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A Burmese soldier shoots Japanese reporter Kenji Nagai at close range in Rangoon on 27 September 2007.

2008 Annual Report

ASIA-PACIFIC

A YEAR OF CRISES. WHAT IMPACT ON PRESS FREEDOM?

The Asian continent turned into a battlefield for journalists in 2007, with 17 killed during the year and nearly 600 assaulted or faced with death threats. In Pakistan alone, security forces arrested 250 reporters, frequently clubbing them first, for covering marches organised against President Pervez Musharraf or at their own demonstrations against restrictions imposed on them under the state of emergency. In Sri Lanka, several senior figures on the Tamil-language newspaper *Uthayan* lived holed up at their offices for fear of being gunned down in the streets of Jaffna where paramilitaries have sown terror. In Burma, soldiers ordered to restore order in September shot dead a Japanese reporter and hunted down Burmese cameramen and photographers.

Asia has never had so many privately-owned TV and radio stations and news websites, all trying to provide the public with news of which they have been deprived for so long. Seven of the world ten highest circulation dailies are now Asian and the continent boasts the largest number of Internet-users.

Who could have imagined that footage of public executions in North Korea would one day be broadcast by international television? Who could have expected to see dozens of Burmese journalists smuggling reports out of the country from victims of atrocities by the ruling junta? However, the authorities continue to do their utmost to restrict access to sensitive regions. Journalists find it impossible to reach the scene of clashes between the army and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, or the tribal zones between Pakistan and Afghanistan, or some Chinese and Tibetan villages shaken by demonstrations.

AUTHORITARIAN COUNTER-ATTACKS

Dictators and other self-proclaimed presidents have been responsible for brutality and bad faith in countering the emergence of free media. Master of this medium, Pervez Musharraf has presented himself as the “last bulwark of democracy”, while allowing his secret services to kidnap and torture journalists. He also, in November, ordered the banning of all privately-owned television and radio. The tyrant of Pyongyang, Kim Jong-il, decided on appeasement of the international community in relation to his nuclear programme, while allowing the most outrageous mistreatment to prevent North Koreans having contacts abroad. One man was executed for having made a phone call to a foreign country and international and dissident radios in Korean were systematically jammed.

This wave of damaging footage for governments prompted some very virulent counter-attacks. In Bangladesh, when the interim government was faced with demonstrations, it ordered independent television stations to remove news bulletins and talk shows from their schedules.

In the run-up to the 17th Chinese Communist Party Congress in October, the Propaganda Department began bringing liberal media to heel and closing thousands of websites, blogs and discussion forums. Not one of the promises made by the authorities to secure the 2008 Olympics was kept. At least 180 foreign journalists were arrested, physically assaulted or threatened in China, even though at the time the games was awarded in 2001 an official said: “There will be total freedom of the press”. And 15 Chinese journalists and cyber-dissidents were arrested in 2007 for “inciting subversion” or “disclosing state secrets”.

Vietnam’s sole political party set out to get rid of leaders of opposition movements, including those of underground publications which started in 2006. Around a dozen journalists and cyber-dissidents were given prison sentences during the year. While in Malaysia, the internal security ministry hounded media and arrested several bloggers and opposition columnists.

BEWARE OF TABOO SUBJECTS

It can be a dangerous business to: criticise the royal family in Thailand, to raise the problem of the influence of religion in Afghanistan, to oppose Lee Kwan Yew in Singapore or to expose corruption among those close to primer minister Hun Sen in Cambodia. As a result, Asian journalists are frequently driven to self-censorship. The law provides for long prison sentences, and even the death penalty, for those who take the risk of breaking religious political or social prohibitions.

A young journalist in the north of Afghanistan had this terrible experience in 2007. He was arrested for “blasphemy” and sentenced to death, while the Council of Mullahs put pressure on the authorities for

even tighter control on the content of Afghan privately-owned TV. In Bangladesh, a cartoonist was imprisoned for innocent wordplay about the prophet Mohammed. A blogger was arrested in Bangkok for posting a remark about the Thai royal family. Finally, several Cambodian reporters were forced into exile after they investigated lucrative timber-trafficking involving relatives of the head of government.

Communist governments in particular use imprisonment of journalists and cyber-dissidents to punish critics and intimidate the rest of the profession. 55 reporters and Internet-users have been arrested in China since the country was awarded the Olympic Games in 2001. And Burma's Win Tin is at 77 the world's oldest imprisoned journalist. In total, almost two-thirds of the world's imprisoned journalists are being held in Asia.

CENSORSHIP REACHES INTO NEW TECHNOLOGY

China is undoubtedly the most technically advanced country in terms of censorship and repression of the newest means of communication. Cyber-censors have continued to hound news websites as shown in Reporters Without Borders' report, "Voyage to the heart of Internet censorship", which it released in 2007, based on information from a Chinese technician. A variety of state administrations imposed strict control on online content.

Bolstered by this success, the government extended its influence to blogs, for which the main hosts were forced to sign a self-discipline pact in 2007. Foreign-based independent news websites, such as the Boxun platform, fell victim to ferocious attacks by hackers emanating from China.

Chinese and Vietnamese dissidents continued to use the Internet and new technology to break out of the straitjackets in which they are held. The activist Hu Jia was arrested at the end of December a few weeks after giving evidence to the European Parliament via his webcam. He had been under house arrest for nearly a year. In Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh-City, journalists, lawyers and trade unionists were arrested for posting articles critical of the government online. Before his arrest, the lawyer Nguyen Van Dai had his own blog nguyenvandai.rsfblog.org. Despite filtering and surveillance, discussion forums in Vietnamese are full of political remarks and dissidents use Skype, paltalk and Facebook to communicate with one another.

THE TERRORIST THREAT

The increase in suicide bombings by Al-Qaeda followers has created fresh dangers for the media, who have to closely cover the figures involved and sensitive events. Two Pakistan reporters got killed in this way in 2007. One died in the first suicide attack against Benazir Bhutto in Karachi and the other was killed by a bomber targeting the Pakistani interior minister.

Henchmen of Mullah Dadullah who cut the throats of the Afghan fixer and driver of Italian special correspondent Daniele Mastrogiacomo, then released him in exchange for several imprisoned Taliban leaders, created a precedent that only increased the risk run by journalists in southern and eastern Afghanistan. The murder of the respected head of *Peace Radio*, Zakia Zaki, stunned the entire profession and a botched investigation failed to find the perpetrators.

In Nepal, it was armed groups fighting for the rights of the Madhesi people in the south, who were responsible for creating terror. Some 100 journalists were assaulted, threatened or forced to flee the region. Hit lists of journalists to kill were posted up in some towns by Madhesi militants.

IMPUNITY STILL HOLDS SWAY

The authorities in Sri Lanka systematically blocked investigations into murder cases involving the press. Police made no attempt to probe further when suspects were indicated or vital clues found in the murders of two staff on the newspaper *Uthayan* or in the 2005 murder of Sivaram Dharmeratnam, the editor of *Tamilnet*. Pakistani authorities refused to reveal the conclusions of two investigations into the kidnapping and murder of Hayatullah Khan, a journalist from the tribal areas, whose widow was killed in 2007, as if to punish her for having sought justice in the murder of her husband, in which the secret services could be implicated.

It is rare for the determination of a judge to alter the course of history. An Australian judge concluded that the murder of five journalists in East Timor in 1975 was a war crime committed by Indonesian forces, after taking detailed evidence from dozens of witnesses, including a former Australian prime minister. But Jakarta immediately rejected his conclusions, thus prolonging the impunity of soldiers accused of atrocities in East Timor.

In the Philippines, Nena Santos, the courageous lawyer of murdered journalist, Marlene Esperat, succeeded in getting the justice system to investigate who ordered the killing. However this did not prevent two more journalists from being killed in 2007 by hit-men in the pay of corrupt politicians.

Vincent Brossel
Head of Asia-Pacific desk



AFGHANISTAN

Area: 652,090 sq. km.

Population: 31,057,000.

Languages: Pashto, Dari, Uzbek and around 30 other languages and dialects.

Head of state: Hamid Karzai.

Afghanistan, which has been destabilised by an increasingly violent civil war, finds it difficult to protect its journalists. The Taliban kidnapped and then killed two fixers working with an Italian special correspondent and have launched attacks on several media premises. A court sentenced a young journalist to death for alleged “blasphemy” and security forces harassed the most critical journalists.

The men of one of the Taliban’s most feared commanders, Mullah Dadullah, in March 2007 cut the throats of Sayed Agha and Adjmal Nasqbandi, driver and guide to Italian reporter Daniele Mastrogiacomo, after “trying” them for “espionage”. The life of the reporter for *La Repubblica* was saved thanks to his country’s intervention in negotiating the release of several Taliban chiefs in exchange for his freedom. He had been snatched while working in the southern Helmand region where the Taliban are active.

The fate suffered by the foreign journalist’s Afghan fixers demonstrate the serious risks run by journalists working in the south and east of the country where fighting claimed several thousand lives in 2007. A British special correspondent who had worked with Sayed Agha made the same point in comments after the young man’s death: “Sayed Agha was a gentle, witty and deeply likeable young man (...) It was access quite impossible to achieve without the tribal connections and guarantees that a local man like Sayed was able to provide. But with his work came a great level of risk.”

Mullah Omar’s men, who control several districts, seized a score of journalists in 2007. The Taliban stopped and held a team from *Al-Jazeera* and two Pakistani reporters at the beginning of the year before quickly releasing them safe and well. The Taliban also stepped up attacks against media installations, launching a rocket attack on radio *Mili Paygham* (Pashto for National Message) in Logar province, eastern Afghanistan.

THE DIRECTOR OF PEACE RADIO MURDERED

The profession was traumatised by the murder overnight on 5-6 June of Zakia Zaki, head of radio *Sada-e-Sulh* (Peace Radio) and a charismatic figure in Afghan journalism. She was killed by a gang

which broke into her home and shot her seven times in front of her two-year-old son. Police arrested six suspects and released four of them for lack of evidence. The authorities accused the Taliban of carrying out the murder, but friends and family of Zakia Zaki pointed the finger at local figures, including former warlords, whom the journalist had exposed in her programmes on human rights. Zaki launched the first free radio even before the fall of the Taliban in 2001 and became a member of the constituent assembly in 2003.

A few weeks after the murder of Zakia Zaki, Farida Nekzad, editor of the independent Afghan news agency *Pajhwok*, received death threats from unknown men who warned that she would suffer the same fate as the radio director, whose murder she was investigating.

The murder of Zakia Zaki took place against an extremely tense background between the staff of *Sada-e-Sulh* and certain local officials. The journalist Abdul Qudoos had been released in early February after being held in custody for 11 months on the basis of a complaint of “attempted murder” lodged by woman deputy Samia Sadat. On his release, a council of elders told him not to make any statements to the press or seek compensation from the deputy. Samia Sadat was a political rival of Zakia Zaki at the latest legislative elections. She had moreover tried to close down Zakia’s radio which she viewed as an instrument of propaganda for her political opponents.

Police never fully solved the murder, at the end of May, of Shakiba Sanga Amaj, a popular young presenter of the programme “Da Gudar Ghara” on the Pashto-language *Shamshad TV* for which she also reported. The authorities and her friends and colleagues believed there was a family link to the crime, accusing family members of hiring a killer to



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punish her because the young woman refused to get married.

ONE JOURNALIST SENTENCED TO DEATH AND INDEPENDENT REPORTERS ARRESTED

For the second time since the fall of the Taliban, a journalist was sentenced for blasphemy. Journalism student, Sayed Perwiz Kambakhsh, 23, who was arrested in October in Mazar-i-Sharif, was sentenced to death on 22 January 2008 after a closed-doors trial at which he had no lawyer to defend him. He was convicted of “disseminating defamatory remarks about Islam”, for printing and distributing to friends an article he downloaded from the Internet that analyses what the Koran says about the role of women. But the sentence, which was demanded by the Council of Mullahs, was also designed to intimidate the victim’s brother, journalist Sayed Yaqub Ibrahimi, who has been investigating the authorities in the Balkh region of northern Afghanistan.

The often criticised government has not hesitated to take controversial measures against the media. In January, independent journalist Tawab Niazi was arrested by the secret services for having had contact with a Taliban spokesman. He was sentenced to one year in prison at the conclusion of a summary trial. The authorities released him, in August.

For his part, the chief prosecutor attacked *Tolo TV*, sending in around 50 police officers, also in April, to arrest journalist Hamed Haidary as well as the station head, accusing them of having twisted his words in a news bulletin broadcast the same day. Police withdrew faced with strong resistance from the journalists.

The secret services in July arrested Mohammad Asif Nang, editor of the magazine *Peace Jirga*, and Kamran Mir Hazar, journalist on radio *Salam Watandar* who also runs the blog *kabulpress.org*. They were later released on bail. After a second

arrest, Kamran Mir Hazar decided to flee the country.

NO NEW LAW ON THE MEDIA

The head of state in December refused to sign the media law – which nevertheless protects freedom of the press – which had been adopted by the parliament in May, after a lively debate within parliament and the government. Deputies, most of them former warlords, banded together to tighten media control in the name of “respect for Islamic values”. One of the leaders of the Islamist party *Hezb-i-islami* said that “these programmes and photos of half dressed women are like a poison which is spreading in our society and provides a pretext for people to join the enemies of the government”.

A media campaign succeeded in preventing the adoption of articles which would have been a backward step. One of the heads of the privately-run station, *Ariana*, Abdul Jabar Baryal, said on the fringes of the debate that the “spirit of modernity and freedom escapes this government of ex-communists and Mujahideen who want the media to become a propaganda machine”.

Foreign military present in Afghanistan, increasingly concerned about the effect on public opinion of mistakes resulting in the deaths of civilians, have on several occasions tried to prevent the press from doing its job. US soldiers in March wiped photos taken by Afghan reporters, working for the *Associated Press*, after they covered the death of civilians killed by Marines, in eastern Afghanistan. French journalist, Claire Billet, working for the independent *Hamsa Press*, was blacklisted by NATO forces in May for filming military convoys without permission. She had previously been arrested and questioned in April by private security agents working for the US army in Kabul. Afghan and foreign journalists are regularly ordered by international coalition forces in Afghanistan not to film their activities.

AUSTRALIA

Area: 7,617,930 sq. km.

Population: 20,560,000.

Language: English.

Head of government: Kevin Rudd.

The last years of conservative prime minister John Howard's long period in power - brought to an end with his decisive defeat in elections in November - was marked by a growing battle with the press. The media even formed a coalition called Australia's Right to Know to combat the administration's lack of transparency. Meanwhile a journalist's right to protect sources and the confidentiality of communications were once again under threat.

During the legislative election campaign, the Australia's Right to Know coalition showed that a lot of news and information was not accessible to the press and public and that this right was obstructed by at least 1,500 legal decrees and rulings. One of the leaders of the campaign, John Hartigan, chairman and CEO of News Limited, said that journalists working for his group had been banned from: accessing information in an audit of politicians' expenses; obtaining a list of restaurants against which public health authorities had taken action; and accessing ranking of hospitals according to the quality of care. A few days after his election, Labor Party leader, Kevin Rudd promised concrete improvements in access to public information.

Lack of rights for journalists to protect sources was demonstrated in June 2007 when two journalists working for the *The West Australian* in Perth were threatened with prison unless they revealed how they had obtained a confidential report of an anti-corruption commission which the newspaper had used to point the finger at a political figure.

Some articles of the telecommunications and anti-terror laws, adopted by John Howard's party, threaten the confidentiality of journalists' sources. Procedures which allow phone-tapping can threaten the independence of the press when it tries to cover cases involving terrorism or organised crime.

TENSE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE AUTHORITIES AND THE PRESS

Some sentences provided for under anti-terror laws are quite simply outrageous. A journalist who might interview a person suspected of terrorism,

is at risk of up to five years in jail. Journalists reporting on these cases can be arrested by police, particularly if they publicly reveal the names of suspects. Under the law a journalist does not have the right to refuse to reveal sources in cases of terrorism. Security forces can search media offices for evidence.

Relations between the local authorities and the press, often in a monopoly situation in some states, can sometimes be very tense. The Western Australia state government in May blackmailed the management of *The West Australian* when the attorney general threatened to withdraw public advertising from the daily, which has a highly critical editorial line towards the local government. He also threatened not to apply the law protecting sources, the shield law, unless the editor was fired. The Western Australian premier personally threatened the editor whom he called "dishonest", "immature" and a "problem for the state". The editor of the newspaper rejected the attack. "Every government would prefer to have a compliant media which simply recycles the government's version of events", he said. "However that is not how *The West Australian* or any other credible media organisation operates".

