

# The fight goes on:

## Press freedom in South Asia 2006-2007



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This document has been produced by the IFJ on behalf of the South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSN).

Afghan Independent Journalists' Association  
 Committee to Protect Afghan Journalists, Kabul  
 Bangladesh Freedom Watch  
 Bangladesh Journalists' Rights Forum  
 Bangladesh Manobadhikar Sangbadik Forum (BMSF: Human Rights Journalists Forum of Bangladesh)  
 Media Watch, Bangladesh  
 All India Newspaper Employees' Federation  
 Indian Journalists' Union  
 National Union of Journalists, India  
 Federation of Nepalese Journalists  
 National Union of Journalists, Nepal  
 Nepal Press Union  
 Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists  
 Federation of Media Employees' Trade Unions  
 Free Media Movement  
 Sri Lanka Working Journalists' Association

## THE FIGHT GOES ON: PRESS FREEDOM CRISES IN SOUTH ASIA (2006-2007)

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**Design by:** Fahim Siddiqi  
**Printed by:** Impulsive Creations



**Cover Photo:** Protesters in Colombo, Sri Lanka, protest the death of freelance journalist Sampa Lakmal de Silva. Photo: Buddika Weerasingha.

Published by the IFJ Asia-Pacific. [www.ifj-asia.org](http://www.ifj-asia.org)  
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## FOREWORD

By Jacqueline Park, director, IFJ Asia-Pacific



After another tumultuous year in South Asia, it is clearer than ever that it takes extraordinary courage, dedication and commitment for journalists to tell the essential stories of our communities in the region.

South Asia continues to carry the distinction of being one of the most dangerous places for journalists to work in the world. Indeed, some parts are fast-becoming no-go areas for media staff. While media workers often face daily threats to their work and safety, those who threaten them are too often protected from prosecution by a culture of impunity and indifference.

Meanwhile, countries such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka face increasing adversity, which manifests in disturbing threats to the populations' basic human rights. In these countries, restrictive regulations stifle critical reporting and the ability of the media to hold governments accountable. And in Afghanistan, where hostilities are worsening, media workers are taken hostage and brutally murdered in the growing conflict.

But in the face of these tremendous hardships, what emerges is a resilient, defiant and vital group of men and women who fight against oppressive odds to report the news, to be critical of their country's major institutions, and most importantly to keep the population informed of the truth.

The fight certainly goes on, and there are many positive developments to celebrate from the past year. For example, on November 21, 2006, Nepal witnessed the signing of an historic peace accord between the government and the Communist Party of Nepal. This was a major step forward for Nepalese people, who have endured a decade of violence and rampant blights on freedom of expression.

This peace accord could not have taken place without the relentless campaign for democracy and press freedom waged by Nepal's journalists led by the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ). There is still much to be done in Nepal to strengthen the democratic space for media but their crusade to monitor and publicise attacks, and protect the security and rights of Nepalese media workers, has been an inspiration to journalists around the world.

Elsewhere in South Asia, conditions have worsened under the strain of war and conflict and oppressive measures by government in the name of the war on terror. In the current climate, media workers face great challenges not only to their

work, but also to their personal safety. As in previous years, journalists and other media workers continue to be targeted, harassed, assaulted, and murdered in the course of duty.

As journalists' safety deteriorates, the obligation and responsibility of government and media employers to support independent journalism and protect journalists grows. In the past 12 months the IFJ has been part of international press freedom missions to investigate and highlight the situations in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and the Maldives, where the world body of journalists has pressed this point with governments.

Whether it is the government quashing freedom via censorship and police arrests, the risk of lives lost in reporting conflict, or the personal attacks made on journalists and their families from activists, state agents and vigilante groups, dangers are everywhere.

But without those journalists who face such dangers in the course of their day-to-day work, vital stories would never be heard – an unthinkable loss to our communities.

This is why journalists around the world need to stand in solidarity to demand respect for the important work we do in sustaining democracy and bringing vital information to the public forum.

In South Asia journalists' voices are heard through the IFJ and the South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSAN), a coalition of journalists' unions and press freedom organisations in South Asia. SAMSAN is dedicated to building solidarity in the region, along with promoting a safer working environment and greater respect for the work of journalists.

To highlight and campaign for press freedom and journalists' safety the IFJ has worked with its affiliates and partners in SAMSAN to produce this report with the support of the following organisations:

### Afghanistan

Afghan Independent Journalists Association  
Committee to Protect Afghan Journalists, Kabul

### Bangladesh

Bangladesh Freedom Watch  
Bangladesh Journalists' Rights Forum  
Bangladesh Manobadhikar Sangbadik Forum (BMSF: Human Rights Journalists Forum of Bangladesh)  
Media Watch, Bangladesh

### India

All India Newspaper Employees' Federation  
Indian Journalists' Union  
National Union of Journalists, India

### Nepal

Federation of Nepalese Journalists  
National Union of Journalists, Nepal  
Nepal Press Union

### Pakistan

Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists

### Sri Lanka

Federation of Media Employees' Trade Unions  
Free Media Movement  
Sri Lanka Working Journalists' Association

## OVERVIEW

In 2006-2007 South Asia saw another year marked by press freedom violations and journalist abuse. It was another year overshadowed by political instability, state repression, poverty and inadequate health and social structures.

