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Japanese politician murdered

Anti-corruption campaigner stabbed outside his home

Jonathan Watts in Tokyo
Saturday October 26, 2002
[The Guardian](#)

A Japanese politician who made his name by exposing corruption in high places was stabbed to death outside his home in Tokyo yesterday.

It could prove to be Japan's first political assassination for more than 40 years.

Koki Ishii, an outspoken member of the house of representatives for the opposition Democratic Party of Japan, was slashed in the head and chest with a 12-inch sashimi knife as he was about to get into his car.

The killer, who was described by witnesses as being in his 50s and wearing a red bandana, ran off after the attack, leaving no clue to his motive.

Japan has one of the world's lowest levels of crime and has not had a political assassination since 1960, when the Socialist party leader Inejiro Asanuma was stabbed to death by a rightwing youth at a political rally.

But many politicians say they have been threatened by rightwing extremists and gangsters connected with building companies, industry and senior members of the government party, the Liberal Democrats.

Ishii was one of the most vocal critics of the cosy and often illicit ties between these groups, prompting even the prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi, to speculate that the murder may have been politically motivated.

"There is absolutely no excuse for the use of violence to silence politicians," he said. "I feel anger rising up inside me."

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Ishii headed an anti-corruption taskforce in the Democratic party called the G-Man Squad, after the gang-busting American FBI agents.

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The leader of the DPJ, Yukio Hatoyama, said he was shocked. "We must not let this happen again. He had been fighting a lone battle against corruption."

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In his three terms in office, Ishii - who held a doctorate in philosophy from Moscow University - made many enemies.

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He played a role in uncovering the crimes of the Aum Supreme Truth Cult, which carried out the 1995 sarin gas attacks in the Tokyo underground railway.

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This summer he accused the defence agency of dirty dealings in its purchase of training aircraft from Fuji Heavy Industries in preference to what he said was a better offer by the Swiss company Pilatus.

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