The country's highly influential community media sometimes suffer the effects of news events in their country of origin. The editorial staff of the weekly *al-Furat*, which serves the Iraqi community, received death threats on the editor's answering machine in January. The caller said he would "massacre" the editor, Hussein Khoshnow, as well as "all the Iraqi Kurds and Shiites in Australia". The threats came after the paper took a stance in favour of the application of the death penalty to Saddam Hussein. A police investigation got nowhere.

AUSTRALIA

JUSTICE FOR THE FIVE BALIBO JOURNALISTS?

The year saw a Coroner's Court inquiry into the killing in Balibo, East Timor in October 1975 of five British, New Zealand and Australian journalists which concluded on 16 November that it was a "war crime" committed by the Indonesian army and pointed the finger at former army captain, Yunus Yosfiah, who subsequently became a minister in Indonesia.

The inquiry report, based on scores of witness accounts including controversial evidence from a former Australian prime minister, clearly demonstrated that the journalists were killed because they were unwanted witnesses to the Indonesian invasion of East Timor. On the day the report was published, Indonesia rejected its conclusions with the official comment: "This court has a very limited jurisdiction and it will not change anything".



BANGLADESH

Area: 144 000, sq. km.
Population: 144,460,000.
Languages: Bengali, English.
Head of state: Iajuddin Ahmed.

A drop in the number of physical assaults and death threats was eclipsed by dozens of cases of arrests, maltreatment and censorship committed by the army against independent journalists. The interim government and the military put an end to political disorder but at the price of serious violations of press freedom.

There was a sharp decrease in the number of journalists physically attacked or receiving death threats from political militants and criminals. On the other hand, arrests increased markedly, with almost 40 cases in 2007. And the army, the real power in the country, committed serious press freedom violations aimed at silencing independent journalists. The government constantly stated that the media had a role to play in the fight against corruption and social injustice, but these good intentions were confounded and, in a new development, self-censorship began gradually to be applied to political issues. "Some asserted that the media was becoming the parliament in the absence of a government formed by elections. Others welcomed the emergence of a fourth estate. But one thing in the media was missing: critical articles on the current administration, clearly demonstrating the existence of censorship and self-censorship", the Bangladesh Centre for Development, Journalism and Communication (BCDJC), a Reporters Without Borders partner organisation, said in one of its recent reports.

CENSORSHIP IMPOSED AT EVERY POLITICAL CONVULSION

A state of emergency was declared on 11 January and the country's TV and radio were ordered to stop broadcasting their news programmes for two days. When the government faced student demonstrations at the end of August, it banned stations from broadcasting talk shows and political programmes. Army intelligence services officers summoned editorial heads and threatened them with draconian criminal proceeding, including under Article 5 of the State of Emergency Regulations. *CSB News* and *Ekushey TV* were ordered by the Press Information Department not to broadcast "provocative" reports and commentaries. A management figure at *ATN Bangla* told Reporters Without Borders, "The ban on talk

shows is a disaster. While there is no parliament, political broadcasts are the best way for citizens to comment on the government's decisions."

Privately-owned television stations, which enjoy growing popularity in the country, were the main target of crackdowns. The government in September ordered the suspension of *CSB News* whose management had allegedly forged a document to obtain a frequency in October 2006, and police closed the station, but the decision was probably linked to the broadcast of footage of opposition demonstrations, in defiance of warnings from the authorities. According to the *Daily Star*, members of the government even accused the station of inciting students to demonstrate in Dhaka.

The written press did its best to resist pressure from the authorities. Mahfuz Anam, editor of the privately-owned *Daily Star*, said in an editorial in January, "As long as we have not received a written order from the government, we will consider them illegal (...) Friends of democracy never silence the press, it is only done by dictators. The people of Bangladesh will never accept dictators". But in September, the management of *Prothom Alo* was forced to apologise and to sack the deputy editor of its humorous supplement, *Aalpin*, under pressure from conservative clergy after cartoonist Arifur Rahman drew a sketch which included wordplay on the name Mohammed, gently poking fun at the habit of people in some Muslim countries of putting the name Mohammed before their usual name. Police arrested him and seized all copies of the magazine, which was accused of "hurting the people's religious sentiment". The copies were ritually burned in front of one of the capital's mosques.

During the year, privately-owned dailies, such as *Prothom Alo*, *Inqilab*, *Amader Shomoy*, *Jugantor*, *Daily*



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Star and *Shamokal* were also victims of judicial harassment. The newspapers had to employ a large number of lawyers to keep their editors and journalist out of prison in the face of around 100 defamation suits.

JOURNALISTS TORTURED BY MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY

Several journalists were tortured for investigating the security forces. Tasneem Khalil, journalist and blogger (tasneemkhalil.com), was detained and tortured in May after openly criticising the army for the spread of extra-judicial killings. The Human Rights Watch consultant and contributor to *CNN* was forced to flee the country. Jahangir Alam Akash, correspondent for the newspaper *Sangbad*, and for *CSB News* and German radio *Deutsche Welle* in Rajshahi, who had been investigating the 'execution' by the army of a student leader, was arrested by soldiers on 24 October. He was released on bail on 19 November and spoke about the hell he had lived through at an army camp. "Officers and soldiers tortured me for several hours: electric shocks, blows to my legs. I couldn't walk for a week," he said.

Police, acting under emergency laws, arrested two journalists in March in Moulvibazar in the north-east, after local politicians laid a defamation case against him. A correspondent for the *Daily Star*, Asduzzaman Tipu, spent one month in prison after being falsely accused of extortion.

No fewer than 15 journalists were arrested on the same evening when a curfew was imposed in

August and around 30 others were beaten by police and soldiers deployed in the capital. The chief news editor of the privately-owned *Baishakhi TV*, Anis Alamgir, was beaten up by soldiers, while a photographer with the daily *Dinkal* was seriously injured by police. The authorities apologised by nobody was punished for the assaults.

On the other hand, the anti-crime struggle allowed the arrest of suspects in the murders of journalist Gautam Das in 2005 and of Shamsur Rahman in 2000. And several politicians, including Shahidul Islam, former member of Parliament from the Kushtia region, responsible for attacks on journalists in 2006, were taken into custody.

Although weakened, Jihadist groups continued to threaten journalists. An Islamist group threatened an attack on the Jatiya press club in May and in April extremists sent a letter containing death threats to a journalist on the daily *Bhorer Kagoj*, in Chittagong in the south-east of the country.

Finally, even though no journalist was killed for their work in 2007, the authorities did not fully clear up the circumstances of the death in March of Jamal Uddin, correspondent for the news agency *Abas* and local newspaper *Dainik Giri Darpan*, in Rangamati in the south-east, whom the authorities said had committed suicide. The president of the Rangamati press club said the journalist's body bore marks of blows all over his body, which had been found lying at the foot of a tree, with a rope around his neck.



BURMA

Area: 676,580 sq. km.
Population: 51,000,000.
Language: Burmese.
Head of state: General Than Shwe.

The military junta was faced with a major protest movement for the first time since 1990 and responded by firing into the crowds. A Japanese reporter was killed, around 15 Burmese journalists were arrested for reporting on the crackdown and the Internet was cut for two weeks. Once order was restored censorship was stepped up.

Popular demonstrations, led by Buddhist monks in August and September 2007 shook the military government which has ruled the country for more than 40 years. Despite pressure from the international community, the junta's reaction was brutal: at least 50 people were killed, thousands arrested and a climate of fear and denunciations took hold. After several weeks of hesitation during which the world enthusiastically watched the highly-mediated "Saffron Revolution", the military took drastic action. Japanese journalist, Kenji Nagai, who was at the centre of a crowd with his camera in his hand, was gunned down by a soldier on 27 September. The Internet was cut for two weeks, during which time around 15 Burmese journalists were arrested. Foreign correspondents who had entered the country on tourist visas found themselves very closely watched.

Many Burmese journalists covered the demonstrations, despite the fact that military censorship bans the publication of independent news. Some 15 were arrested, suspected of sending footage of the marches and the crackdown to other countries. This is what happened to Win Ko Ko Latt, reporter on *Weekly Eleven Journal*, Nay Linn Aung, of the *7-Days Journal*, and cameraman Min Htin Ko Ko Gyi, who were imprisoned in Rangoon. Ko Thu Ya Soe, a photographer working for the European news agency *EPA*, had to go into hiding for several weeks after taking numbers of photos of the demonstrations. When security forces failed to find those they were looking for, they arrested members of their family instead. Khin Mar Lar, the wife of Nyein Thit, a documentary-maker and ex political prisoner who hid for several weeks, was taken into custody near Mandalay for more than ten days.

A score of publications showed their solidarity with the demonstrations by ceasing to appear rather than publishing government news. Other

titles did not appear for fear of not selling a single copy. Military censorship prevented them all from covering the events independently. The Burmese people once again resorted to international radio, *BBC*, *RFA*, *VOA*, and the Oslo-based *Democratic Voice of Burma* radio and television. Despite bans there was a huge boom in satellite dishes. More than a million homes are now equipped to follow Chinese soaps, European football but also international channels like *Al-Jazeera International* and the *BBC*, which are very popular in Burma.

Artists, intellectuals, comedians and singers suspected of supporting the rebel monks were arrested and threatened. For example, writer Maung Yan Paing, poet and singer Ye Lwin, comedian Zargana, nicknamed Burma's "Charlie Chaplin" and the comedians, the Moustache Brothers, in Mandalay. The authorities in November banned distribution of a video recording of a performance by a comedy troupe "Say Young Sone". The same month police arrested a Burmese rapper for paying tribute to the monks during a concert.

THE JUNTA'S MILITIA

The junta deployed its militia, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), and gangs known as "Masters of Force", who travelled in army trucks armed with shovels and iron bars terrorising demonstrators and journalists. From the start of the marches in mid-August, correspondents for foreign media were jostled and insulted. Authorities then cut telephone lines of numbers of activists and journalists, including that of the *Agence France-Presse* correspondent, and the freelance journalist May Thingyan Hein. "Men in plainclothes who sow fear among the demonstrators prevent us from working", said one Burmese reporter for a foreign media. "It's difficult when you run the risk of being arrested for a photo."



BURMA

From 20 August, Rangoon's military commander banned all journalists from taking photos of demonstrations and ordered the destruction of cameras confiscated from offenders. Belgian journalist Thierry Falise who was in Rangoon at the time said that security forces then received the order to fire on people taking footage of the crackdown, which most likely led to the death of Kenji Nagai...

The security forces, which had been thrown off balance at the start, quickly threw themselves into the hunt for cameramen. Several accounts given by people arrested and then released had police questioning everyone about the names of the "cameramen", understood to mean journalists working secretly for foreign media or the *Democratic Voice of Burma*. Many photographers and cameramen were so afraid of being identified that they stopped working altogether. Some even threw away their cameras and went into exile.

INTERNET CUT OFF

Burmese Internet-users were restricted to just a few hours online a day during in October and November. The regime ordered access providers to limit exchanges between the Burmese people and the rest of the world. The junta aimed to prevent the spread of film on sharing sites such as YouTube, Dailymotion, and Flickr. Cutting off the Internet isolated the country, with rumour replacing news and reducing footage to that taken by foreign media.

The junta unsurprisingly also strictly controlled the sale of foreign publications within the country. Magazines *Time* and *Newsweek* and Thai newspapers disappeared from the newsstands in the first few weeks. At the end of December, Burmese authorities raised the price of a satellite licence by 167 times, from 6,000 to one million Kyats (from five to 800 dollars). This was aimed particularly at DVB TV whose deputy director told Reporters Without Borders "The military junta knows the power of an image. They are not going to let DVB TV and foreign televisions become the principal source of news in Burma. Even if 90% of satellite

dish owners don't have licences, this decision is perhaps the first step to imposing control".

After the crackdown, the military junta did its utmost to give the impression of a return to normality. But behind the peaceful footage of crowds gathering to support the junta, the censorship bureau, headed by a military officer, acted with complete ruthlessness. The weekly *News Watch* was banned for one week after publishing photos in mid-November which angered the military. A score of journalists suspected of sympathy with the protest movement, were also banned from writing articles or being interviewed in the press. Chief among these were sports journalist Zaw Thet Htwe, cartoonist Au Pi Kyee and writer Pe Myint.

Government media poured our propaganda, featuring the actions of the junta heads on the front pages. Demonstrators, who were presented as agitators of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in the service of foreign powers, were accused of having stirred up the violence. Pro-junta media accused the foreign press of having created the disorder. Even though for years General Than Shwe cultivated a taste for the secretive, he appeared several times on national television to pronounce diatribes against the opposition. He made a speech to students at a military academy in December in which he exhorted them to be ready to "sacrifice your lives to defend the state". And state-run television channels denigrated the work of foreign media, particularly the *BBC*, *RFA* and *VOA*, whom it accused of wanting to "destabilise the country". The media were ordered to vaunt a return to normality and the country's economic progress.

U WIN TIN, IMPRISONED SINCE 1989, CALLS FOR RESISTANCE

Burma's most renowned journalist, U Win Tin, has never been granted the early release he has been entitled to since 2005. On his 77th birthday in March 2007, he launched an appeal for resistance against the military regime which has kept him in prison since July 1989. "All political prisoners should be released and the democratic parliament



BURMA

should be recalled. We must not abandon our demands”, he told one of his family members who was allowed to visit him. A few days earlier, the director general of prisons visited UWin Tin in his cell. The journalist pointed out his rights to him as a political prisoner. “I am not going to beg you to release me. I have the right to be freed because I have served 18 of my 20-year prison sentence. I should be allowed an early release”. But the director general told him he did not qualify because he had not worked while in custody. Win Tin told him that as a political prisoner he could not be forced to work in jail.

U Win Tin, laureate of the 2006 Reporters Without Borders press freedom prize, also promoted from his cell the “Suu Hlut Twe” platform which demands: the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners (Suu); recall of the parliament elected in 1990 (Hlut) and political dialogue (Twe). “My vision, my opinions and my principles have not changed”, said the journalist, calling on pro-democracy activists to resist repression.

During the year UWin Tin had to undergo treatment for blood pressure problems and inflammation of the prostate. Although a prison doctor checks him twice a month, UWin Tin is dependent on the help of family members who regularly bring him medication and food. His health has considerably deteriorated after 18 years in jail.

NINE JOURNALISTS IN PRISON

Eight other Burmese journalists were in prison as at 1st January 2008. Ko Aung Gyi, former editorial head of the sports magazine, 90 minutes, is suspected of having contributed to the *Democratic Voice of Burma*. Ko Win Maw and Ko Aung Aung, two other secret media contributors are also being held in prison.

The year began with prison releases. Than Win Hlaing, who had been in jail since 2000 and was suffering from diabetes and Thaug Tun, arrested in October 1999 and sentenced to eight years in prison for sending human rights violations footage abroad, were both freed in January.

CAMBODIA

Area: 181,040 sq. km.

Population: 14,347,000.

Languages: Khmer, French, English.

Head of government: Hun Sen.

Prime Minister Hun Sen, who has been in power since 1985, can count on the support of the majority of the broadcast media. Only one radio station is critical of him and the highly-politicised written press struggles to maintain its role of challenging authority.

The publication, in May 2007, of a report on deforestation by the organisation Global Witness, provoked a raft of incidents in relation to the press, including the temporary closure of *Cambodge Soir*, harassment and death threats against three journalists who wrote about the issue. The report highlighted the responsibility of people close to the head of government in large-scale illegal logging. The press picked up the report, but on 8 June, the information minister, Khieu Kanharith, said that “the media had had a week to put out their reports” and that was “largely sufficient”. Newspapers could “make reference to it but not reproduce it”. Any infringement would result in “our taking necessary judicial steps” the minister specified. The brother of the head of government, Hun Neng, reportedly said that if anyone from Global Witness came to Cambodia, he would “hit him about the head until it broke”. Journalists on *Radio Free Asia*, one of the very few media to have seriously investigated deforestation, were threatened by an unknown interloper at their station’s studios in Phnom Penh.