But it was also a year when the region's media continued its fight against corruption and the suffocation of freedom of expression, despite the oppressive threats and pressures that face journalists in South Asia.

In areas of political instability, the role of the media as an objective reporter - shining a spotlight on political process and social standards - is especially vital to achieving peace and functional democracy.

The following reports show that the South Asian media landscape is marred by repressive regimes, systematic intimidation and physical violence against journalists - protected by a culture of impunity from prosecution.

However, there have been several major changes in the region. Most notably Nepal's monarchy was ousted, and an historic peace accord was signed.

In 2006, King Gyanendra was forced to grudgingly acknowledge democracy after the monarchy's absolute power was toppled. This ended a decade-long insurgency that had claimed more than 13,000 innocent lives. The change brought welcome relief for the Nepalese media, whose press freedom was severely muzzled under the royal regime - a repression which was often administered brutally. After years of strict control and blatant abuses of freedom of expression, there is now a sense of hope that the Nepalese media can finally raise its voice to a nation crying out for truth and clarity.

Journalist safety deteriorated with Afghanistan's stability in 2006-2007, as the media suffered threats and violence from security forces as well as religious and terrorist groups. While media diversity received a boost, with 25 new media organisations licensed by the Information and Culture Ministry, freedom of the press is still limited. In June 2006 the

**Obstruction of free media and free speech was the overshadowing trend for South Asia's media in 2006. Governments' attitudes of using the press as their mouthpiece, restricting the media's freedom and obstructing the citizens' rights to know the truth should be stopped at all costs.**

Afghan parliament passed controversial new media regulations, allegedly in the 'national interest', which further restrict the media.

Attacks, intimidation, harassment and arrests of journalists continued at the hands of security forces. On May 7, 2006, Tolo TV cameraman Umid Yakmanish was beaten up by two parliament members in the general meeting room of the lower house, while recording a conflict between congressmen.

The dangers of conflict reporting in Afghanistan were gruesomely highlighted again when fixer Ajmal Naqshbandi was abducted and then beheaded by the Taliban on April 8, 2007. Naqshbandi who was working for Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, was captured along with his Italian colleague, journalist Daniele Mastrogiacomo, on March 5. Mastrogiacomo was released when President Karzai agreed to a controversial prisoner swap involving the release of five Taliban members.



**Damning report:** Protesting the escalating threat to Sri Lanka's media. Lakruwan Wanniarachi/AFP.

But the government refused to entertain further Taliban demands that could have saved their fellow countryman's life. In 2006, three journalists were killed in Afghanistan.

Sri Lanka too saw its media environment severely worsen in 2006-2007. Since 2006, Sri Lanka has experienced a general erosion of the due process of law, which leaves the safety and security of the country's journalists under increasing threat. In fear of their lives, journalists face intense pressure and threats in the course of duty, especially as intolerance and incitement to violence have become commonplace.

Restrictions on freedom of expression, unsafe working conditions for journalists, barriers on information access, and the pressure of transforming the media into a state-owned public service have all undermined the effectiveness of Sri Lanka's media.

The controversial *Prevention of Terrorism and Specified Terrorist Activities Regulations* laws pose a serious threat to the fundamental rights of the whole Sri Lankan population. The laws facilitate arrest and detention without charge, closures without reason, anti-terrorism and emergency regulations and extrajudicial arrests, and have become yet another platform to victimise journalists.

Particularly disturbing is the plight of Tamil journalists. From 2001 to July 2006, aside from a single Sinhala journalist, every journalist and media person murdered in Sri Lanka was a Tamil.



**Call for justice:** The South Asian Editors' Mission in October, 2006, called for action on journalist safety and investigation into media deaths.

The most recent case of victimisation of a Tamil journalist was Maunasamy Parameshwaree, a female freelance journalist working for the Sinhala weekly *Mawbima*. She was arrested by the Terrorist Investigations Unit on November 21, 2006 and detained for four months without charge.

In the **Maldives**, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom's longstanding regime continued to harass, intimidate, and arbitrarily arrest and imprison journalists, despite his claims of support for democratic reform and freedom of the press.

Despite the government exerting constant duress on pro-opposition media outlets, newspaper *Minivan Daily* and political magazines *Aduvas*, *Manas* and *Fiyes* continued to criticise the government. The *Minivan Daily* and its associated website and radio station have been a particular target of state-sponsored harassment. The Maldives Chief of Police allegedly sent an expletive-laden death threat to Ahmed Moosa (Sappe'), the editor of the pro-opposition tabloid website, *Dhivehi Observer*.

