

Sri Lanka to regulate news websites amid crackdown
By Associated Free Press
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COLOMBO — Sri Lanka on Thursday announced new regulations to control websites, defying international criticism of a recent crackdown on opposition news portals.

Media minister Keheliya Rambukwella said the government was amending the 1973 Press Council Act to include news websites, which will now be required to be registered with the authorities.

The Press Council has powers to fine and jail journalists who defy its orders.

"The government thought it fit and the time is right to make amendments to the existing act to accommodate new technologies," Rambukwella told reporters.

Police raided two opposition news websites and arrested nine employees late last month on charges of discrediting President Mahinda Rajapakse. Both Srilankaxnews.com and Srilankamirror.com had been critical of the government.

The New York-based Human Rights Watch accuses Rajapakse of trying to silence critical media since the military crushed separatist Tamil Tiger rebels in 2009, ending decades of ethnic warfare on the island.

The United States and the European Union have urged the government to stop what they call harassment of journalists.

A total of 17 journalists and media employees have been killed in Sri Lanka in the past decade. No one has been brought to justice for the killings.