At the same time, French journalist Soren Seelow of the French-Khmer paper *Cambodge Soir* was sacked without notice, on 10 June, after reprinting part of the Global Witness report. One of the managers of the paper, also a French adviser to the Cambodian agriculture ministry, and its editor decided to close the paper. Staff went on strike to defend the paper’s editorial independence, which was threatened by intervention on the part of some shareholders. It has an outspoken stance and despite recurring financial problems, *Cambodge Soir* has made its mark on the Cambodian media landscape, digging up news for the Khmer-language press. After several weeks of conflict, some of the journalists re-launched the title in a new format. Thanks to mediation by its funder, the International Francophone Organisation, its editorial independence was at least partly protected but around a dozen staff ended up losing their jobs.

Also in June, Lem Piseth, of *Radio Free Asia*, received a death threat after investigating deforestation in Kompong Thom province in central Cambodia. In his report, he said that he was followed by soldiers and police. Then he had a call on his mobile phone and the following conversation ensued: “Is that you, Lem Piseth?” “Yes. Who are you?” “You are insolent, do you want to die?” “Why are you insulting me like this?” “Because of the business of the forest and you should know that there will not be enough land to bury you”.

THE JOURNALIST FLED TO THAILAND.

In August, it was the turn of Phon Phat, of the Khmer-language newspaper *Chbas Ka*, to be threatened for the same reasons. His house was set on fire after he had been threatened with reprisals. His reports had implicated businessman Meas Siphon in illegal deforestation.

TELEVISION UNDER CONTROL

Cambodia boasts 11 TV stations but not one of them is genuinely independent. The Aspara, group which owns one television and one radio station, is owned by Hun Sen’s daughter. *Bayon Television* is directly controlled by the party of the head of government while *TV3* and *TV5* are respectively controlled by the Phnom Penh municipality and the armed forces. Only *Cambodian Television Network* gives occasional airtime to opposition figures.

Radio Sombok Khmum (*Beehive FM 105*) plays an important role in the media landscape. It rents its aerial to the main Cambodian opposition parties and to *Radio Free Asia* (*RFA*), whose Khmer service readily broadcasts challenging news. The head of government in May accused the deputy editor of *RFA*’s Phnom Penh bureau, Um Sarim, of being “offensive” and working for an “aggressive”

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radio station. The prime minister ordered all TV channels to show the altercation to demonstrate to TV viewers the extent of the “insolence” of *RFA*. Um Sarim left the country for several days.

Ahead of legislative elections scheduled for July 2008, there are fears that the ruling party will tighten its grip still further on electronic media. Hun Sen has already said that he plans to stay in power for another 20 years.



CHINA

Area: 9,598,050 sq. km.
Population: 1,315,844,000.
Language: Mandarin.
Head of state: Hu Jintao.

An icy blast blew on press freedom in China ahead of the 17th Communist Party Congress in Beijing in October. Journalists were forced to put out official propaganda, while cyber-censors stalked the Net. Despite the introduction of more favourable rules in January, nearly 180 foreign press correspondents were arrested or harassed in 2007.

Reporters Without Borders representatives met for the first time Chinese officials in Beijing at the start of the year, including the deputy information minister. The authorities said they were ready to reconsider the cases of journalists and Internet-users currently in prison, including Zhao Yan, who worked for the *New York Times* and was sentenced to three years in prison on the basis of false accusations. But they did not keep their promises. Zhao Yan was released in September having served his full sentence. And all the other promises came to nothing. At the end of the year, the authorities refused to grant visas to five representatives of Reporters Without Borders who wanted to travel to Beijing.

The assurance given by a Chinese official in 2001 that, “We will guarantee total press freedom”, when Beijing was lobbying for the 2008 Olympics, was never kept. It was a year of disillusionment in 2007. Many observers had expected more tolerance to be shown to the press along with greater freedom of expression, as the authorities had pledged. But the government and in particular the political police and the propaganda department did everything possible to prevent the liberal press, Internet-users and dissidents from expressing themselves. Foreign correspondents experienced great difficulties in working despite new rules giving them greater freedom of movement until October 2008.

President Hu Jintao consolidated his power base, by promoting the “harmonious society”, from which democracy is for the time being ruled out. The regime’s conservatives set about creating this “harmony” by force. Public Security minister, Zhou Yongkang, in March called on the security services to step up a crackdown on “hostile forces”, particularly separatist movements and dissidents, ahead of the Olympics.

“PRISONERS OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES”

Police began arresting dissidents and bloggers calling for improved human rights ahead of the staging of the Olympics. The best known of these “Olympics’ prisoners” is rights activist, Hu Jia, who was arrested at his Beijing home on 27 December. Police produced an arrest warrant accusing him of “inciting subversion of state power”. His wife, the blogger, Zeng Jinyan, and their young daughter got their home surrounded by scores of police. The couple are activists for the environment and the rights of Aids patients and political prisoners and were pushing at the limits of free expression in China by posting sensitive news on their blogs.

Chinese contributors to foreign-based news websites also found themselves singled out for harassment. At least three contributors to US-based news site *Boxun* are currently in prison. Police arrested one *Boxun* correspondent Sun Lin, also known under the pen-name Jie Mu, in Nanjing, eastern China on 30 May 2007 after he exposed abuse of power, including in videos posted on the site. Another regular *Boxun* correspondent, Huang Jinqui, has been in prison since 2003 after being sentenced to 12 years for “subversion of state power” in eastern Jiangsu province. And in August 2007, cyber-dissident and blogger He Weihua was forcibly admitted to a psychiatric hospital in Hunan in southern China. His family said it was linked to articles published on his blog www.boxun.com/hero/hewh/. Before being released in February 2008, Li Changqing, who had written several articles for the same US-based site, was jailed for three years by a court in Fuzhou, Fujian province in the south-east for circulating “alarmist news”.

THE LIBERAL PRESS TARGETED

The liberal press – including the dailies *Xin Jing Bao* (*Beijing News*) and *Nanfang Dushi Bao*, and the



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magazine *Caijin* – carry news embarrassing to local and national authorities. Such was the case in July, when *Xin Jing Bao* revealed that local officials had succeeded in banning publication of a report that put the cost of pollution in China at nearly 70 billion dollars. One month earlier, British newspaper the *Financial Times* reported that the government had censored a World Bank report on China's environmental problems. The article was picked up by a large number of Chinese blogs before it was deleted by the cyber-censors.

“Everyone in the newsroom knows that we have to wait for the story from the official news agency *Xinhua* when there is an issue relating to party leaders, official appointments or international subjects such as North Korea,” a journalist on the *Beijing News* told Reporters Without Borders. “It is much too risky to publish anything before then. Everyone knows what is banned: minorities, religious freedom and Falungong”. The government has no hesitation in bringing the liberal media to heel. The financial magazine *Caijin*, a major source of information to the international community, was in March forced to censor an article on the adoption of new legislation on private property. It also had to remove articles from its website.

Those at the head of this outspoken press run huge risks. Yu Huafeng, director of the daily *Nanfang Dushi Bao*, was released in February 2008 after four years in prison in Guangzhou. His colleague Li Minying, the paper's former editor, was released in February 2007, three years before the end of his sentence. They were both sentenced prison for “corruption”. More than 2,000 Chinese journalists signed a petition in 2005 calling for their release.

Other journalists have fallen victim to purges within their media and been reassigned to innocuous publications. Huang Liangtian was ousted from the editorship of the monthly *Bai Xing* (The Masses) at the start of 2007, and appointed to a small agricultural magazine, after he investigated harsh conditions in rural areas. He had also revealed that the administration of a poor region of the central Henan province, had built a square larger than Tiananmen in Beijing. Local authorities called

for his head. “I doubt that freedom of the press will improve for government media and I am sad that my life as a journalist stops here,” Huang Liangtian told Reporters Without Borders. In July, it was the turn of Pang Jiaoming of the *China Economic Times* to be sanctioned by the authorities for publishing an investigation on the poor quality of construction materials for the rail tracks of China's first high speed train, linking Wuhan to Quanzhou.

ENSORSHIP ON A DAILY BASIS

The Propaganda Department and the General Administration for Press and Publications (GAPP) shared out the work of putting a brake on the enthusiasm of journalists. During the year, GAPP reminded the press that “reports must be true, precise, objective, fair and should not oppose the interests of the state or infringe the rights of citizens”. The Propaganda Department stepped up action against the press. Reporters Without Borders compiled an internal document in November which detailed the different forms of censorship. The Propaganda Department warned publications, in the form of a glossary, to comply with “the rules of discipline set up for news”. The instructions are clear: “1- “Reporting banned” means: it is forbidden to write a report on this subject. - 2- “Don't send a reporter” means: permission to publish the standard article from the *Xinhua* agency or to copy the reports, article (contribution) from a local media. - 3- “Ban on criticism” means: no comment on the remarks, including with a cartoon”.

For instance, in November, the Propaganda Department ordered the managers of China's leading media to avoid negative reports on air pollution, relations with Taiwan on the question of the Olympic torch and public health problems linked to the preparation of the Olympic Games.

Censorship was even tougher for TV and radio with journalists working for state-run CCTV receiving a daily warning when they switch on their work computers about subjects to avoid or those to handle with caution. For example, in December, they were banned from covering the case of the



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death in hospital of a pregnant woman, for lack of medical attention. They were also ordered to restrict comment on the assassination of Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, so as to avoid offending China's ally Pakistan.

In the face of press criticism, the government passed the Emergency Response Law, in August, which banned the "fabrication of false news on accidents and disasters and makes the government responsible for providing precise information on the cases within a reasonable time span". Media risked losing their licences for carrying news on such cases without permission. In practice they are limited to publishing only *Xinhua* reports on natural disasters, industrial accidents, epidemics or public security breaches and cannot make their own investigations. In the same vein, the Propaganda Department on 16 August ordered the Chinese media to restrict coverage of a bridge collapse, killing more than 40 people, in the city of Fenghuang, in southern Hunan province. Media were forced to pull out their reporters from the city. Before they could leave, five journalists, including one from *Nanfang Dushi Bao*, were beaten by men linked to the local authorities.

CAMPAIGN AGAINST "BOGUS JOURNALISTS"

The Propaganda Department and the GAPP worked together, on government instructions, on a national campaign against "bogus journalists". Using the pretext of a false report on rotten food by a young Beijing television reporter, the authorities began tracking down "bogus journalists" who were using accreditations with foreign or Hong Kong-based media, to undertake "blackmail and disinformation". The government announced several weeks later that it had identified 150 such "bogus journalists" and 300 unlicensed media. Some dozen journalists were imprisoned, including two managers of a publication in Liaoning, in north-eastern China *Social News* (illegal according to the authorities). If there is blackmail in China, it is certainly the case that very many media work without a licence because it remains difficult to obtain one.

The GAPP took advantage of the campaign to file details of the almost 30,000 foreign journalists

accredited for the Olympic Games. Officially it was again to identify "bogus journalists" and to help Chinese officials respond to interviews. But the government did not specify what type of information would be collected. The filing project was confirmed by a foreign consultant working for the Olympic Games organising committee. The State Security Department has been made responsible for creating files on reporters and activists who could "disrupt" the Olympics.

180 INCIDENTS WITH FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS

News regulations brought in on 1st January 2007 allowed greater freedom of movement for foreign correspondents. Some media immediately took advantage of the change to report on subjects which were previously banned. *Reuters* went to Inner Mongolia to meet the wife of Hada, a local managing editor who has been imprisoned since 1995, an interview which the British agency had been trying to do since 2004. *Reuters* was also able to interview Bao Tong, former assistant to reformist prime minister Zhao Ziyang. But just a few days after the regulations came into force, foreign correspondents were prevented from visiting Zhao Ziyang's children or interviewing Shanghai lawyer, Zheng Enchong, lawyer Gao Zhisheng, or Aids activist Dr Gao Yaojie. Reporters from Hong Kong were ordered back by soldiers on 9 January as they headed to the site of a military plane crash in the south-eastern Guangdong province.

Police obstructed the work of correspondents reporting on sensitive subjects throughout the year, arresting a team from the *BBC World Service* in March in a village in Hunan, where there had just been a riot. "You are not in the United States or Great Britain. This is China", said one of the officers who interrogated them. One journalist told them that the Beijing government had adopted new rules. "That is only for news linked to the Olympic Games and I don't think you have come here for the Olympics," the officer replied.

At least seven journalists were arrested or physically assaulted as they tried to reach the village of Shengyou, south of Beijing, where in 2005, henchmen



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working for local officials killed six people. Those involved were from *Agence France-Presse*, *BBC World Service* and *Swiss TV*, whose correspondent, Barbara Luthi, was beaten by police.

It is as difficult as ever to work in Tibet or Xinjiang. In May, Harald Maass, correspondent for German daily *Frankfurter Rundschau*, and Tim Johnson, of the US press group *McClatchy*, were summoned by a ranking official in the Chinese foreign ministry who told them they had violated journalistic standards in their articles on Tibet. Plain-clothes police had followed and harassed them from the moment they arrived in the capital Lhasa. Tibetans whom they interviewed were fined. Police stopped Harald Maass from entering the city of Shigatse.

The Foreign Correspondents Club of China (FCCC) received reports of a total of 180 violations of the new regulations, from surveillance of journalists to arrests. The FCCC carried out a poll in 2007 in which they asked journalists "Has China kept the promise made by Olympics Games organiser Wang Wei in Beijing in 2001, that, "We will give foreign media complete freedom of reporting. More than 67% replied "No" and only 8.6% said "Yes".

IS PLURALISM UNDER THREAT IN HONG KONG?

Hong Kong still enjoys pluralism even if some media owners have been driven for financial reasons to keep the Beijing authorities sweet. "Hong Kong journalists who report in China have to beware of local authorities and powerful figures who are none too keen on our style of press. Some topics are already taboo, like the independence of Taiwan or Falungong," said Mak Yin-ting, the general secretary of the Hong Kong Journalists Association. "In general China coverage is more cautious than before," she added. Francis Moriarty of the Foreign Correspondents Club explains it thus: "Money is being made in China. It is not surprising therefore that most the newspaper proprietors have financial interests on the mainland." But he added, "The problem is the amount of self-censorship which that brings about. For example Taiwan is now handled under the China section.

And most Hong Kong media do not cover Falungong demonstrations in the territory, even though there are regularly tens of thousands of them in the street". There were several incidents in Hong Kong in 2007: Shuhwey Liao and I-Chun Ko, two Taiwanese reporters with (pro-Falungong) *Sound of Hope* radio, were expelled from Hong Kong and managers of pirate *Citizen Radio* are once again in court for breaking the telecommunications law.

CRACKDOWNS IN TIBET AND XINJIANG

Censorship and police control were more robust in provinces with autonomist movements. Three Tibetans were sentenced to jail for between three and ten years for "spying for foreign organisations threatening state security" by a court in Kardze, Sichuan province, on the Tibetan border in November. The authorities said they had sent abroad photos of demonstrations at the start of August by nomadic Tibetans. Adak Lupoe, a senior monk at the Lithang monastery and Kunkhyen, a musician and teacher, were sentenced respectively to ten and nine years in prison after being found guilty of "espionage" for taking photos and sound recordings of the demonstrations.

In Xinjiang, one of the sons of renowned Uighur leader Rebiya Kadeer, Ablikim Abdiriyim, was sentenced on 17 April to nine years in prison for posting "secessionist" articles on the Internet. According to *Xinhua*, Ablikim Abdiriyim was trying to give a bad image of "human rights and ethnic politics in China".

AROUND 100 JOURNALISTS AND INTERNET-USERS IMPRISONED

China is still the country which jails the largest number of journalists, cyber-dissidents, Internet-users and freedom of expression campaigners. They frequently endure harsh prison conditions: They share overcrowded cells with criminals, are condemned to forced labour and are regularly beaten by their guards or by fellow prisoners. Ill-treatment is at its worst in the first weeks in custody when police try to extract confessions. At least 33 journalists were in prison in China as at 1st January 2008.



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Before being released in February 2008, two years before the end of his sentence, the Hong Kong journalist Ching Cheong, was detained in a prison in Guangzhou. His wife described the conditions there to Reporters Without Borders: "I was allowed to see him once a month for one hour. We were separated by glass and we spoke on a telephone. Our conversation was listened in to. It's even written on the visiting room wall. Ching Cheong is held in a cell with 12 other prisoners, most of them criminals serving long sentences. There are two factories in the prison. He has to work eight hours a day, with overtime twice a week until 9 in the evening, making police uniforms, for which prisoners are not paid. Before his arrest, Ching Cheong already had blood pressure problem, but it used to happen two or three times a week. Now it's every day. He suffers from the military discipline imposed in the prison. He has lost 15 kilos since his arrest. You know the first month of detention in Beijing was extremely hard, he was treated in a way which could be viewed as mental torture".