The Gayoom government has still not fulfilled its promises to overhaul the existing media laws, which it proposed in its 2005 political reforms scheme. Draft media reform legislation is reportedly broad, vague and could be used against journalists.

**Bhutan** still has no laws or regulations to protect such basic rights as press freedom, right to free speech, or citizens' right to know the truth. Government officials indirectly censor the news before it is published, broadcast or telecast. For instance,

most programs made for the government-owned radio and television stations, and news items prepared for the government mouthpiece newspaper, *Kuensel*, go through vigorous filtering processes by government officials.

But 2006 also saw the significant introduction of media privatisation in Bhutan. The government permitted the publication of two privately-owned weeklies and the operation of three FM stations. But at the same time, serious restrictions were imposed on foreign media, especially on TV channels; the government arguing that content aired by foreign channels could hamper Bhutan's 'unique cultural identity'.

According to the figures compiled by the IFJ, in 2006 **Pakistan** became the third most dangerous country in which to be a journalist. Repeated, often targeted, physical attacks against

journalists are the most frequent assault on press freedom, while the perpetrators go unpunished.

In one of the region's most disturbing trends, journalists' family members became targets of murder and violence in attempts to silence critical reports. And under President Pervez Musharraf, security forces stormed and ransacked media outlets.

An attack on the Geo TV news channel on March 16, 2007 was a direct show of power against the media, bringing the issue of safety out of the main conflict areas and literally into newsrooms. After President Musharraf suspended the country's Chief Justice for 'misuse of authority' in a widely

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condemned move, local TV channels were given covert 'gag orders' to curb reportage of the nationwide protests that broke out amongst the lawyer fraternity. Air beams were jammed for Aaj TV and Geo News TV, and popular news program, *Kamran Khan Key Saath* was ordered off the air.

When Geo TV continued its telecast of the Supreme Judicial Council hearing, and showed footage of lawyers being assaulted during their protest outside the court, a police contingent broke into their Islamabad offices swinging batons, smashing glass doors and threatening staff.

In **India** too, attacks on journalists have recently become more frequent than ever before. While at one time proprietors of media would be threatened, even jailed if they dared challenge the rulers, attacks on journalists have increased in severity to regularly become life-threatening.

Female journalists are the targets of molestation and rape, while mental torture and threats to job security have also become weapons in influencing media proprietors.

Journalists in north-east India face death threats, torture and abduction. Arun Narayan Dekate, a rural correspondent of Marathi daily *Tarun Bharat*, sustained injuries after he was attacked with stones on his way home. He was hospitalised but died on June 10 as a result of his injuries.

Another journalist was abducted on the same day and an attempt made on his life as well. Syed Shujaat Bukhari, Kashmir-based special correspondent for Indian national newspaper, *The Hindu*, was reportedly forced into an auto rickshaw by two armed men on his way home from work, and was later thrown from the vehicle and shot at. Bukhari survived after fleeing when his assailant's gun apparently jammed.

The **Bangladesh** government's four-party alliance, in power

since October 2006, has led ministers, members of parliament, local leaders and workers of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) to engage in media bashing and harassment of journalists, for reports of corruption and anomalies they had published.

Statistics show that the leaders and activists of the BNP-led four-party alliance were involved in at least 89 incidents of violence against journalists in 2006 alone. At least 462 journalists were reportedly attacked or harassed in 238 separate incidents. Among them, 247 were physically assaulted and 73 received death threats. Some 43 cases were filed in which at least 137 journalists were being sued.

The promulgation of the state of emergency in Bangladesh on January 11, 2007, resulted in severe media censorship. While according to media reports the President had no knowledge of a gag order made by his office, there was nevertheless a complete news blackout for nearly two days, as all television channels had to suspend broadcasting of their news following the order. The newspapers were also advised to treat news 'carefully'. However, after repeated communication between the editors, senior journalists and officials of the newly formed caretaker administration led by Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, the media was free to report factually, especially on political stories.

Obstruction of free media and free speech was the overshadowing trend for South Asia's media in 2006. Governments' attitudes of using the press as their mouthpiece, restricting the media's freedom and obstructing the citizens' rights to know the truth should be stopped at all costs. To achieve this end, it is imperative that media organisations in the region continue their struggle and present a united platform.



**Official Misinformation:** South Asian governments are enforcing a regime where journalists are blindly accepting 'their version' of the truth. Artwork by Chris Slane.

## AFGHANISTAN

### RETURNING REGIME OF DANGER AND REPRESSION

Afghanistan remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists to work. Over the last 12 months the further deterioration of journalists' safety and growing government interference has seen challenges arise in the media environment reminiscent of those faced under the Taliban.

