

Photojournalists 'banned from budget'

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Leading media organisations in Sri Lanka have condemned the government for banning photo journalists from covering the budget speech by President Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Only the photojournalists from state-controlled media were allowed to cover the event, five media organisations said in a statement.

President Rajapaksa, in his capacity as the minister of finance, delivered his government's third budget speech on Wednesday.

Photo journalists have boycotted the traditional tea party hosted by the Finance minister as a protest.

"Our organizations consider this an act of clear censorship, a telling disregard for plural opinion in the media, a blow to independent journalism and an act that grossly discriminates against non-State media," the statement added.

"This, we note, is in effect the totalitarian control of media that stifles independent journalism and the freedom of expression".

The media watchdogs have demanded that all non-state media be allowed to cover all events that state media is privy to, "without fear of censorship or discrimination".