Cyber-dissident Guo Qizhen, sentenced to four years in prison for "inciting subversion of state power" was beaten in May by fellow prisoners in his cell in Shijiazhuang, Hebei, northern China, after prison guards encouraged them to attack him. His wife said that his body was covered in bruises. The cyber-dissident had a broken leg when he was arrested but did not receive appropriate medical treatment for it. His state of health has considerably worsened.

THE GREAT [CYBER] WALL OF CHINA

The Chinese Net is one of the most controlled in the world. In 2007, more than 20 companies, some

American, were forced to sign a "self-discipline pact" which forces them to censor the content of the blogs they host in China and to ask bloggers to provide their real identities. Many website were closed during the 17th Communist Party Congress in Beijing in October. The best-known forums on news websites were closed "as a precaution" for the duration of the Congress so that no news should indicate the official line fixed by the authorities. Reporters Without Borders marked the occasion by releasing a report, compiled by a Chinese Internet technician, detailing the censorship system on the Net in China. Five government offices have services dedicated to surveillance of the content of websites and emails.

At least 51 cyber-dissidents are currently in jail in China for exercising their right to freedom of expression online. Chinese authorities have closed websites in Tibet, in particular the discussion forum most used by Tibetan students (<http://www.tibet123.com>), depriving them of the means of expressing their opinion about government policies. In July, the authorities closed the discussion forum *Mongolian Youth Forum* (www.mglzaluus.com/bbs), which is very popular in Inner Mongolia. One of its organisers said the authorities complained that discussion frequently addressed "ethnic problems" in the Chinese province.

Highly sensitive firewalls have also been put in place. Within just a few hours, Reporters Without Borders in Chinese – www.rsf-chinese.org -, launched at the end of May, was blocked. The cyber-police evidently use software that filters words. Without any concern for the consequences for Chinese Internet-users, all IP addresses linked to a website deemed undesirable, are blocked without warning.

Fiji

Area: 18,270 sq. km.

Population: 825,000.

Languages: Fijian, English, Hindi.

Head of state: Ratu Josefa Iloilo Uluivuda.

The military, which has been in power since a 5 December 2006 coup, gave some guarantees to privately-owned media. After a few tense months, Fijian journalists regained their independence, but the authorities continued to harass its critics, particularly on the Internet.

An army spokesman said in May 2007 that the military would stop hounding blogs “critical towards the institution and members of government”. After blocking access to several of them, Col. Pita Driti relented and said that the military authorities “were no longer concerned about comments posted on these blogs”. He explained his change of heart with the remark that the military had developed a “thick skin” and “no longer feels offended by criticism”.

Several blogs had been made inaccessible over a period of a few days, among them resistfranks-coup.blogspot.com and fijishamelist.blogspot.com, but many of them changed address to get round this censorship. Col. Pita Driti made it clear: “The state of emergency is still in place and people should realise that some freedoms have to be restricted, including freedom of expression. When we have found these bloggers, we will take them to our military quarters and explain to them how

their comments constitute a threat to the country”. In 2007, the government appointed by the military said it wanted to allow media some independence, while keeping the power to “thwart those who try to take advantage of the situation to incite people to disturb the peace which now reigns.” Many opposition figures were detained, threatened, and sometimes beaten following the coup.

In June, the Fijian authorities arrested and then expelled New Zealand journalist Michael Field, working for the *Fairfax* press group, after he flew in to Suva airport. He had planned to cover the diplomatic crisis between Fiji and New Zealand, whose ambassador had just been declared *persona non grata*. “This is not the first time I have been turned back, but this time it comes amid growing harassment of Fijian journalists”, said the former correspondent for *AFP* in the Pacific. The incident revealed the existence of a black list of foreign journalists banned from entering Fiji.

INDIA

Area: 3,287,260 sq. km.
Population: 1,109,000,000.
Languages: English, 15 official languages.
Head of government: Manmohan Singh.

Press freedom was threatened by the violence of political parties as well as religious and separatist groups. In some states, beleaguered by rebellion, the authorities have also turned against independent journalists. Courts made rulings which were contrary to the spirit of the Constitution, which protects freedom of the press.

Three staff members on the Tamil-language newspaper *Dinakaran* were killed in May in an arson attack on offices of the Madurai-based daily in Tamil Nadu state, in the south-east of the country. The culprits – supporters of MK Azhagiri, one of the sons of Kalaighnar Karunanidhi, Tamil Nadu chief minister – acted after the daily published an opinion poll putting one of his brothers at the head of a list of possible successors to their father. The building also houses *Sun TV* and the newspaper *Tamil Murasu*. The case provided an appalling demonstration of the contempt towards press independence felt by some political militants and religious followers.

In April, a group of activists, the Hindu Rashtriya Sena, raided the offices of *Star TV* in Mumbai and used hammers to smash computers, cameras, windows and furniture after the station broadcast programmes about inter-religious marriage. The magazine *Outlook* in Mumbai was attacked in August by six militants of the extremist Hindu party Shiv Sena. They threatened reprisals against staff that were present for including the movement's founder, Bal Thackeray, in a list of "villains" Indians, carried in a special edition marking the 60th anniversary of Indian independence. The article was illustrated with a cartoon showing him dressed as Adolf Hitler.

Two journalists were held in Western Bengal state for several days in March by members of the Communist Party of India (CPI) which rules the state. Gouranga Hazra and Bholanath Bijali, who work for *Tara News* television, were reporting on extremely violent demonstrations pitting peasants against CPI members.

In a verdict that represented a danger to press freedom, a court in New Delhi sentenced four journalists on the newspaper *Mid-Day* to four months in prison after they revealed that a former leading judge, Y. K. Sabharwal had authorised the demolition of buildings to benefit his son's company. Editor, S. K.

Akhtar, two journalists Vitsha Oberoi and Irfan Khan and cartoonist M. K. Tayal were released on bail after deciding to appeal. The Editor's Guild of India called the sentence "a threat to press freedom".

VIOLENCE IN ASSAM AND KASHMIR

Separatists continued to threaten the media in the north-eastern states. In June, the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) said it planned to "punish" four journalists who had been involved in organising a demonstration against bombings of markets believed carried out by the group. Shortly afterwards a bomb exploded in front of a regional media.

Some separatist groups in Kashmir launched intimidation campaigns against satellite television operators. In March some of them removed from their package three English-language channels, accused of putting out "obscene" programmes after militants members of armed groups al-Badr and al-Madina Regiment threatened to wreck their installations. Security forces were also responsible for abuses, including the unfair detention of the photographer Mohammad Maqbool Khokhar, known as Maqbool Sahil. Indian secret services in October stopped and interrogated Majid Hyderi, one of the editorial managers of the newspaper *Great Kashmir*.

DANGER IN THE MAOIST REGIONS

The regions plagued by Maoist guerrillas suffered the highest number of press freedom violations. A local human rights organisation FFDA (www.ffdaindia.in) released a report during the year on the situation in the Chhattisgarh state in central India, where security forces are clashing with Maoist rebels. Village militia or police has threatened several journalists there and the state government passed a law that punishes journalists with a three-year prison sentence for reporting on Maoist activities.

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The Chhattisgarh state authorities interrogated one of the authors of the FFDA report, Subash Mohapatra, in July.

Some journalists accused of sympathising with the Maoists are put under surveillance and sometimes arrested. Pittala Srisailam, editor of online televi-

sion www.musitv.com, was placed in custody in Hyderabad, in Andhra Pradesh state in eastern India in December when he was about to interview a leader of the Communist Party of India - Maoist (CPI-M) and accused of being a “messenger” for the Maoists. He was released on bail a few days later.

INDONESIA

Area: 1,904,570 sq. km.
Population: 222,781,000.
Language: Bahasa Indonesia.
Head of state: Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

Indonesia has a free press, but several legal decisions have caused concerns. Former dictator Suharto won a case against *Time Asia* and a journalist was sentenced to six months in prison for “defamation”. The still powerful army has done its utmost to ensure continuing impunity for past crimes, particularly in East Timor.

The Supreme Court in September sentenced *Time Asia* magazine to pay damages of more than 100 million US dollars to former dictator Suharto for “harming his reputation and honour” The case went back to 1999 when the magazine reported the Suharto family had transferred some of the 73 billion dollars embezzled during his 32 years in power from Switzerland to Austria. Suharto had sought damages of 27 billion dollars. This astonishing decision reawakened memories of the dark days the Indonesian press went through when it was gagged every time it raised the issue of corruption and nepotism in the ruling family. The Supreme Court verdict overturned two previous rulings in the magazine’s favour and sentenced six *Time Inc. Asia* employees to publish apologies in the Indonesian and international editions of the magazines. Suharto’s death, in January 2008, should result in the file being closed.

On the other hand, Erwin Arnada, editor of the Indonesian edition of *Playboy* was in April acquitted of publishing indecent photos. The judge rejected the complaint which should have been lodged under the press law. Islamist groups demonstrated throughout the trial and made death threats against Arnada.

PRISON SENTENCES FOR “DEFAMATION”

One journalist, Risang Bima Wijaya, was on 9 September arrested and sent to prison for six months under a section of the criminal law on defamation. The sentence had been handed down in connection with a 2004 case in which he accused an executive director of a newspaper of sexual harassment of a female employee. He is serving his sentence at Yogyakarta jail. Bersihar Lubis, an editorialist on the daily *Koran Tempo*, is facing a prison

sentence for having insulted the office of the prosecutor general after saying that it had intervened to ban a scholastic book.

The Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) reacted to these trials with a campaign entitled, “Stop criminalisation of the Press” condemning the use of criminal law in press cases. The AJI is also opposed to some articles of the new electoral law which provide for prison sentences for journalists who publish news between the end of the election campaign and polling day.

Investigative journalism is gradually gaining ground, but it is on occasion threatened by violations of the protection of sources. Metta Dharmasaputra of the newspaper *Tempo*, spoke out in September against tapping of his mobile phone by police after he revealed a case of tax fraud implicating the powerful businessman, Sukanto Tanoto.

THE ARMY PROTECTS ITS CRIMINALS

The Indonesian army, which was implicated in the death of at least seven foreign journalists in East Timor, has rejected the conclusions of a new Australian investigation into the death of five reporters in Balibo, East Timor in October 1975, which concluded that it was a “war crime” committed by the Indonesian army. A spokesman at the foreign ministry reacted by saying that the investigation would not change the country’s stance on the issue. “This court has a very limited jurisdiction and this decision will not change anything,” he said. Senior Indonesian officials, including a former army captain who afterwards became a minister, and the governor of Jakarta, have been implicated in this quintuple killing which preceded the Indonesia army’s occupation of East Timor.

JAPAN

Area: 377,800 sq. km.

Population: 128,085,000.

Language: Japanese.

Head of government: Yasuo Fukuda.

No progress was made in 2007 on needed reform of the kisha clubs, which continue to obstruct the free flow of news. On the other hand, incidents of violent attacks on the media by nationalist groups decreased and a man who carried out an attack on a newspaper in 2006 was arrested.

Yasuo Fukuda replaced Shinzo Abe as the head of the ineradicable ruling Liberal Democratic Party. The press carried reports of the scandals in which Shinzo Abe's term of office became mired. The government, the media and financial circles kept in place the system of kisha clubs, which prevent independent and foreign journalists from getting access to some categories of news. Officially, Japan has 800 of these kisha clubs but some sources put it as high as 1,500. Most of them are linked to public bodies such as ministries and provincial governments, large companies, political parties and the Imperial Household Agency.

An extreme-right militant, Motohide Hiraoka, aged 42, was arrested in April for throwing a petrol bomb at the head office of the economic daily Nikkei in Tokyo overnight on 20 July 2006. Nobody had been injured in the attack. Police said that the militant accused the newspaper of "manipulating public opinion" in an article about the Yasukuni sanctuary where Japanese war criminals are buried.

Japan's colonial past also prompted controversy. A court in Tokyo in January sentenced public broadcaster NHK to pay a fine for having censored parts of a documentary about the Imperial Army's "sex slaves" under pressure from the government.



LAOS

Area: 236,800 sq. km.
Population: 5,924,000.
Language: Lao.
Head of state: Choummaly Sayasone.

Nothing really changed in Laos in 2007. The press is still under the control of the sole party and the adoption of a press law promised in 2001 was once again postponed. An opposition writer has been in prison since 1999, as have two guides from the Hmong minority who assisted two European reporters.

Media bosses and information ministry officials meet regularly to discuss articles that have already appeared and to determine which topics are to be given priority. On many subjects, editorial offices reprint untouched the reports they receive from the official news agency *Khaosan Pathet Lao (KPL)*.

Although French-language weekly *Le Rénovateur* and the English-language weekly *Vientiane Times* sometimes carry free reports on socio-economic problems the majority of the media only puts out news that is favourable to the communist regime. The organ of the party, *Paxaxon* (People), continues to represent itself as a “revolutionary publication produced by the people and for the people that serves the political action of the Revolution”. The foreign ministry also exercises control over media content. It is forbidden to criticise “friendly countries” Burma and “big brothers” Vietnam and China. “Journalists practise self-censorship because they know what will not be published. Few of them are prepared to take the risk of pushing at the limits of censorship”, said one foreign journalist who has contributed to the Laotian press.

A group of journalists and investors tried to launch an English-language newspaper in 2007, but the authorities made sure that it was put under ministerial surveillance. The project has still not come to fruition.

Since their own media produces nothing but propaganda, many Laotians watch Thai television that

can be picked up near the border. Since March 2006, *Radio France International* has been broadcasting programmes on FM in the capital, apart from... its programmes in Lao.

The government has been promising a press law since 2001, but in 2007 it once again postponed its adoption, for fear of having to precisely define what is banned and of authorising the creation of a privately-owned media. The criminal law allows a journalist to be sentenced to a long prison term for “circulating news that weakens the state”. The law also provides for a one-year prison sentence for anyone who brings into the country “a publication contrary to national culture”.

The foreign press is always prevented from freely covering the condition of the minority Hmong people. Two Laotian nationals of Hmong origin are in jail for having worked as guides, in 2003, to Belgian journalist Thierry Falise and French cameraman Vincent Reynaud. Thao Moua and Pa Phue Khang were sentenced on 30 June 2003 to 12 and 20 years in prison for “obstructing justice” and “possession of weapons”.

Finally, Thongpaseuth Keuakoun, author of numerous articles and pamphlets about the situation in Laos and the need for reforms, has been in prison since October 1999 after being sentenced to 20 years in jail for “anti-government activities”. He was one of the five leaders of a pro-democracy movement.

MALAYSIA

Area: 329,750 sq. km.

Population: 25,347,000.

Languages: Malay, Mandarin, English, Tamil.

Head of government: Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Widespread social and political demonstrations prompted the authorities to harden their line towards the press. The internal security ministry, the bête noire of editorial offices, imposed censorship on the most sensitive issues. A journalist was physically assaulted for investigating leaders of an Indian community party, close to the government.

In the face of mounting criticism, the government of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi reacted with a crackdown. The internal security ministry, under the pretext of fighting incitement to racial hatred or insulting the king, set out to intimidate dissident voices, in particular bloggers. One minister threatened imprisonment against cyber-activists who opened up an unprecedented area of freedom.

The leading media are often compelled to ignore or to play down the many events organised by the opposition and non-governmental organisations. When in December 2007 members of the Indian minority demonstrated, the press simply relayed with no attempt at balance remarks by the authorities attacking the organisers. The internal security ministry asked some media on three separate occasions in November not to report on unauthorised demonstrations. Thus a march on 10 November calling for free and transparent elections passed off without any coverage, apart from online, including by the daily *Malaysiakini*, which also revealed in June that the authorities had ordered radio and television not to allow too much air-time to the speeches of opposition leaders.

The internal security ministry sent a directive to the national media in July banning them from prolonging the debate on the state's Islamic or secular nature and the authorities threatened to withdraw licences from those who continued to carry news on the issue shortly after the deputy prime minister Najib Razak made a controversial statement about the country's Islamic character.

JOURNALIST LEFT IN A COMA

At the beginning of November, the photo-journalist R. Raman of the Tamil-language *Malaysia Nanban* was left in a coma after being assaulted by two thugs in his office in Johor Baru, in the south of the country. He woke up several weeks later

but remained paralysed. Ten days later, his colleague M. Nagarajan received a phone call threatening to kill him if he continued to write articles about poor conditions in the schools. Nagarajan told the press freedom organisation, the Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ): "The caller said I would face the same fate as my colleague if I continued to pursue this story".