Despite having a constitution with provisions for a free press and critical reporting, increased pressures have pushed the Afghan parliament to place new restrictions on the media. These controversial directives, issued in June 2006, include the banning or restricting of materials that contravene the "national interest", which many argue violates the constitutional rights of the media.



**Stop the inaction:** Journalists rally outside the Afghan Parliament for the release of Taliban-abducted fixer Ajmal Naqshbandi, March 28. The government refused to act and Naqshbandi was beheaded on April 8.

New threats and increased violence and kidnapping continue to intimidate and silence the media in Afghanistan.

Three journalists lost their lives in 2006, with another murdered in April 2007. Afghan journalist and fixer Ajmal Naqshbandi was beheaded by the Taliban on April 8, when the Afghan government refused to free a number of Taliban fighters in a prisoner exchange. Naqshbandi was kidnapped on March 5, with his Italian journalist co-worker Daniele Mastrogiacomio of Italian newspaper, *La Repubblica* and driver Sayed Agha. Agha was beheaded soon after the kidnapping, however Mastrogiacomio was released on March 19 in exchange for five Taliban prisoners. In a separate incident, an Italian photojournalist, Gabriele Torsello, was kidnapped on October 12, 2006, but was freed three weeks later. While in captivity, Torsello said he was kept in chains in a windowless room and never saw daylight.

#### Government harassment continues

More than five reporters - including Abdul Qudus, Hasanyar, Mahmadyar, Mutahar, and Tawab Niazi - were arrested by national security officers in 2006. It is reported that Qudus was in prison for more than 10 months.

Similarly, in 2007, a senior reporter of Al-Jazeera TV was

**Despite these obstacles, Afghanistan's media continues to grow and diversify. Since 2006, around 25 media organisations, including three newspapers, five magazines, seven FM radio channels and two television channels, have been licensed by the Information and Culture Ministry.**

arrested by the Afghan national army, then handed over to US forces and detained for a few hours. According to Waliullah Shaheen, a Kabul-based reporter for the broadcaster, he was arrested while videotaping a family in the Nejrab district of the Kapisa province, after a US bombing killed nine people in the village.

In 2006, the Afghan government issued new directives containing 35 articles regulating how journalists should cover issues relating to the government, national interest and Islam.

However, due to serious objections from the Mujahidin (former Afghan rebel fighters against Russia), the Afghan Independent Journalists' Association (AIJA), and other Afghan and international media organisations, the national security released a new draft with only 23 articles. However, the revised guidelines still contain provisions for direct censorship.

In more positive news, Abdul Qudoos, a reporter from Radio Sada-e-Sulh, was released from prison on January 31, 2007, after a court in the eastern province of Parwan dropped the charges of attempted murder, which had been brought against him by parliament member Samea Sadat. Qudoos, who spent nearly a year in custody, was released when Sadat was unable to produce any evidence.

#### Terrorist and religious threats against journalists

Religious orthodoxy has played a growing role in placing restrictions on press freedom in Afghanistan. Blasphemy laws still remain the greatest legal threat to freedom of expression in Afghanistan, and violence and intimidation are increasingly used to silence independent voices. On January 9, 2007, the Taliban sent letters to the AIJA local office in Nangrahar, accusing AIJA members of being spies working for the US and Europe.

In 2006, Taliban commander Mullah Dadullah, the most infamous and feared commander operating in the south, made regular public threats to media organisations warning that journalists would be killed if they continued to publish reports critical of the Taliban. Dadullah particularly targeted reporters working for western media companies.

On July 29, 2006, an armed group in the Paghman district of the Kabul Province harassed Tolo TV reporters as they were

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**Beheaded:** Sayed Agha, Afghan driver, was beheaded by the Taliban on March 5. Naqshbandi and Italian correspondent Daniele Mastrogiacomio were captured in the same ambush.

covering a local demonstration against an Islamic leader and member of parliament, Abdurab Rasol Saiaf. The reporter Noorullah Rahmani, cameraman Qais Ahmand, and their driver were beaten and their camera was confiscated.

### **Moving forward despite adversity**

Despite these obstacles, Afghanistan's media continues to grow and diversify. Since 2006, around 25 media organisations, including three newspapers, five magazines, seven FM radio channels and two television channels, have been licensed by the Information and Culture Ministry. However, due to financial difficulties, not all of these organisations have been able to commence operations.

The three daily newspapers granted a licence were the *Daily Afghanistan*, *Omide-Farda*, and the *Afghanistan Times*, an English-language publication. These dailies cover news, politics and social issues.

The licensed television stations are Lemar Television and Norin Television. Lemar commenced operations on August 16, and broadcasts social, political and entertainment news programs. Norin has yet to go to air but is expected to launch its programs shortly.

