

# SRI LANKA

## TV reporter hacked to death in Jaffna

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Reporters Without Borders is outraged by the murder of **Paranirupasingam Devakumar**, a television reporter of Tamil origin, who was hacked to death yesterday evening as he was returning to his home a few kilometres outside the northern city of Jaffna. A friend who was with him was also killed in the attack.

"Devakumar is the latest journalist to fall victim to the spiral of violence that has wracked the Jaffna peninsula since fighting between the government and Tamil Tigers resumed in 2006," the press freedom organisation said. "The government in Colombo must do everything possible to establish the circumstances of this murder and identify those responsible, so that it does not go unpunished as so many others have."

Reporters Without Borders added: "Although no suspect has yet been found, the security forces should explain how this attack took place in an area of the peninsula that is supposed to be under close military control. The government is exposing both its inability and its lack of political will to protect journalists."

Aged 36, Devakumar had worked for the past three years for the three stations owned by the Maharaja Television group - *MTV*, *Sirasa TV* and *Shakthi TV*. He was hacked to death by an unidentified group of assailants at Navanthurai, a few kilometres outside Jaffna, as he was returning to his home in Vaddukoddai. The friend accompanying him, 24-year-old computer technician Mahendran Varadan, died later in hospital from the injuries he sustained in the attack.

The government has reportedly assigned three police teams to probe the incident. Priority could not be given to any hypothesis for the time being as Devakumar was known for covering both sides of the war between the government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). He had not been criticised or threatened in the past and a personal motive cannot be ruled out. He was probably the last active journalist in the Jaffna peninsula.

Stressing that Devakumar's murder was just the latest in a series of killings of journalists in the troubled Jaffna region, the Free Media Movement said condemnations and promises of investigations had no meaning "without the political will" to complete the investigations. "The repugnant impunity that aids and abets violence against journalists and media personnel must come to an end," the FMM said.

Caught in the crossfire between two armed forces, journalists in the Jaffna peninsula are constantly the targets of threats, kidnappings and murders, and many of them have been forced to flee the region.

Reporters Without Borders has long condemned the untenability of this situation in its press releases and in a report entitled "Jaffna's media in the grip of terror" which it published on 24 August 2007 as a member of an international press freedom mission to Sri Lanka.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa recently reiterated his determination to "defeat the terrorism" of the Tamil Tigers, who are blamed for the frequent deadly bombings in the Colombo region. Despite their attempts to suppress the information, the security forces have sustained heavy losses in the course of their attempts in recent months to dislodge the LTTE from the Jaffna peninsula.