Both reporters had challenged the management of the Tamil schools by leaders of the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), a member of the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition, after which the MIC called for a boycott of the paper. Members of the MIC had previously threatened two journalists on Malaysia Nanban during a political meeting in April.

And, in August, another Tamil-language newspaper *Makkal Osai* was banned for one month, on the strength of a complaint lodged by the MIC, after publishing an image of Jesus with a cigarette in one hand and a can of beer in the other.

Ruling party militants also assaulted other journalists, including in mid-November, a photographer on the *Guangming Daily* who was beaten after taking shots of activists in the prime minister's party as they insulted a political opponent.

CRITICISM IN THE BLOGOSPHERE

Malaysians are very active in the blogosphere and the majority of them support the opposition. In January the prime minister called the bloggers "liars" while in July, the law minister, Nazri Abdul Aziz, said the government would not hesitate to resort to the Internal Security Act (ISA) to punish them. The ISA provides for imprisonment for two years without trial for offences such as "harming state security". Nazri Abdul Aziz added that the government had until then been "very patient". Police summoned and interrogated Raja Petra

MALAYSIA

Kamaruddin (nicknamed RPK), who runs the blog *Malaysia Today*, at the end of July after he posted criticism of the king. The ruling party then laid a complaint against the writer, who claims his blog is read by more than 300,000 a day.

Also in July, Nathaniel Tan, a blogger and member of the opposition Justice Party (PKR) was held in custody for four days, apparently because of a link from his blog to a website hosting news termed as an “official secret” relating to a corruption case implicating internal security minister, Johari Bharum. In September, it was the turn of a journalist working for online television TV PAS, affiliated to an opposition party, to be arrested after covering a demonstration.

LESS FREEDOM FOR TRADITIONAL MEDIA

Bloggers close to the opposition have exposed the fact that Malaysian media handling of the local situation bears the stamp of self-censorship. The management and former managers of the daily *New Straits Times* sued bloggers Jeff Ooi and Ahiruddin Attan for “defamation”, after the outspoken writers posted articles demonstrating that some news and editorials in the Malaysian daily lacked objectivity.

It was the same *New Straits Times* which abruptly halted publication of columns by two independent-minded editorialists. Officially for technical reasons, the columns written by Zainah Anwar, promoting the rights of women, and another by Amir Muhammad disappeared within five days or one another. Zainah Anwar had headlined her last piece, “Let’s give freedom a good press”. Amir Muhammad, a respected film-maker and writer, had broken one of the country’s taboos by rehabilitating communists who fought for independence in the 1940s. His arrival at the daily in 2006 had been seen as a sign of greater openness. He posted on his blog the uncut versions of his articles, which were regularly re-written by the daily’s management.

The authorities, who are very prickly on religious issues, banned Catholic weekly *The Herald*, published in the Malay language, for using the word “Allah”. This instruction was notified to Brother Augustin Julian in a written order from the internal security ministry on 10 December. “We follow the Bible. Its Malay version uses Allah for god. If the government has the impression that the word Allah creates confusion, it should perhaps educate the Muslims,” said Brother Julian. Two weeks later the authorities withdrew the ban.



MALDIVES

Area: 300 sq. km.
Population: 337 300.
Language: Divehi.
Head of state: Maumoon Abdul Gayoom.

Independent and opposition newspapers established themselves in the media landscape despite threats and arrests. Police arrested nearly 10 journalists in 2007. A broadcast law finally allowed licensing of privately-owned radio stations but the independent radio *Minivan* failed to secure one.

President Abdul Gayoom, who has been in power since 1978, slowed down the reform process and preferred to govern with the conservatives, leading to the resignations of several ministers, as he came under mounting pressure from the democratic and Islamist opposition. The information minister drove through the adoption of a law on broadcast media, opening the way for the creation of privately-owned radio. But the exorbitant cost of licences disqualified the sole independent radio already in existence, *Minivan Radio*.

The law on press freedom, which despite its name entailed numerous restrictions, was adopted in August. On the other hand, parliament in November rejected a law on access to information. The information minister was disappointed by the vote, which he said deprived the Maldives of a means to bring about change to a national culture, hostile to the right of citizens and the press, to allow access government information. Finally in May, the founding of the Maldives Media Association was made official with the election of its leadership.

STAR FORCE IN ACTION

Police, and in particular, members of the elite Star Force corps arrested around 10 journalists working in the private press. Ahmed Rifah, a photo-journalist on the opposition daily *Minivan*, was held in custody from the 1st to 10 June after being held as he left a gathering of Muslims, deemed by the authorities to be illegal.

Police had no hesitation in trumping up accusations against journalists. Ahmed Rifah was accused of "violence" and Ibrahim Mohamed, a reporter for *Miadhu*, who was charged in April with organising a demonstration, was alleged to have attacked police officers and to have started a rumour that officers had killed someone. In fact, the young

reporter had taken photos of the beating and arrest of the President of the Maldivian Democratic Party, Mohamed Nasheed. He was held at a police station for 48 hours. Three journalists were arrested a few days later during the funeral of opposition figure Hussein Salah, who had been found dead, his face and body swollen, in Malé. Zeena Zahir, of the pro-government *Miadhu*, Adam Miqdad, editor of the website *e-Sandhaanu*, as well as Mohamed Nasheed, a photographer on *Minivan*, were arrested and accused by police of being demonstrators not reporters. In September, Moosa Anwar, of the weekly *Sangu*, was arrested, beaten and accused of "disobedience" by police officers in Malé.

MINIVAN STILL IN THE FIRING LINE

As in previous years, the crackdown was focused on the highly contentious opposition newspaper *Minivan*. Its editor, Aminath Najeeb, close to the Maldivian Democratic Party, was summoned before the courts on several occasions in 2007. She appeared in April before a criminal court in Malé, accused of "civil disobedience", in connection with an article that appeared in September 2006, in which an anonymous journalist condemned the failings of the legal system. The author said that judges attacked more people than they defended. Aminath Najeeb was faced with the same charges in two further trials and faces up to 18 months in prison. Sub-editor on *Minivan*, Nazim Sattar, was also charged with "civil disobedience". The authorities announced on 3 May, World Press Freedom Day, that the charges against the two *Minivan* journalists would be lifted or reduced.

Also in May, Aishath Ainya, a contributor to *Minivan* and a women's rights activist, was arrested and taken for questioning by the Supreme Islamic Council after she objected in an article to the obligation on women to wear the veil.



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Cartoonist and opposition figure Ahmed Abbas was jailed for six months for his trenchant remarks, carried by *Minivan*. A Malé court in March dismissed his appeal against sentence in his absence for “disobedience of the law” in November 2006. He said in an interview that opposition militants should defend themselves against police prison brutality. He was released from prison in Maafushi, also on 3 May.

Two journalists on the newspaper *Minivan* were also imprisoned for drug-taking. Abdulla “Fahala” Saeed, sentenced to life imprisonment in April 2006 for “possession and drug-trafficking”, has been physically and morally weakened by the harsh prison conditions in Maafushi jail. Observers condemned numerous irregularities during his trial. His life sentence appeared to be linked to the highly critical stance he took in the columns of *Minivan*. At the end of 2007, Ali Rasheed, a journalist contributing to a number of opposition publications was imprisoned in Maafushi after being sentenced to life imprisonment, also for drug-trafficking. Rasheed, who admitted taking drugs, said he had been the victim of a rigged trial. He had at

the start of 2007 condemned the regime in scathing articles and also in the foreign media, including *Al-Jazeera* television.

The authorities also obstructed the work of journalists on the foreign-based news website *Minivan News*. US reporter Phillip Wellman, correspondent on *Minivannews.com*, was expelled from the country in January a few days after his arrival, and on the pretext that he did not have a valid visa, he was banned from visiting the country for two years. He was previously arrested and expelled in September 2006, despite the fact that he had a working visa. He had been assured that he would be allowed to return to the Maldives after two weeks.

Patrick Browne, correspondent in South Asia for the *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation* and his cameraman were mistreated by police in March during a demonstration held to welcome back Maldives opposition figure, Mariya Ahmed Didi who had just received an “International Woman of Courage” award from US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice.

NEPAL

Area: 147,180 sq. km.

Population: 27,680,000.

Language: Nepali.

Head of government: Girija Prasad Koirala.

The overthrow of King Gyanendra and the signing of a peace agreement in 2006 led to the hope that 2007 would bring real change, particularly for journalists, who had previously suffered so much ill-treatment. But an outbreak of ethnic violence in the south and blunders by some Maoist cadres left two dead and scores of injured among the media. It was a year of contrasts for Nepali journalists who regained their freedom but not their safety.

The 2006 peace agreement with the Maoists was rapidly overshadowed by violence in the south of the country where the Madhesi people protested against the government which it said had treated them unfairly. Journalists, particularly correspondents for national media, who were accused of being in cahoots with the “powerful in the capital”, lived through hell. Around 100 of them were physically assaulted, threatened or forced to flee after being threatened by Madhesi militants who grew ever more radical. Lists of “wanted” journalists along with rewards were posted up in the southern town of Birgunj at the end of January. A dozen reporters left the Parsa, Bara and Rautatah districts, in fear of their lives.

Elsewhere the Maoists blew hot and cold towards the press. After the Maoists pulled out of government in September, groups of trade unionists and young Maoists launched a campaign of threats against the media. Some party leaders imposed a reign of fear throughout whole regions, preventing journalists from working freely. But a return to government by the former rebels at the end of December, after securing a transition towards a republic, gave rise to hopes of a reduction in violence in 2008.

WAVE OF BRUTALITY IN THE TERAI

No fewer than 70 journalists were assaulted or threatened by different armed groups in the Terai (South) between January and June, seeking either to silence them or force them to become spokespersons. Rioters beat three journalists and a photographer taking pictures in the streets of Morang in the south on 29 January. The previous evening partly, demonstrators destroyed the radio station *FM Birgunj* as well as the offices of the Federation

of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) in Birgunj. Journalists reacted by going on strike.

The authorities, who were overwhelmed and on occasion complicit, proved themselves incapable of protecting journalists or arresting those responsible for the violence. The Madhesi Jana Adhikar Forum (MJAF) sowed fear by publishing lists of journalists accused of being “traitors”. Correspondents for *Nepal Television*, *Radio Nepal*, *Kantipur Publications* and *Nepal FM 91.8* were targeted at the end of January. The MJAF alone was responsible for at least 25 assaults on journalists in 2007. In March, an even more radical organisation, the Madhesi Tiger Nepal (MTN), threatened reprisals against journalists in Nepalgunj if they tried to cover a strike. This organisation blocked circulation of local publications and distribution of national media.

Members of the Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha party (JTMM) threatened staff at *Narayani FM* and *Radio Birgunj* in June, for failing to broadcast news about a strike they had launched. The same group had been responsible for kidnapping Rajendra Rai and Dewaan Rai, of the *Auzaar National Daily* in January. In April, another group, the JTMM-G, called on members of its revolutionary group to “physically attack” journalists working for *Image Channel Television* and radio *Image FM*. The two media had both put out reports on their abuses.

Security forces showed more restraint towards the press than previously but some incidents brought back memories of their past methods. In July, Bhojraj Basnet and Ambika Bhandari, two journalists on the *Samyantra Weekly*, were attacked by two police officers in Belbari, eastern

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Nepal, after it carried an article headlined, “this is how police collect their bribes”. Both journalists fled the town.

TWO JOURNALISTS KILLED BY MAOIST LEADERS

Maoist cadres demonstrated their ruthlessness towards the press. At least five journalists were kidnapped and two were killed by former rebels. The trade unionists and young Maoists used different method of harassing independent media, whom they accused of damaging them or defending the monarchy.

Maoist leaders finally acknowledged at a press conference on 5 November that party cadres had abducted and murdered journalist Birendra Shah, 34, of *Nepal FM*, *Dristri Weekly* and *Avenues TV* in Bara, central Nepal. After a month of silence and lies, the Maoists established that the journalist had been beaten to death on the day he was kidnapped by Lal Bahadur Chaudhary, member of the Maoist regional committee of Bara, central Nepal. Two other party cadres, Kundan Faujdar and Ram Ekwil Sahani, helped kidnap and kill the reporter.

On the other hand, the Maoists have never publicly admitted to the 5 July kidnapping of Prakash Singh Thakuri, from the daily *Ajako Samachar* in Kanchanpur in western Nepal. The spokesman for the hitherto unknown armed group, the National Republican Army said on 8 July that it had killed Prakash Thakuri, justifying his killing on the basis of his articles favourable to the king. But his wife said she was convinced that the Young Communist League, affiliated to the Maoist party, were the instigators of the kidnapping. Police arrested one of them, Pamlal Sharma. The Maoists denied all involvement in the case. The journalist’s body has not been found.

A third journalist killed during the year, Shankar Panthi, was however working for the pro-Maoist newspaper *Naya Satta Daily* in Sunawal, in western Nepal. Police who found his body on the roadside on 14 September initially believed that he was the victim of an accident, his bicycle having apparently been struck by a car. But following protests from

his family and the Association of Revolutionary Journalists, police accepted that his death had not been an accident.

Maoists kidnapped at least three other journalists including in October a reporter on *Mahakali FM*, Pappu Gurund, who was held captive for three days in Dodhara, western Nepal along with his wife. Gurund said his captors threatened him with reprisals if he did not give up his profession.

BLOCKADES AND SABOTAGE

The Maoists departure from government in September fuelled tension with privately-owned media. Maoist trade unions held a series of strikes, against those they believed favourable to their opponents.

First in July and then again in August, the dailies, *The Himalayan Times* and the *Annapurna Post* were not distributed for several days because the pro-Maoist union, All Nepal Communication, Printing and Publication Workers Union (ANCPPWU), imposed a blockade to punish it for publishing critical articles. Union leaders announced they would “kill anyone who distributes the two dailies”. During a peaceful demonstration held by the Nepal Press Union on 9 August, 25 journalists were beaten up by members of the Young Communist League in Kathmandu.

The press group Kantipur in its turn became a target of unions affiliated to the Maoist party who in September blocked circulation of newspapers, threatened staff and committed serious acts of sabotage. Using salary demands as justification, the campaign led militants of the ANCPPWU to sabotage an electric system at the Kantipur group’s printers and to try to torch one of the group’s buildings in the capital. During a demonstration, one Maoist leader said, “The Nepalese won’t die of lack of news from Kantipur. We don’t need their news, nor their journalists either (...) we are ready within an hour to assemble one hundred thousand workers to attack Kantipur”. At the same time, Maoists set fire to one thousand copies of the newspaper in Bharatpur and Pokhara in central Nepal and at Biratnagar in the east of the country.

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The Editors Alliance, a new organisation created by the management of the country's leading privately-owned newspapers in response to the constant threats, spoke out against a "sinister scenario of intimidation and threats against journalists" by organisations affiliated to the Maoist party.

A RETURN TO PEACE IN 2008?

The Maoists re-entry to government in December has given rise to fresh hope for a more peaceful year in 2008. But general elections scheduled during the year could again stoke up violence in regions where armed groups have imposed their will.

Moreover, a generalised climate of impunity in connection with murders committed during the

long years of civil war has allowed the security forces as much as the Maoists to get away with murders and disappearances of journalists.

Throughout the year, the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) has played a crucial role in exposing and condemning violence against the press, including through its investigations and on-the-spot mediation efforts. The FNJ also pushed for the adoption by the interim parliament in July of a law on the right to access to information. This guarantees all citizens access to information about public bodies and provides for the creation of a national information commission responsible for the application of the new law. In the same way, the adoption of the law on working journalists was made possible in August thanks to the efforts of professional bodies and gives better protection to media employees.



NORTH KOREA

Area: 120,540 sq. km.
Population: 22,580,000.
Language: Korean.
Head of state: Kim Jong-il.

The totalitarian regime in North Korea keeps its people in a state of ignorance through tight control of the media. Foreign-based radio stations and independent websites do try to break this isolation and a new magazine using journalists working incognito was launched in 2007. A few foreign reporters were given permission to visit the country, but under the watchful eye of minders.

North Korea is the world's most isolated country and the security forces are responsible for keeping it that way at all costs. A state-run company's director was executed by firing squad in 2007 for having made phone calls abroad without permission. A South Korean Institute has revealed a marked increase in executions for the offence of communicating with people outside the country.