In 2007, the Centre for International Journalism (CIJ) - the first Afghan independent media training institution - was granted a licence by the Information and Culture Ministry. CIJ has now trained more than 1000 journalists in covering different rounds. CIJ has also trained journalists in radio, journalism ethics, civic journalism and training press officers for government and non-government organisations.

On March 28-29, 2007, the 'Media is Development: Afghanistan Media and Civil Society Forum', was organised by the Killed Media group, the Inter Press Service (IPS), CIJ, *Pajhwok Afghan News* and the SAYRA media organisation, in Kabul. Senior journalists, donor organisations, Afghan media organisations and regional researchers participated in this forum to discuss the past five years of media and civil society in Afghanistan. The forum examined challenges and problems faced by the Afghan media, and highlighted the achievements of journalists.

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## **BANGLADESH**

### **A STATE OF EMERGENCY FOR JOURNALISTS**

The state of emergency, declared in January this year, was followed by blanket media censorship and struck at the heart of press freedom in Bangladesh. Sparked by recurring turmoil between the two major political parties, the state of emergency was announced on January 11, with an army-backed caretaker administration and a presidential order to gag the media.

There was a complete news blackout for nearly two days, with all television channels ordered to suspend broadcasting. The newspapers were also advised to treat news 'carefully'.

However, following a series of meetings between editors, senior journalists and the officials of the newly formed caretaker administration, the ban was relaxed allowing the media to report factually, especially on political stories. Television channels went back on-air with news programs and the newspapers began to publish stories, albeit with some degree of censorship.

The Information Ministry is now encouraging the media to support the interim administration's cause. The unfortunate result is a kind of self-censorship, as media outlets curb their criticism of the present administration.

### **Government advice for journalists**

On April 17 the government took censorship a step further. Bangladesh media outlets received a letter requesting they resist publishing or broadcasting ill-motivated, harassing or misleading reports, particularly against government officials, businesses, professionals, intellectuals and politicians.

Signed by Iftekhar Hossain, principal information officer of the Press Information Department under the Ministry of Information, the letter states: 'The government hopes that the country's mass media will take greater care in publishing/broadcasting apolitical and substantial news, features, discussions, satirical sketches and cartoons, in order to maintain the positive role of the electronic and print media'.

The government requested the media to 'be more vigilant to ensure that the mass media do not provide any room for activities, propaganda or reports that are unnecessarily harassing or misinformative'. The letter comes in the wake of government concerns that 'dishonest and unprofessional' media coverage was 'creating confusion among the people'.

In the letter, the government offered the media dubious praise for 'carrying out the government's ongoing multifaceted reform programs'.

"Because of this positive role, the government is always proactive in maintaining the freedom of the electronic and print media in spite of the country being under a state of emergency," the letter said.

### **Shocking number of targeted journalists**

Prior to the caretaker administration, the media faced troubled times. The ministers, members of parliament, local leaders and workers of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) engaged in media-bashing and harassment of journalists when corruption and anomalies were uncovered by the press.

Statistics show that the leaders and activists of the BNP-led four-party alliance were involved in at least 89 incidents of violence against journalists in 2006 alone. At least 462 journalists reported being attacked or harassed in 238 separate



incidents. Among them, 247 were physically assaulted and 73 received death threats. Some 43 cases were filed in which at least 137 journalists were being sued. Additionally, journalists were verbally abused by the political stalwarts and their activists, repeating the trend of previous years. This continued until the neutral caretaker administration was handed power in October.

The highest number of physical assaults on journalists was recorded in May 2006. At least 106 journalists were either physically assaulted or harassed in only 23 separate incidents, and six journalists received death threats. In Kushtia a ruling BNP member of parliament, Shahidul Islam, sent his loyal armed cadres to attack a journalists' convention that was taking place near the Kushtia Press Club on May 29. Many senior journalists, who were invited from Dhaka to attend the program, including the former president of the Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and the *Bangladesh Observer* editor, Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, were injured in the attack.

On March 5, 2007, Jamal Uddin, correspondent for the news agency *ABAS* and the local daily *Dainik Giri Darpan*, went missing from his home in Kathaltala. The next day, his body was found near the Rangamati Lake. A part of his face was damaged and other parts of his body were found to have been scratched. A rope was also tied around his neck. The post-mortem report, released 12 days after the body was found, concluded that Uddin probably committed suicide. His colleagues and relatives however, have rejected this finding, saying it was based on circumstantial evidence, and that Uddin had no suicidal tendencies. Police claimed that they found an audio cassette on Uddin's body, where he recorded a suicide note. However, police refused to allow his colleagues to listen to the audio. One suspect has reportedly been arrested.

