws_15.html)- Accessed 28 May 2010.
12. ‘Contest in Colombo a battle of the goliaths’ (undated), *The Nation* <http://www.nation.lk/2010/02/28/politics.htm> - Accessed 31 May 2010.
13. Deleted

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<sup>13</sup> Morgan, D. & Mottram, L. 2010, ‘Australian government pressured over Tamils’ visa refusals’, *ABC News*, 13 January <http://www.radioaustralianews.net.au/stories/201001/2790915.htm?desktop> – Accessed 22 April 2010 – Attachment 18.

14. UK Home Office 2009, *Report of Information Gathering Visit to Colombo, Sri Lanka 23-29 August 2009*, August.
15. Vincent, M. 2010. 'Returned asylum seekers killed, jailed: advocate', *ABC News*, 19 May <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/05/19/2903429.htm> - Accessed 31 May 2010.
16. Haigh, B. 2010, 'The AFP gets close to the edge of the law', Online Opinion website, 13 April <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=10281> – Accessed 22 April 2010.
17. Morgan, D. & Mottram, L. 2010, 'Australian government pressured over Tamils' visa refusals', *ABC News*, 13 January <http://www.radioaustralianews.net.au/stories/201001/2790915.htm?desktop> – Accessed 22 April 2010.