The year was marked by the launch in November of the first magazine to be produced secretly by North Korean journalists. Working closely with a Japanese news agency, *Rimjingang* has promised unprecedented news about the situation within the country. Around a dozen journalists received secret training in China before returning to their country. The first editions carried interviews with North Koreans and an analysis of the economic situation. This group of journalists also helped Japanese and South Korea media to broadcast exclusive footage from within the country, including of public executions. "North Korean reporters are looking for subjects that reflect the lives of the people, their attitudes and aspirations", the project's founders said, adding that the magazine will be distributed secretly inside North Korea.

DISSIDENT RADIOS JAMMED AGAIN

Several foreign-based radio stations have increased their airtime, while newspapers available online, in particular *Daily NK*, have stepped up their coverage. But the regime responded to the challenge on 11 May by resuming jamming independent and dissident radios broadcasting to the people of North Korea: *Free North Korea Radio*, *Voice of America*, *Open Radio for North Korea*, *Radio Free Asia* and *Radio Free Chosun*. A manager at *Open Radio for North Korea* told Reporters Without Borders that this backward step could be linked to the opening of a railway line between North and South.

Jamming of short wave radios had noticeably eased after July 2006, since the authorities, hampered by a serious energy crisis, did not have the capacity to scramble broadcasts all day and on all frequencies.

The Korean Workers' Party, headed by Kim Jong-il, in April fiercely condemned foreign news aimed at "destabilising" the regime. The security forces were ordered to act to prevent foreign videos, publications, telephones and CDs from coming into the country of.

KIM JONG-IL, MEDIA GUIDE

In a propaganda film posted on one of the very few websites favourable to the North Korea regime, Kim Jong-il is presented as a direct inspiration to journalists. He is seen visiting media newsrooms, giving orders to reporters and correcting the editorials. The overblown commentary describes the "dear leader" as the driving force behind the "revolution in the people's media". "All night if necessary, he gives his opinion on the articles and photographs and edits the leaders. He guides the media in their mission which is the promotion of the *juche* (national self reliance) ideology. Thus the radio enthusiastically broadcasts what the worker's party undertakes. With the media under the leadership of Kim Jong-il, the country continues to triumph" intones a voice-off.

Kim Jong-il is in direct control of the North Korean press, including *Rodong Shinmun* (The workers' newspaper), the *Korean Central News Agency*, and national television *JoongAng Bang Song*. Each journalist is indoctrinated so as to unfailingly reflect the regime's ideology and to condemn "bourgeois and imperialist corruption." A typing error can prove costly: several North Korean journalists have been sent to "revolutionising"



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camps for a simple typing slip. In another case, Song Keum-chul, of state television, was sent to a concentration camp at the end of 1995 for having set up a small group of critical journalists and nothing has been heard of him since.

INTERNET AND FOREIGN JOURNALISTS ALLOWED IN TINY NUMBERS

During the October summit between Kim Jong-il and his South Korean counterpart Roh Moo-hyun, only 50 journalists from the South were allowed into Pyongyang. The rest of the press was restric-

ted to covering the visit on giant screens set up in press rooms in Seoul. No more than a dozen foreign media, most of them Chinese, have a presence in North Korea and reporters who obtained visas in 2007 were very closely watched by official guides.

The country remains one of the world's least connected to the Internet. However, many exiled North Korean journalists do contribute to the blogosphere. Most of the websites are hosted in Japan or South Korea because the ".nk" domain name has yet to be launched.



PAKISTAN

Area: 796,100 sq. km.
Population: 159,500,000.
Languages: Urdu, English.
Head of state: Pervez Musharraf.

It was an annus horribilis for journalists in Pakistan. Six reporters were killed, nearly 250 arrested and more than 100 incidents were recorded of threats and physical assault. The brutality came from all sides: the army, Islamists, political militants and local organised crime. And Gen. Pervez Musharraf, rocked by a protest movement launched by judges and lawyers, made life impossible for privately-owned television and radio stations.

Pakistan has been through a year of major political crisis which began in March 2007 with the sacking of the President of the Supreme Court, Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry, deepened with the 3 November declaration of emergency rule and culminated in December with the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the historic leader of the leading opposition party. Pervez Musharraf's reaction to this crisis only aggravated the situation. After unleashing a first wave of repression and censorship in April and May, the head of state at the start of November ordered a blackout of all independent television and radio stations.

The president and his ministers however constantly boasted of the "total freedom allowed to the Pakistani media". In March, when several TV stations were censored for showing footage of demonstrations in favour of Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry, information minister Muhammad Ali Durrani told Reporters Without Borders that, "The government never banned the media from broadcasting these images. It was a decision of the Supreme Judicial Council. The media are close to our heart and no station has been censored". The authorities in November rejected international condemnation of the ban on privately-owned broadcast media, claiming it was not censorship but a necessity to "save the nation".

The political crisis prompted a craving for news among Pakistanis. Newspaper sales soared, particularly supplements devoted to the state of emergency, after the ban on private TV and radio. The Urdu service of the *BBC World Service* boosted the number of news bulletins while its programmes were pulled from Pakistan's FM band after the army closed the *FM 103* station. And although only 15% of Pakistanis are connected to the Internet,

more than a million people visit the *Geo TV* website on a daily basis.

SILENCING OF PRIVATELY-OWNED TELEVISION AND RADIO

The government in 2002 allowed the development of electronic media but did not create the conditions to guarantee their independence thus exposing them to daily and unfair harassment from some government officials and the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA). This authority abused its power on at least ten occasions to force cable operators to halt broadcasts by certain television stations.

The government, overwhelmed on all sides, at the end of May banned live broadcasts of news events. Information minister, Mohammad Ali Durrani, warned media not to cross the "legal limits". As a result privately-owned stations *Aaj* and *ARY TV* were pulled from the cable package by operators in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. A manager at *ARY TV* told Reporters Without Borders that the government claimed not to know anything about it. "But when we call the cable operators they tells us that is it the government who asked them to do it".

The government in June promulgated the PEMRA Amendment Ordinance 2007 to boost the regulatory body's power of censorship and control over television stations and cable operators. It gave the PEMRA the right to seize TV equipment, to close installations and cancel licences for any violation of the law. Fines were also increased from one to ten million Rupees. The regulatory authority no longer even needed to go to the complaints council set up under a previous ordinance. Faced with an outcry, the government at first backed down, then



PAKISTAN

took advantage of the 3 November state of emergency to impose the new measures.

On the day emergency rule was declared, Pervez Musharraf told PEMRA to halt broadcasts on all cable networks of all privately-owned regional and national TV stations, and in particular news channels. Only state-run PTV continued to broadcast. Mobile telephone communications in the capital were also subject to constant interruption.

The head of state amended the Press, Newspapers, News Agencies and Books Registration Ordinance of 2002 and the PEMRA Ordinance de 2002. Under these amendments, it was totally forbidden to all media to broadcast footage or news about a suicide-bombing (the terrorist, his claims or the victims); to make remarks prejudicial to the ideology, sovereignty, integrity of security of Pakistan; to broadcast any news ridiculed the head of state, the army and institutions; or to refer to ongoing judicial proceedings.

On 15 November, international channels BBC and CNN were restored after being interrupted on 9 November, while covering the house arrest of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto in Islamabad. The previous evening they were able to get back on air for a few hours during which President Pervez Musharraf announced that elections would be held in February 2008. The government had in July prevented journalists from the US channel from entering the Red Mosque, after it put out a documentary called, "The threat within" on the presence of the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Pakistan.

Radio Mast FM 103 in Karachi was able to resume broadcasting on 6 November after accepting certain conditions: no national or international news or presidential election news and the BBC Urdu-language news bulletin was to come off air.

The federal government was enraged to see thousands of Pakistanis buying satellite dishes so that they could still watch privately-owned television, and on 13 November decided to make it more difficult to buy decoders, modulators and other equipment, making importers obtain permission from the PEMRA. The authorities also put pres-

sure on the Dubai government to close *Geo News* and *Ary One World*, broadcasting from the emirate. The emir of Dubai ordered a halt to broadcasts on 17 November, but following an international outcry the two channels resumed broadcasting ten days later.

At the start of 2007, privately-owned channels had begun showing news programmes and talk shows which became more and more daring. The authorities applied political and financial pressure to try to stop the most troubling of them. In June, colourful television presenter Ali Saleem announced the end of his programme on *Aaj* because of "increasing government censorship". He invited guests for interview in his "boudoir", in which he appeared in drag. At the end of November, *Aaj* pulled its talk shows "Live With Talat" and "Bolta Pakistan".

SERIOUS POLICE BRUTALITY

As the crisis surrounding the sacking of the president of the Supreme Court gathered steam, journalists were frequently attacked and beaten up by the security forces. They also raided editorial offices, as on 16 March at the studios of *Geo TV*, in Islamabad, which had just shown footage of lawyers injured during a demonstration in support of Iftikar Mohammed Chaudhry.

Police wielding clubs in Islamabad injured at least 30 journalists on 29 September, in a bid to prevent them covering a crackdown on a demonstration by lawyers opposed to the candidature of Pervez Musharraf at the presidential elections. Journalists complained to the Supreme Court which ordered the government to suspend the chief of police and two officers, which order was carried out. The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) declared 30 September to have been a "black day" and the Pakistani press called the incident, "The battle of Constitution Avenue".

Brutality and raids against the media also accompanied the imposition of emergency rule. Members of PEMRA and about 30 police officers arrived at the offices of radio FM 103 in Islamabad on 3 November and seized broadcast equipment.



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Police surrounded the studios of *Aaj* television and radio *FM 99* in the capital. Police arrested at least five photographers and cameramen in front of the Karachi Press Club on 5 November as they covered a demonstration by human rights activists. At the same time a correspondent for the *BBC* was arrested close to the home of a judge in Karachi. A police officer in Quetta tried to destroy a camera belonging to a reporter for *Agence France-Presse* who was covering a demonstration. And in Rawalpindi, police beat and insulted journalists covering a lawyers' demonstration. Photo-reporter Muhammad Javed had two fingers broken by one officer, who also seized the memory chip of his camera.

The secret services also went after journalists, and even more aggressively. Eight agents arrested Shoaib Bhutta, editor of the Urdu-language *Daily Tulou* at his office in Islamabad in November. In two days of questioning, during which he was kept chained up and deprived of sleep, they quizzed him about why he was critical of the authorities. A few days later, Khurram Hashmi, of *Aaj* television suffered a brutal interrogation about the funding of the press protest movement against the state of emergency. He was beaten and threatened with reprisals before being released in Karachi. Secret service officers in Islamabad beat up Babar Malik, of the ARY TV in August. "If you break scandals, we can also break your arms and legs", one of the soldiers told him, shortly after it broadcast a report by the journalist about the disappearance of Imran Munir, sentenced for spying by a military court.

JOURNALISTS CAMPAIGN TO DEFEND THEIR FREEDOM

Journalists' organisations, particularly the PFUJ, have also suffered official harassment. A lawsuit was started against nearly 200 journalists for defying a ban on protests after they held a press freedom rally on 4 June. The collective suit was withdrawn a few days later on the orders of Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz after it was condemned in the press. Secretary General of the PFUJ, Mazhar Abbas, found an envelope containing a bullet in his car at the end of May.

During the November crisis, the principle media organisations - the PFUJ, the All Pakistan Newspapers Society, the Council of Pakistan Newspapers Editors, the Pakistan Broadcasters Association and the South Asia Free Media Association (whose director Imtiaz Alam had been held for one day) - joined together to fight the new laws and demonstrations drawing thousands of journalist defied the government.

Police in Karachi and Hyderabad arrested some 160 journalists on 20 November. One police officer said he had received the order to use force against journalists who were assembling near an official building. Around a dozen journalists were beaten.

VIOLENCE IN THE TRIBAL AREAS

The few journalists who work in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan, members of the Tribal Union of Journalists (TUJ), were targeted by the Taliban and their Jihadist allies, but also by the authorities. The vice-president of the TUJ, Noor Hakim, a journalist on the Urdu-language daily *Pakistan*, was killed in a bombing in June in the tribal area of Bajaur in the north-west. Four other people died in the attack that was aimed at an official.

Foreign journalists are banned from going to the most turbulent regions, particularly Waziristan, while Pakistani reporters now hardly ever venture there. The most radical Islamists use illegal FM radios to broadcast calls for Jihad.

The case of Hayatullah Khan, a reporter from the tribal areas kidnapped and killed in 2006 had a further tragic twist when in November his widow was killed in a bombing at her home in Mir Ali in North Waziristan. The teacher had campaigned to condemn the kidnapping and murder of her husband. The journalist's brother Ehsanullah Khan accused his brother's killers of being behind the death of his widow. In the past he had accused members of the military secret services of taking part in the kidnapping of his brother, which the government has always denied. But the authorities have never made public the conclusions of the



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inquiry carried out by a judge in Peshawar in 2006, which identifies the killers. Ehsanullah Khan said that he informed the information minister, Muhammad Ali Durani, that the life of his brother's widow was in danger, but the authorities did not take any steps to protect her.

Islamists in Waziristan killed four family members of Din Muhammad, a reporter for the newspaper *Inkishaf*, who had assisted a group of Pakistani correspondents working for the national and international press, to go to Wana, a town under the influence of Jihadist groups. Three other members of his family were kidnapped.

The home of Nasrullah Afridi, correspondent in the tribal areas for the Urdu-language daily *Mashriq Khyber*, was targeted in a grenade attack in May. Five days earlier, the head of the Jihadist group Lashkar-i-islam, Mangal Bagh, made a death threat against the journalist on the illegal FM radio that he runs. The journalist, who had already moved home because of similar threats, told Reporters Without Borders that "I am in fear for my life" and I will have to "leave the town".

The army, which has proved unable to get on top of the situation, sometimes makes life difficult for local journalists. An officer in the Pakistani army insulted and threatened to kill Sailab Mehsud, correspondent for the newspaper *The News and Al-Jazeera* in Dera Ismail Khan, south of Peshawar, and editor of the website Karwan-e-Qabial (karwan-e-qabial.net). The former president of the TUJ had the previous evening broadcast news about a clash between the army and the Taliban in South Waziristan. "He introduced himself as a member of military intelligence based in Dera Ismail Khan. He insulted me and said I would disappear and future generations would never find me," said Mehsud.

ISLAMIST THREATS

The offensive by Islamist groups was not limited to the tribal areas. A religious leader at the Red Mosque pronounced a fatwa in June against, among others, Zubair Kasuri, editor of the fashion magazine *Octane*, for publishing series of photos

captioned "Adam and Eve, the apple of discord". Police in Islamabad made a "blasphemy" complaint against the magazine. Then, in July, the presenter on a talk show on state-run PTV, received death threats from extremist students after broadcasting an interview with the former imam at the Red Mosque, Maulana Abdul Aziz, wearing a woman's burka, in which he had disguised himself to escape the besieged mosque.

Suicide bombers posed serious threats to the safety of journalists, particularly photographers and cameramen, who have to closely follow political figures. A young freelance photo-journalist, Mehboob Khan, was killed in this way in April during a suicide attack against the interior minister, Aftab Khan Sherpao. Four other journalists were wounded. The cameraman Muhammad Arif of privately-owned ARY TV, was one of the 133 victims of the suicide-bombing of the cortege of former prime minister, Benazir Bhutto in Karachi on 18 October.

KIDNAPPINGS AND CENSORSHIP IN BALOCHISTAN

Pakistani security forces fighting separatism in Balochistan, in the south-west, secretly detained many civilians there, including journalists. The secret services in August released Munir Mengal, director of the channel *Baloch Voice*, after holding him secretly for more than 16 months. But police immediately sent him to prison for 30 days in Khudzar, Balochistan province under the Maintenance of Public Order. "How can he threaten public order when he is already in the hands of the security forces?" asked one journalist reporting on the case. After so many months in the hands of the military he was "weak and suffering from unexplained illnesses."

Javed Lehri, of the Urdu-language daily *Azadi*, based in Quetta, in Balochistan province is disappeared since November. One colleague who request anonymity, told Reporters Without Borders, "Even if Javed Lehri belonged to an opposition political party, his disappearance seems much more likely to be linked to his journalistic work". Editor of the paper considered that secret services agents



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were behind his disappearance. Javed Lehri had just done a report on a political party rally against the assassination of Akbar Bugti, the head of the Balochistan National party.

Riaz Mengal, of the newspaper *Intikhab* based in Khuzdar, was kidnapped on 5 October. Before his disappearance he had written articles about a car-ringing gang. "Riaz had received death threats after his reports His life was in danger", one Balochistan journalist told Reporters Without Borders. He managed to escape from his captors on 25 November.