### Media Owners and Journalists Jailed, Accused and Attacked

During the anti-corruption drive of the caretaker government, the joint forces have arrested a number of media owners. They face a variety of charges including promoting criminals, money laundering, abuse of authority and extortion. Those detained include the owner of television channels NTV and RTV and Bengali language newspaper *Amar Desh*, Mosaddek Ali Falu (who also happens to a politician of the BNP), Enayetur Rahman Bappi, managing director of NTV, and Mahammad Abdus Selim, chairperson of Channel 1.

In the print media, persons arrested include Nurul Islam Babul, owner of the Bengali daily *Dainik Jugantor*, and Atiqullah Khan Masud, editor and publisher of *Dainik Janakantha*. Masud



**Burning for independence:** Four people died when fire almost destroyed a building housing NTV, RTV and daily newspaper *Dainik Amar Desh* on February 26. Farjana K Godhuly/AFP.

was detained at his office by joint forces, at about 10.30pm on March 8. Staff were not allowed to enter or leave until Masud was taken. He was not informed of the reason for his arrest but the officer said it was an order of a higher authority. Although a Dhaka court approved Masud's one-month detention from March 13, the High Court ordered the government to show cause as to why Masud's detention would not be considered illegal. Government press releases state that Masud was detained for running the newspaper on foreign funds and publishing propaganda to tarnish the image of the government. He was also accused of occupying land illegally in the name of housing businesses.

Masud also faces a number of defamation charges, including a case filed by a lawyer from the BNP, and his reporter

Shangkar Kumar Dey, for running a 'defamatory' news item about the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) on December 5. Barrister Omar Sadat, the son-in-law of former minister and BNP leader Shajahan Siraj, also filed a similar case which argued the accused published a story headlined 'RAB shows its true colours at Hawa Bhaban's directives,' which tarnished the public image of RAB. Metropolitan magistrate Syed Mohammad Muzibul Haq, has ordered a judicial inquiry into the matter.

**Journalists are facing less intimidation and harassment, as the government focuses on its anti-corruption drive against high-profile politicians.**

**Cleaning up state institutions and increasing accountability would go a long way to establishing a more journalist-friendly environment, and limit the scope for media harassment.**

On February 26 the 12-storey building which houses private television channels NTV and RTV, and national daily newspaper *Dainik Amar Desh*, almost completely burnt down when it was set alight. Four people died, including a woman, and many others were seriously injured. Whether it was an act of sabotage or an accident remains unclear. The television channels' broadcast had to be suspended after the fire damaged all its equipment, control rooms and studios. *Dainik Amar Desh* continues to publish from a different location. NTV has resumed a test transmission for a couple of hours daily, however it is still uncertain as to when both channels will return to air full-time.

### **The Fourth Estate in Uncertain Times**

The detention of top media owners sparked job security concerns among Bangladeshi journalists. With no sign of their release in the immediate future, organisations face ever tighter operating constraints.

Despite regular pressure on the media, there have been slight positive developments, as demonstrated with the Ekushey Television (ETV). ETV returned to air from March, 2007, following a High Court verdict, although its future is still uncertain following an appeal made by the government on April 18, to stop its transmission setup. The case is currently being heard before the High Court. ETV was earlier shutdown in 2002.

Journalists are facing less intimidation and harassment, as the government focuses on its anti-corruption drive against high-profile politicians. Cleaning up state institutions and increasing accountability would go a long way to establishing a more

**The highest number of physical assaults on journalists was recorded in May, 2006. At least 106 journalists were either physically assaulted or harassed in only 23 separate incidents, and six journalists received death threats.**

journalist-friendly environment, and limit the scope for media harassment. The current government must make a strong commitment to this goal.

The interim administration has sought to involve the media in its fight against corruption and other social injustices. There are regular briefings from the office of the Chief Adviser, and

**Staged suicide?:** 25-year-old Jamal Uddin was found dead, with rope around his neck and a broken neck. His family denies the suicide verdict of his post-mortem.



other advisers are also readily available to talk to the media. A number of them acknowledge the crucial role the media is playing at this juncture of the nation's history. Some commentators have dubbed the media a 'parliament', representing people in the absence of a political government.

In this situation where critical reports of the interim administration are very rare, however, Bangladesh's media is still censored and falls short of its duty as the Fourth Estate.

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## BHUTAN DEMOCRATISATION AND MEDIA

The most significant change in Bhutan's government-controlled media landscape has been the government's 2006 decision to allow the creation of privately-owned media. However, while the government permitted the publication of two privately run weekly newspapers and the operation of three FM stations, there are still serious restrictions imposed on foreign media, especially television channels. The

government argues that foreign content could hamper the 'unique cultural identity' of the country.

The two landmark privately-owned weeklies are the *Bhutan Times* and *Bhutan Observer*.

