

Again Arson Destroys Office of Brazil Newspaper that Denounced Corruption

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A fire that swept through the offices of the fortnightly newspaper "Tribuna do Povo", in Várzea da Palma (300 km north of Belo Horizonte, capital of the southeastern state of Minas Gerais) on April 9, 2007, was arson according to Brazilian authorities.

The blaze resembled one that destroyed the offices of a newspaper and two radio stations in Marília, in the state of São Paulo, in September 2005 after they too had strongly criticized local officials.

The latest fire badly damaged the offices, destroying furniture and computers. A neighbor alerted police, who found cans of petrol on the spot and said it was arson.

The newspaper, founded and co-edited by Dirceu Marques de Oliveira and Artur Nascimento, has reported on extensive corruption in the Várzea da Palma town government.

Similar accusations of corruption against local officials, including former mayor Abelardo Camarinha, led to the fire at the Marília offices of the daily "Diário de Marília" and radio stations Diário FM and Dirceu AM on 8 September 2005. Three people were each sentenced to 12-year jail terms in January 2006 for setting the fire.

Camarinha and his son Vinícius, a member of the state assembly, were not punished, and mounted an operation to block publication of "Diário de Marília" on general election day on October 3, 2006.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF), an international group dedicated to defend freedom of expression and of the press, says that it strongly deplores what happened in Brazil and called for those responsible to be arrested and punished. There are no suspects, at the moment, however.