



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TAMIL JOURNALISTS

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Reg. No: 06470424

London, 06.01.2009

STOP Violence and threats against media

IATAJ strongly condemned pre-dawn attack by a dozen heavily-armed men that badly damaged the studios of the Maharaja Television/Broadcasting Network (MTV/MBC) in Pannipitiya, near Colombo, after charges that the network's reporting of the war between the government and LTTE was not "patriotic" enough.

"Violence and threats against such privately-owned media outlets and journalists trying to impartially report on the conflict must stop," the worldwide press freedom organisation said. "The government must quickly find and punish those responsible for this latest attack and see the network is compensated.

"The attack seems to be because its coverage was not 'patriotic' enough. The network is one of the country's few, and very popular, independent news sources. The incident recalls the November 2007 attack on the Leader Publication printing works, for which nobody has been punished."

The attackers threw grenades, set fire to the main control room and then left. Susil Kindelpitiya, news editor of Sirasa TV, which is part of the network, said some staff were roughed up.

The network has been criticised for not giving enough air-time to recent government victories over LTTE, with state-run media outlets accusing it of reporting a suicide attack in Colombo on 2 January, the day the army captured the LTTE's capital of Kilinochchi, in northern Sri Lanka. A bomb was thrown at the network's offices just after news of the government victory was broadcast.

The state-owned media has recently attacked MTV/MBC for supposedly being "unpatriotic," which has forced some of its journalists to censor themselves or flee the country.

The International Association of Tamil Journalists strongly condemns the attack on MTV/MBC and urges the Government to take stung action. The IATAJ also urges Sri Lankan Government to ensure that such attacks on media stops forthwith.

The IATAJ request the International Community to put pressure on the Sri Lanka Government to act immediately to uphold the freedom of the media in Sri Lanka.

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