The *Bhutan Times* began publication on April 27, 2006 from Thimphu. It is the first private newspaper published in the country with permission from the government. The weekly is owned by Bhutan Media Services, which runs businesses in the publishing and printing sector. Tashi Phuetscho

edits the 16-page colourful tabloid and Tenzing Rigden heads its operation, although its first edition had 32 pages carrying an elongated write-up by the then Crown Prince on 'important national issues and on the future of the nation as a multi-party democracy'.

Another weekly began publishing on June 2, celebrating the enthronement anniversary of King Jigme Singye Wangchuk. The *Bhutan Observer*, owned by KMT printing press, is published from the southern town of Phuentsholing, also called the 'Gateway to Bhutan', and the 14-page tabloid focuses on rural life and poverty.

The *Bhutan Times* is published in English while the *Bhutan Observer* publishes in two languages: Dzongkha and English. However, by the beginning of 2007, the Dzongkha edition of the *Bhutan Observer* was already facing serious financial problems due to lack of advertising. Management has warned they may have to halt the publication of the Dzongkha edition; however, an official decision has not yet been made. This would have negative implications on the *Bhutan Times'* plans to start a Dzongkha edition later this year.

The government has also issued licenses to three companies to run FM radio stations. Kuzoo FM went to air on September 28 and is run by the Kuzoon society. The station broadcasts music and informative programs targeting young people. The other is Radio Valley FM, which launched on April 12, 2007. It covers the capital, Thimphu valley, and its surrounding areas, airing programs in English and Dzongkha. The third station is yet to start operation.

There is only one television station in Bhutan and it is owned by the government. However, a company is reported to have started working on a project to launch a private television station, but is yet to receive a license to operate.

### Legal provisions and media freedom

Article 7 of Bhutan's draft constitution, which is expected to be adopted in 2008, has provisions for the protection of fundamental rights, including the right to information and freedom of expression. For instance, in sub Article 7(4) it states that, 'There shall be freedom of press, radio and television and other forms dissemination of information, including electronic'.

Nevertheless, the draft constitution as a complete document does not adequately incorporate the principles of press freedom, freedom of speech, and freedom of expression by citizens and residents.

There are a number of clauses included in the constitution that completely restrict these freedoms.

For instance, Article 6(3)(e) of the constitution uses vague provisions to curtail freedom of speech, such as the termination of citizenship if found 'speaking against the king, country and people'.

Similarly, Article 7(21)(e) states that the government can impose legal restrictions on 'the disclosure of information received in regard to the affairs of the State or in discharge of official duties'.

The draft constitution also has objectionable provisions under the Emergency section, which basically gives the government absolute power to suspend not only the rights of the media, but the rights enjoyed by all citizens.

Additionally, the constitution does not protect the licenses of publications, radio or television stations from cancellation. When given emergency powers, the government has the authority to suspend or cancel these licenses, forcing temporary or permanent closures of any media bodies.

Because the law does not protect media houses from censorship, the government may cite the aforementioned articles, such as speaking against the country and the people, in order to impose censorship on the publication or broadcast of certain news.

### Media policies and legislations

The rigid and strict restrictions on access to media have recently been made more flexible, following a 2003 research



**Voice of independence:** Kuzoo FM, launched in September, is Bhutan's first private radio station.



**Sounds of change:** In 2006 Bhutan's government-controlled media stretched to include two privately-owned newspapers and three private radio stations.

committee report on the importance and impact of media. As per the recommendations made, the government unveiled the *Media Act* and media policies in 2006.

“Enhanced access to information and knowledge is rapidly becoming a potent tool for individuals and communities everywhere in their quest for new opportunities, for dignity and for a better life,” the government’s Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) policy reads.

The policy holds that because of its diverse and pervasive impact, information and media are integral to socio-cultural change; shaping and transforming values, lifestyles, and national economies as well as socio-political systems.

Thus, the Bhutan government recognised the positive role that the media could play in promoting good governance through efficiency, accountability and transparency, towards attainment of the overall goals of ‘Gross National Happiness’, the philosophy propounded by King Jigme Singey Wangchuk with the support of current home minister Jigme Y Thinley.

The government’s strategy for media development explained that, ‘Upholding the universal rights of citizens to information, freedom of opinion and expression, and independence of the media ... has the mandate to connect, inform, educate and entertain’.

However, the *Media Act 2006*, which came into effect from July 5, does not state that journalists will be consulted in the formulation of any laws, by-laws or regulations related to press freedom or media bodies. Article 13(3) empowers the Information Minister to refuse to disclose any information if he or she ‘assumes’ the disclosure would have a negative impact on the national interest. Similarly, Article 14(1) contains emergency provisions which give the minister power to take over control and management of the media for a limited period. Article 15 sufficiently empowers the government to impose unlimited censorship on media contents.

Additionally, the Act does not guarantee the job security of journalists, nor does it include provisions to ensure better working conditions for journalists.