CRIMINAL TENDENCIES

It is in the rural areas - dominated by a quasi-feudal system - which the henchmen of politicians go after the press in the most brutal ways. For example, six men armed with Kalashnikovs on 17 June killed Nasir Ahmed Solangi, correspondent for the Sindhi-language *Khabroon* in Kingri, Sind province.

A colleague, Khan Muhammad, told Reporters Without Borders that "Solangi had received death threats two days before the murder from the Junejo tribe which was furious about his reporting". One of his colleagues rebutted the official theory that he had been killed for ethnic reasons. "He was killed because of his work," the journalist said.

Also in Sind, Zubair Ahmed Mujahid, correspondent for the national daily *Jang* in Mirpur Khas district was shot dead on 23 November, by an unknown attacker on a motorbike. "My brother was killed because of the critical articles he wrote, including on the state of the poor in our region," his older brother Muhammad Iftikhar said. The experienced correspondent for *Jang* wrote a weekly column "Crime and punishment" in which he often exposed landowners and police officers. "Our family had no family conflicts (...) My brother wrote articles about the plight of the poor, which were aimed of course at influential people," said Iftikhar.

PHILIPPINES

Area: 300,000 sq. km.
Population: 84,500,000.
Languages: Tagalog, English.
Head of state: Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

Two journalists were killed because of their work in 2007, fewer than in previous years but constant threats and physical attacks make some regions, particularly Mindanao island, dangerous areas. The press managed to defend its rights despite judicial harassment from some political figures that led to journalists being imprisoned.

Hired killers continued to strike in the Philippines. Carmelo Palacios, of public *dzRB Radio ng Bayan*, in Nueva Ecija province in the north, was murdered on 17 April. Police themselves confirmed that the motive appeared most likely connected to this work. His body showed signs of injuries and he had bullet wounds to the face. Palacios worked on reports exposing corruption and he collaborated with the police to break up criminal gangs through the programme *Citizens Crime Watch*. At the time of his death, he was investigating cases of misuse of power on the part of police officers and local officials.

On Christmas Eve, two men riding on a motorbike shot dead Ferdinand Lintuan, a presenter on *DXGO Radio*, in Davao City, Mindanao island while he was travelling in a car with two colleagues, Louie Ceniza and Edgar Banzon. He was hit in the head by a bullet fired at point blank range and died instantly. He had been critical of local officials; in particular he had accused the governor of Davao of corruption in the development of a "People's park" project, which he had dubbed the "crocodile park". A few days later, police arrested a former soldier believed to have been hired to kill the journalist.

Local journalists' organisations condemned the actions of a death squad linked to the congressman of Davao, Prospero Nograles, whose advisor retired general Jovito Palparan human rights groups accuse of a number of murders.

Four other journalists were killed in 2007, but it has been impossible to determine whether the reasons for the murders were linked to their work as journalists. There were also at least ten murder attempts on journalists during the year. In April two men shot at Delfin Mallari, of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* in South Luzon and Johnny Glorioso, of radio *DZMM*, in the south of Manila. One bullet

hit Delfin Mallari, who reports on timber and drug trafficking. A few days later the governor of Quezon, Rafael Nantes, took the two journalists to court. Delfin Mallari told the press that the legislator was the instigator of the murder attempt against him and his colleague. The governor responded, "There will be bloodshed if I lose the elections". In July, it was an official in the transport minister who attempted to kill Ferdinand "Bambi" Yngson, of radio *RGMA-Bacolod* in Sagay City, Western Negros province, south-west of Manila after the reporter exposed embezzlement and unfair practices on the part of officials enforcing road regulations.

Jose Cagalawan Pantoja, of radio *dxLS* in Iligan, in the south of the Philippines suffered the same fate, when two men riding on a motorbike shot him several times in the stomach, leaving him seriously injured. He presents a daily programme "Katawhan Alagaran" (Serve the people), exposing corruption and criticising the governor Lanao del Norte, Vincente Belmonte. His remarks have landed him with numerous defamation suits, several of which were dismissed. Jose Cagalawan Pantoja was also spokesman for the former governor of Lanao del Norte, Imelda Dimaporo, who was beaten by Vincente Belmonte at the last elections.

The media which do most to expose corruption and abuse by armed gangs on Mindanao island have been the target of violence. Several vehicles belonging to radio *dxCC* in Cagayan de Oro, in the north of Mindanao, were damaged in a bomb attack outside the station in March. The radio's director, Zaldy Ocon, received a death threat via a text on his mobile phone shortly before the attack.

SUCCESS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST IMPUNITY?

The police task force charged with investigating murders of journalists has had a degree of success.

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Two suspects in the 2001 murder of journalist Rolando Ureta were arrested in November. According to official statistics, there was a reduction of more than 80% in murders of journalists, trade unions and opposition figures during the year.

However it will be a long struggle to really put an end to impunity. A very detailed report by a UN group of experts, headed by Philip Alston, concluded that some sections of the army were implicated in extra-judicial killings of left wing activists, including journalists.

Families of murder victims who fight impunity have ended up being threatened themselves. This happened to Nena Santos, a lawyer and friend of the journalist Marlene Esperat, who was murdered in 2005. She received several death threats while she was working on the case.

IMPRISONED JOURNALISTS

It is rare in the Philippines for journalists to receive prison sentences but a presenter of *dxMF Bombo Radyo*, Alex Adonis, was sentenced to four and a half years in prison in January for defaming Prospero Nograles, a member of parliament, reportedly close to President Gloria Arroyo, who sued him for remarks about an alleged affair he had in 2001. The young journalist, who was on a salary of 150 dollars a month, could not afford to hire a lawyer to defend him at his trial. He was imprisoned in Davao jail. Director of the radio, Dan Vicente, his co-accused, was acquitted.

Police arrested Gemma Baguaya, director of the online magazine *Newsbreak* (www.newsbreak.com.ph), at her office near Manila in March after Luis "Chabit" Singson, governor of Iloco Sur province and a political ally of Gloria Arroyo, opened a libel suit against her. She was released on bail a few hours later. The Bangkok correspondent of the *Asia News Network*, Jofelle Tesorio, was imprisoned in Quezon jail in June over a series of articles written in 2003 about a natural gas project in Camago-Malampaya, in Palawan, alleging wrong-doing against former deputy Vicente Sandoval, who won his defamation case. The journalist was set free a few days later.

The authorities took it out on the press when in November they faced with a military revolt. Several dozen journalists were arrested close to a hotel in Manila where around 30 soldiers were holed up and calling for the president's resignation. The journalists, including several foreign press correspondents, were questioned about "obstruction of justice". Police said they needed to check that none of the rebels had escaped by hiding among the journalists.

Finally, the president's husband, Mike Arroyo, decided on 3 May, World Press Freedom Day, to drop legal action which he had first opened against 46 journalists and editors in 2003. Philippines journalist organisations had campaigned very effectively to get the country's "First gentleman" to back down, taking him to court themselves in December 2006 over the unacceptable nature of his accusations.

SINGAPORE

Area: 620 sq. km.

Population: 4,450,000.

Languages: English, Mandarin, Malay, Tamil.

Head of government: Lee Hsien Loong.

A “worthy” successor to his father, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has done nothing to loosen state control over the media. Journalists have a great deal more freedom to cover international news than local affairs. And a political documentary was hit by censorship.

The authorities continued their trial of strength with the magazine the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (FEER), which has been banned from distribution in the country since 2006, but which is still available online. A court in June rejected a request from the prominent Hong Kong-based monthly to be defended by a British lawyer in a “defamation” trial opened against it last year by Lee Hsien Loong and his father. The judge considered that the suit was not sufficiently “complex” for the lawyer in question. Lee Hsien Loong and his father Lee Kuan Yew took exception to an article in the *FEER* about opposition leader Chee Soon Juan, whom it termed a “martyr of the country” because of a raft of legal proceedings he has had to face.

The opposition, particularly the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP), *bête noire* of the regime, is rarely quoted in the media and dissident voices have to resort to using the Internet to express themselves.

The authorities in April declared a sentence of up to two years in jail and a heavy fine would be imposed on anyone suspected of possessing or

broadcasting a copy of the documentary “Zahari’s 17 years”, about the 17-year imprisonment of journalist and opposition figure Said Zahari. The film-maker, Martyn See, was forced to hand over the original and copies of the documentary to the ministry of information communications and the arts. In the film, the former editor of the newspaper *Utusan Melayu* recounts why the government of the time, headed by the father of the current premier, arrested him in 1963 along with several of his associates, under a draconian internal security law. The ministry said “Zahari’s 17 years” threatened “public confidence in the government”. Martyn See’s films can be viewed on the Internet.

A correspondent for *Reuters* in Singapore, Mia Shanley was forced to reveal the source for one of her stories after two companies took action against the British news agency and the newspapers *The Straits Times* and *The Business Times* to force them to reveal the sources for articles dating back to November 2006. The courts systematically returned verdicts in favour of companies, undermining the protection of sources in the country.

SOUTH KOREA

Area: 99,260 sq. km.

Population: 48,501,000.

Language: Korean.

Head of state: Lee Myung-bak.

Lee Myung-bak, conservative victor in the December 2007 presidential election, promised to find a solution to the “press rooms” crisis. Journalists have fought the closure of these rooms that were assigned for their use within the main administrative buildings. Former president Roh Moo-hyun had wanted to rationalise and modernise government communications.

The administration in May 2007 adopted new rules entitled “Measures to develop a modern system of media support” which meant the closure of most press rooms within public buildings in the capital Seoul. New rooms were built but they no longer allowed journalists free access to ministries and major administrations as had been the case previously. The authorities closed the administration press rooms which had been established for decades, on 11 October. The Internet was cut off and equipment removed. One month later, the national police did the same. Police were deployed in front of the building to stop journalists from going in. Journalists protested against the new measures which they deemed an obstruction to their work, refusing to use the new rooms and “camped” in the corridors of the administrations. The major journalists’ organisations condemned it as an attempt to restrict access to information. On the other hand, some foreign journalists and publications close to the head of state welcomed the changes.

This reform, which was initiated by President Roh Moo-hyun, was intended to concentrate all official

communications into just a few press rooms in Seoul, Gwacheon and Daejeon. Officials were no longer allowed to speak directly to the press. The new president, Lee Myung-bak, has promised to rapidly resolve this crisis.

Elsewhere, the conservative victory should bring an end to various attempts by the centre-left presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun to limit the power of the newspapers, *Chosun Ilbo*, *JoongAng Ilbo* and *Dong-A Ilbo*, which represent nearly 70% of the market of the daily written press.

Cases of violence against the press are rare. However, in March, anti-riot police in Seoul injured ten journalists, while covering a rally of demonstrators opposed to free trade negotiations between South Korea and the United States. The following day police issued a statement apologising.

Finally, although it is never used, Article 7 of the law on national security still allows a journalist to be imprisoned for expressing “sympathy” with the North Korean regime.



SRI LANKA

Area: 65,610 sq. km.
Population: 19,800,000.
Languages: Sinhala, Tamil, English.
Head of state: Mahinda Rajapakse.

The government and the military have intensified the war against the Tamil Tigers and President Mahinda Rajapakse has sworn to stamp out the rebellion, at the price of appalling human rights violations if necessary. Both the Sinhala and English-language press came under even greater pressure from the authorities in 2007. On their side, the Tamil Tigers allow no dissident voices in the areas they control.

Bolstered by military victories in the east of the country, the government of Mahinda Rajapakse, backed up by his brother, defence secretary Gotabaya Rajapakse, has vowed to inflict military defeat on the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) who have stepped up attacks on Sinhala civilians and threats against journalists whom they consider to be in cahoots with the authorities. Security forces supported by militia have sown terror in Tamil areas, carrying out many extra-judicial executions, kidnappings and threats. Despite international condemnation, the government has used the fight against terrorism to justify this “dirty war”. The Tamil press has been badly affected by this strategy that is aimed at dissuading the Tamil population from supporting the LTTE.

In the capital Colombo, the government, allied to ultra-nationalists of the right and the left, cracked down on independent press groups, closing a radio network and publications in Sinhala. Officials have made frequent statements hostile to press freedom activists and investigative journalists, forcing the best known of them, Iqbal Athas, to temporarily flee the country.

Access to conflict zones is virtually impossible for journalists and the war of words and statistics between the government and the LTTE spilled over into the press. This was the case in January when the army vaunted the success of its bombardment of an LTTE military base in Padahuthurai, eastern Sri Lanka. But the Tamil Tigers said that 15 civilians had been killed in the attack, which they claimed had not hit any military objective. Since no independent journalist was able to reach the scene, the majority of the Sinhala and English language press in Colombo carried the government account without being able to check it, while Tamil news websites and media carried news and footage put out by LTTE.

The government, ever more resistant to international pressure, refused to allow UN observers into the country and summoned several ambassadors who had expressed opinions about human rights in the country. The national human rights commission is so lacking in independence that it lost its international status in 2007. Since March it has been preventing its offices from providing information to the media on certain cases.

TERROR IN JAFFNA

The northern Jaffna Peninsula, where Tamils are in the majority and which the army directly administers, has become a nightmare for journalists, human rights activists and civilians in general. A wave of murders, kidnappings, threats and censorship has made it one of the most dangerous places in the world for the press. Two journalists were killed there during the year, two more kidnapped and at least three media have been the victims of direct attacks on them. Scores of journalists have fled the region and others have chosen to abandon the profession altogether.

The Tamil militia of the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) who back the security forces in their fight against the LTTE, have been implicated in many violent episodes. Their leader, Douglas Devananda, is also social affairs minister. In the east, a militia formed from a group that broke away from the LTTE has sowed terror.

A gunman on a motorbike killed a young reporter, Selvarajah Rajivarnam, who was riding his bike near the office of Jaffna's biggest selling daily *Uthayan* at the end of April. He covered criminal cases, going into police stations and the hospital to obtain information about murders and disappearances. Several sources in Jaffna said members of the EPDP could be behind the killing. Also in April,



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the editor of local magazine *Nilam*, Chandrabose Suthaharan, was murdered at his home in the government-controlled town of Vavuniya in northern Sri Lanka. Police have failed to find the killers.

Two armed men who arrived on a motorbike burst into the home of journalism student Sahathevan Nilakshan, three kilometres from Jaffna on 2 August and shot him several times, leaving him fatally wounded. He was also a member of the management of a Tamil-language magazine *Chaa'laram*, linked to the student federation in Jaffna district. Another journalist, Kangarajan Prashanthan, working for the nationalist Tamil-language paper *Navadu Eelandu* until its closure in 2006, might easily have been killed in October but gunmen murdered his twin brother in a mistaken identity attack.

TWO JOURNALISTS DISAPPEARED

Sri Lanka holds the record for the greatest number of disappearances reported to the UN. Among them are two Jaffna journalists: Subramaniam Ramachandran, a journalist on *Thinakural*, who has not been seen since February after being arrested by the army; and Vadivel Nimalarajah, a sub editor on *Uthayan*, who was abducted from the street, after spending the night working at his office.

Neither of these disappearances has been seriously investigated, despite government promises and the identification of some suspects. Similarly, the killing of two staff in a bloody attack on the offices of *Uthayan* in May 2006, went uninvestigated by police, even though the paper's management provided the authorities with the name of a suspect, Valluvan, a militant in the pro-government EPDP militia. However witnesses, quoted by *Uthayan*, saw Valluvan in 2007 in the administration offices in Jaffna.

TAMILS DEPRIVED OF INDEPENDENT NEWS

Throughout the year, the government and its allies have tried to block the flow of independent sources of news in Tamil. Those living in the north and east of the country, already isolated by the war,

have also been gradually deprived of media not affiliated either to the government or an armed group. For their part, the LTTE increased their surveillance of Tamil journalists, threatening those who dare to criticise them openly. And the media in the areas in which they control are forced to relay the movement's belligerent propaganda.

Some staff on *Uthayan* live spend time holed up in their offices in the centre of Jaffna. One journalist lived there permanently in 2007 for fear of being killed in the street. "We had 120 staff, of whom 20 were journalists, before August 2006. Now there are only 55 of whom five are journalists, who are prepared to face up to the risks", editor M. V. Kaanamylnaatha said in June when he welcomed Reporters Without Borders to his Jaffna office.

