

Sri Lankan journalists protest against assault on scribes

Hundreds of Sri Lankan journalists Wednesday held a peaceful rally in the heart of Colombo to denounce the attack on a fellow journalist and a British high commission official by unknown men and urged the authorities to speedily arrest the culprits.

The protesters gathered a few hundred meters outside President Mahinda Rajapaksa's official residence and shouted slogans urging the authorities to take steps 'To stop immediately the threat to media freedom', 'Stop attacks on journalists' and 'Stop the culture of impunity'.

'All what we want from the government and the authorities is that they take all possible steps to stop attacks, harassment and threats against journalists and stop the prevailing culture of impunity,' said the convener of the independent Free Media Movement (FMM), Sunanda Deshapriya.

Media rights groups here said that Mahendra Ratnaweera, the political officer of the British high commission, was severely injured in the Monday evening attack in Colombo. His friend and freelance journalist Namal Perera also suffered serious injuries when an unknown group of men in a van blocked their car and assaulted them.

Several local and international media rights groups have condemned the attack and called for immediate investigation.

The US and Britain Tuesday condemned the assault and asked the Sri Lankan authorities to bring the perpetrators to book at the earliest.

'We are deeply concerned by a series of recent incidents involving members of the Sri Lankan media,' a US embassy statement said Tuesday.

The British high commission also condemned the attack as a 'despicable act'.

Sri Lanka's defence spokesman, Minister Keheliya Rambukwella, said police investigation had been launched into the incident.

'We are hopeful of an early breakthrough in this regard,' Minister Rambukwella told reporters Wednesday, adding that the ruling coalition was fully committed to uphold the media freedom.

The Newspaper Publishers Association Wednesday announced that it was ready to offer Rs.5 million to anyone who provided information that could assist the probe into the latest attack on journalists in Sri Lanka.

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