Until May the Jaffna press went through huge problems to obtain essential supplies. The regions three titles were being asphyxiated by the authorities, who from August 2006 onwards refused to allow ink and newsprint on the list of goods that could be delivered to Jaffna. Despite their growing popularity, *Uthayan*, *Yarl Thinakural* and *Valampuri* were forced to drastically reduce their pagination and circulation. Finally after pressure, mostly from abroad, the army lifted its embargo and stock was able to arrive from the capital by boat.

The information ministry decided on 25 October to suspend the licences of five radio stations - *Sun FM*, *Gold FM*, *Hiru FM*, *Shaa FM* and *Surayan FM* - belonging to the privately-owned Asia Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) group for putting out a news item that turned out to be wrong. It was the president in person who ordered the investigation. The ABC group, several hundred of whose staff lost their jobs because of the closures, had always stood up to the authorities. The director of the Tamil-language *Surayan FM* was kidnapped in Colombo in 2006. In January 2008, the government opened new negotiations with the ABC management, which asked some employees to return to work.

The English-language news website *Tamilnet*, which is very popular because it often provides exclusive news about the situation in the LTTE-controlled

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areas, was blocked by the country's Internet service providers on 15 June. A bullet to the head had killed the website's director, Dharmaratnam Sivaram "Taraki", in April 2005 in Colombo. The authorities once again in 2007 blocked an investigation that had begun with the arrest of a suspect, a member of a pro-government Tamil party.

One by one Tamil correspondents for the national and international press have been leaving the north and east and sometimes the country, after receiving threats. When a Reporters Without Borders' representative was in Jaffna in June, the correspondent for the *Associated Press* received a text message and a call from a satellite phone telling him it was his last warning before his execution. He left Jaffna the following day.

"I have never seen anything like it. Even in Iraq under Saddam Hussein, foreign journalists had more freedom of movement", a journalist working for *Agence France-Presse* told Reporters Without Borders after returning from reporting in Jaffna. He had only been allowed to visit the city accompanied by a military escort and had not been able to interview a single resident. A British television film crew was in October also prevented from working in the peninsula, even though they had obtained permission from the defence ministry. Soldiers forced the three journalists to stay at the Palaly military bases and escorted them round Jaffna for two hours before telling them to return to Colombo.

In its war against the LTTE, the army at the end of November bombed the installations of the movement's official radio, near Killinochchi in the north. Nine civilians, three of them station staff, were killed and around a dozen more were injured. The radio *Voice of Tigers* is certainly a propaganda radio run by the LTTE, but the attack violates rules of engagement that restrict military bombing to strictly military targets.

By contrast, the pressure brought to bear by the LTTE was less visible than that of the authorities, but was every bit as effective. The separatist movement has never hesitated to go after dissidents within the Tamil community and the press is no

exception to this rule. The head of a Tamil media explained: "We know that the reaction of the LTTE can also be potentially harmful for our staff, so we are very careful. We weigh every word when we talk about the LTTE and the army. And naturally we never refer to the Tigers as terrorists". The LTTE intelligence services often summon or call Tamil journalists when they want them to provide them with information.

OFFICIALS TURNED INTO GANG LEADERS

Some ministers behave like gang leaders. Labour minister, Mervyn Silva, arrived with his henchmen at the offices of the state-run television *Rupavahini*, in Colombo in December and ordered one of his men to beat the news editor because he had failed to broadcast a speech he just made while formally opening a new bridge. Police were forced to intervene and the minister left the building under a hail of insults.

The same minister had in January incited his supporters to physically attack journalists, including a BBC correspondent, who were covering a peaceful rally. He said in April that "journalists behave like mad dogs and they have to be injected against rabies".

The defence secretary and younger brother of the president, Gotabhaya Rajapakse, in April called the editor of the *Daily Mirror*, Champika Liyanarachchi, on his mobile phone and threatened her, saying that she would escape reprisals only if she resigned. He said he would put pressure on the newspaper's management to ensure she was dismissed. He also threatened to "exterminate" the journalist Uditha Jayasinghe, for writing articles about the plight of civilian war casualties. Security forces on two occasions also accused the *Daily Mirror* of betraying the country.

OBSTACLES INCREASINGLY PUT IN THE WAY OF INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

The prominent investigative journalist Iqbal Athas and several of his colleagues on the *Sunday Times* were in August victims of a campaign of harassment orchestrated by army officers wanting to silence them after revelations about the purchase of MIG-27



SRI LANKA

warplanes from Ukraine. The government staged demonstrations outside the home of Iqbal Athas in Colombo accusing him of being a “traitor”. After his police protection was removed, Athas left the country for several weeks and suspended his column that specialised in military affairs.

An article posted on the defence ministry website on 2 October accused the journalist of taking part in “psychological operations by the LTTE terrorists”. A few days earlier, after Athas had just resumed his column in the *Sunday Times*, army spokesman, Brigadier Udaya Nanayakakara, called on the media to stop publishing his articles.

The authorities also sponsored an arson attack in November on the printers of the Leader Publications group, sending in around 15 men, with the complicity of the army, who mistreated two staff before spraying machines with petrol and torching them. The group publishes the

English-language weeklies *The Sunday Leader* and *Morning Leader*, the Sinhala-language weekly *Irudina* and the Tamil-language daily *Sudar Oli*. The raiders destroyed thousands of copies of the *Morning Leader* which were due for distribution that morning. The editor of the *Sunday Leader*, Lasantha Wickramatunga, known for his investigations and critical editorials, condemned the attack as a commando operation backed by the government.

The few Tamil journalists who tried to carry out investigative work were also targeted. In August, Kalimuttu Palamohan, known as K. P. Mohan, a specialist in military affairs for the Tamil-language daily *Thinakkural*, had acid thrown at him as he returned to his home in Colombo. Soldiers had attacked the journalist two months earlier. “When I showed them my press card they insulted me and then called other colleagues who beat me”, K. P. Mohan said about the first incident.

THAILAND

Area: 513,120 sq. km.
Population: 64,770,000.
Language: Thai.
Head of government: Samak Sundaravej.

The army, which took power in a coup in September 2006, provided guarantees for press freedom while at the same time hounding media close to former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra. The new Constitution, adopted in August 2007, guaranteed free expression, but a new security law could turn out to be dangerous. Most cases of censorship involved the Internet.

The army went along step by step with a return to democracy which culminated in the adoption of a new Constitution in 2007 and legislative elections in December, during which the supporters of Thaksin Shinawatra had their revenge and saw the military suffer an overwhelming defeat. The constituent assembly appointed by the junta came up with a law promising a democratic regime, while strengthening the power of the armed forces.

In 2007, the Council for National Security (CNS), the government which emerged after the 2006 coup, concentrated its attacks on the media close to the ousted prime minister. An internal CNS memo revealed in September that a media campaign had been launched to discredit the People Power Party, a resurrection of Thaksin Shinawatra's former party. The military could count on scores of TV and radios whose licences they controlled.

This strategy however proved ineffective because the People Power Party won the December elections. Its leader, the populist figure Samak Sundaravej, has a history of making attacks on the press which augurs badly for relations between the media and the new government.

For Chavarong Limpattamapanee, journalist and secretary general of the Press Council, the media has "well and truly come out of the Thaksin era, when they were under constant pressure. Newspaper journalists are able to write in freedom, although it's less the case in television". One of the managers of the daily *Matichon*, Pairat Pongpanit, said they could carry out investigations without obstruction, even if he acknowledged that the military leaders have not gone back on their position that the press should "cooperate" with the government and not act as "dissidents".

ATTACKS CONCENTRATED ON PRO-THAKSIN MEDIA

A television station to be run by people close to the exiled prime minister was smothered at birth by the military, while bloggers supporting the ousted head of government were arrested. The still popular "Asian Berlusconi", Thaksin Shinawatra, who was guilty of numerous press freedom violations when he was in power, has been the bête noire of the authorities in Bangkok. In January 2007, the government told the main Thai cable TV operator to block access to CNN when it was about to broadcast an interview with the former primer minister. The Cnn.com website was also blocked. The CNS had on 10 January told all TV and radio stations not to transmit interviews with Thaksin Shinawatra or his close advisors.

The government, fearing it would become a platform for Thaksin Shinawatra, banned *People Television* (PTV) in March, after it had been broadcasting by satellite for just ten hours. "Repeated censorship on the part of the military junta is totally contrary to the so-called democratic aspirations the military announced when it took power," one of the station's managers said.

The authorities had initially tried to prevent its launch on the grounds that it had not obtained a licence to broadcast from Hong Kong. To get round the problem, PTV then made the decision to use one of the in-country satellite broadcasters, Star Channel MVI.

IS A PUBLIC INDEPENDENT CHANNEL IN THE OFFING?

The government took over control of the kingdom's third most watched channel, iTV, in March, imposing a record fine of 100.45 billion Baht

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(about two billion Euros), for non-payment of concession fees. It was handed to the public group Mass Communication Organization of Thailand (MCOT) which already owned *Channel 9*, various radios and the *Thai News Agency* (TNA).

Thaksin Shinawatra himself had bought the channel shortly after 2000. He then undermined its independence, gradually replacing investigative programmes with entertainment. After a few weeks of confusion surrounding the future of the channel, the authorities agreed to let it continue broadcasting and to provide itself with the means to turn it into an independent public channel, a first in South East Asia.

SURVEILLANCE AND BLOCKING THE INTERNET

The law against cyber-criminality, the Computer Crime Act, came into force in July and allowed police to seize computer equipment from anyone suspected of sending messages with insulting or pornographic content. Under the new law, Internet service providers, have to keep personal details of Internet-users for 90 days. The authorities have the power to check this information without any legal checks.

In April, the government blocked video-sharing website YouTube, as well as several others which had content critical of King Bhumibol Adulyadej. YouTube was unblocked in August after at least four videos had been removed. The Thai ministry

of information and communications welcomed this compromise. Owner of the site, Google, undertook not to put videos online that were contrary to the law or insulting to the monarchy. The minister added that YouTube had created a programme allowing Thai service providers to block access to videos deemed to be sensitive. The government followed this up by announcing it would set up a national committee for the supervision of the media to regulate content put out by radio, press, television and the Internet. This new body would comprise representatives of government and the Internet sector, including Google and Microsoft.

The authorities also blocked websites favourable to Thaksin Shinawatra, including hi-thaksin.net. The organisation, Freedom Against Censorship in Thailand (FACT), condemned increased censorship on the Net. Political discussion forums and websites close to separatist movements in the south of Thailand, PULO, BIPP, and BRN, were shut down in 2007.

One blogger, Praya Pichai, spent two weeks in custody under Section 14 of the law against cyber-criminality for “defamation” and “harming national security”, accused of “criticising the monarchy” in an article posted on his blog (prachathai.com). The authorities then lifted the charges against him for lack of evidence, but he will be under surveillance for ten years and faces prison if he posts any new political comment on a website.



VIETNAM

Area: 331,690 sq. km.
Population: 84,100,000.
Language: Vietnamese.
Head of state: Nguyen Minh Triet.

The political police continued in 2007 what it had begun at the end of 2006: a relentless battle against opposition movements and dissident publications. One journalist and a score of cyber-dissidents were sentenced to harsh prison terms. A French journalist working for an opposition radio was arrested for “terrorism”.

Legislative elections in May 2007 served as an occasion for the sole party to remind the opposition that it had no right to exist. In some districts of Ho Chi Minh City, the turnout reached 100% and no independent candidate was elected. The press was forced to show enthusiasm for these elections at which everything was decided in advance.

President Nguyen Minh Triet, replying in May to a question about human rights from a European journalist, said: “Perhaps it is hard for you to understand the love that we have for the people and the love that we have for human rights. But people who break the law must be punished.” A few weeks earlier, Father Nguyen Van Ly, who runs the dissident review *Tu do Ngôn luận* (Freedom of Expression) published in Hue, central Vietnam, and four of his contributors were given harsh prison sentences at the end of a summary trial after being found guilty of “propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam”.

STALINIST TRIALS AGAINST DISSIDENTS

The trial of Father Nguyen Van Ly and his four co-accused lasted just over three hours. Weakened by a hunger strike, the priest refused to get up to give his name to the judge at the people’s court in Hue. After hearing his sentence of eight years in prison, he shouted out, “Down with the Communist Party!” His colleague Nguyen Phong said in front of the judge, “For the Vietnamese nation, I will continue to fight for the values of freedom and democracy.” Nguyen Binh Thanh, who was sentenced to five years, said in his defence that he had only acted in obedience to “international laws”. Hoang Thi Anh Dao and Le Thi Le Hang received suspended 18-month sentences.

Father Ly was arrested in February and during the year two other managers of the review, Father

Chan Tin and Father Phan Van Loi were placed under house arrest. The magazine continued to be clandestinely distributed in Vietnam and abroad.

RETURN OF THE “POPULAR COURTS”

The authorities reactivated the “popular courts” to intimidate dissidents. Residents are invited to speak to the court to denounce and condemn an accused person. Nguyen Khac Toan, deputy editor of a dissident publication *Tu Do Dân Chủ* (Freedom and Democracy) was tried before one of these courts in Hanoi in August. A dozen party cadres and police officers accused him of having incited peasants to demonstrate, before recommending that he be sent to a re-education camp to “remove him from society”. The trial was held in tandem with a press campaign against him in which he was accused of being an “unmasked political opportunist”.

A lawyer who represented several jailed dissidents, Nguyen Van Dai, was brought before one of these courts in the Bach Khoa area in February and accused of “betraying his country”. The “popular court” ruled that he should lose the right to work as a lawyer and his office should be closed.

The authorities went well beyond the recommendations of the people and in March, Nguyen Van Dai, who also runs the blog nguyenvandai.rsfblog.org, and another lawyer Le Thi Cong Nhan, were both arrested in Hanoi. After their arrests prompted criticism abroad, the security forces told their families not to speak publicly, particularly in foreign media. Both lawyers were sentenced in May to five and four years in jail respectively under Article 88 of the criminal code.

Other dissidents, a doctor, Le Nguyen Sang, journalist Huynh Nguyen Dao, and Nguyen Bac Truyen, all members of the banned People’s Democratic



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Party were also sent to prison, by a court in Ho Chi Minh-City. They were accused of publishing articles hostile to the regime on the Internet. Tran Quoc Hien, spokesman for the United Workers-Farmers Organization (illegal), was arrested in January for “propaganda against the regime” after posting numerous news items online about the plight of Vietnamese workers.

A FRENCH JOURNALIST DETAINED FOR “TERRORISM”

Vietnamese-born French national Nguyen Thi Thanh Van, an opposition journalist, was arrested and held in custody in Ho Chi Minh-City from 17 November to 12 December. After her release she had this to say about her ordeal, “Between four walls, I was distraught because I could not imagine how I was going to get out of this situation. There was no violence against me, but police officers interrogated me for one or two hours every day, except Sunday. They were trying to weaken me. It was a form of moral terror”. She had come to Vietnam to promote radio *Chan Troi Moi* (New Horizon), close to the opposition party Viet Tan, and to conduct interviews with dissidents.

This case demonstrated the open hostility of the authorities towards international radio stations that broadcast in Vietnamese. Four trade unionists were thrown in prison in December for having sent news to *Radio Free Asia* while the Vietnamese embassy on several occasions threatened journalists from *Radio France International* and denied visas to one of them.

A PRESS UNDER SUPERVISION

Liberal newspapers, such as *Tuoi Tre* (Youth) tried to push against the limits of official censorship but the government used repressive legislation to

bring the most daring to heel. A law passed in 2006 provides for fines and suspensions of licences for media and journalists who defame and attack the “prestige of the state”.

The official media, which comprises more than 100 radio and television stations, as many websites and nearly 600 publications did not in 2007 make use of the space for debate opened up ahead of the 2006 Communist Party Congress. On the contrary, the media, including the party newspaper and police newspapers campaigned against “agitators” and “terrorists” from inside and outside the country. Some foreign governments and international organisations like Reporters Without Borders were accused of supporting enemies of the regime.

VIETNAM MARKS TEN YEARS ON THE INTERNET

The country experienced its biggest crackdown since 2002 when, in the space of one week, six cyber-dissidents were sentenced to prison terms of three to five years. Since Vietnam became the 150th member of the World Trade Organisation, it has behaved very differently from the way it presented itself to the international community to get itself admitted. It is one of the world’s most authoritarian countries and closely follows the Chinese model when it comes to violations of freedom of expression online. Eight cyber-dissidents are in prison for having exercised freedom of expression on the Web.

Police and the culture ministry in September ordered the closure of the online newsletter *Intellasia.com* which is run by an Australian and specialises in financial news as well as posting political articles about Vietnam.