### Existence of foreign media

Indian and other foreign newspapers are available in the market but distribution is limited to Paro, Thimphu and Phuentsholing cities. Bhutan’s low literacy rate, however, means that print media is not relevant to the majority of the population. Oral tradition is very strong and radio broadcasts are widely popular.

In the past foreign media organisations were not allowed to have correspondents in Bhutan, but by the end of last year the situation had changed. International media agencies, such as Indo Asian News Service (IANS) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), have produced frequent reports on Bhutanese events. Visits by foreign journalists have also increased.

However, the government still restricts the transmission of some foreign television channels. News channels such as Aajtak, CNN-IBN, Fashion TV, MTV and some Indian channels have been among those censored. The government argues that the broadcast of these channels could have an eroding effect on Bhutanese culture.

### Bhutanese media in exile

In contrast, the exiled Bhutanese media have thrived. After the April 2007 uprising in Nepal, which led to a more open public environment, Bhutanese refugees based in Nepal have expanded their involvement in the media sector.

Newspapers like *The Bhutan Reporter*, *The Child Creation* (monthly) and *Naulo Aawaj* (weekly) continue to be published from Kathmandu and Jhapa, in eastern Nepal. Hard copies of *The Bhutan Reporter* are distributed across all refugee camps in eastern Nepal, as well as diplomatic missions, UN agencies, NGOs and government offices in Kathmandu.

In 2006, the Association of Press Freedom Activists (APFA-Bhutan) began its online news website *apfanews.com*. From February 2007, APFA has also started a weekly radio program in co-operation with *Nepal FM 91.8* in Kathmandu. The APFA has been working to relay the radio program from two FM stations in eastern Nepal, the Jhapa and Ilam districts. Its aim is that the transmission would reach the refugee community as well as half of western Bhutan.

This would increase public awareness of the importance of media, and at the same time safeguard the right to information of the people of Bhutan. APFA is also working on making the radio program available online so that people from all around the world can tune in.

### Media organisations

In 2006, the Third World Media Network, with its headquarters in Bangladesh, recognised the formation of its Bhutan chapter. It was established in September 16, 2006, to expand the relationship between the Bhutanese media with the international media bodies.

However, there are still no reports of the formation of any media organisations inside Bhutan.

■ Report by IP Adhikari Association of Press Freedom Activists (APFA) – Bhutan, Kathmandu, Nepal (in exile).  
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## INDIA

### THE SURGE IN CROSS-MEDIA OWNERSHIP

The year under review saw all-round growth in the Indian media. The National Readership Study (NRS) for 2006, which released its findings in August 2006, reported an increase of 12.6 million, or 6.6 per cent in the readership of daily newspapers over the preceding year. The total figure of newspaper readership now stands at 203.6 million, or 20 per cent of the population above the age of 12.

Some evidence of growing concentration is available, particularly in the market for Indian language dailies, whereas the pace is slightly slower in the English language media. The top three English language dailies together accounted for 6.6 per cent of aggregate daily newspaper readership in 1999, their share now stands at over 7.5 per cent. The fastest growing

segment of the print media is found in the Hindi language and here the pace of concentration has been faster: for instance the top two dailies' share of total newspaper readership has risen to 20.7 per cent in 2006, from 12.26 per cent in 1999.

There is increasing evidence of cross-media concentration. Developments include the acquisition of the Tamil daily *Dinakaran* by the Chennai-based Sun TV network towards the end of 2005, and Bennett Coleman and Company, publishers of *The Times of India*, beginning a 24-hour English news channel, on top of its entertainment and lifestyle channels.

Most recently in February, 2006, India saw the launch in the Delhi market of *Metro Now*, a joint venture between Bennett Coleman and HT Media, publishers of *The Hindustan Times*. The

two newspapers, respectively the first and third ranked among English dailies, had fought a bitter price war beginning in the mid-1990s, before concluding a truce in 2005 under which subscription and advertisement rates were raised in concert. The new partnership between the two print media enterprises needs to be examined from a public interest point of view, particularly in relation to its implications for competition and diversity in the media.

#### Broadcast regulation proposed

The year under review saw an attempt by the Indian government to bring in a law for governance of the broadcast sector. The draft Bill, the *Broadcast Services Regulation Bill* (BSRB) was introduced for public debate in September 2006. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) has since indicated that it intends to bring a revised and updated Bill before Parliament soon.

The BSRB drew considerable adverse notice in the media for the powers of supervision and seizure that it conferred upon the public authorities. It also reserved the power for the government to order, in specific cases, that business groups with interests in different sectors of the media, divest themselves of controlling stakes in one or more of these.

Public interest advocates were concerned that powerful media groups would unite to defeat the law on account of these provisions. They also found the draft legislation lacking in giving operational content to the finding by the Indian Supreme Court that the airwaves are neither a government monopoly nor a corporate resource, but the property of the public.

Earlier drafts of the Bill had spoken of restricting cross-media ownership, among other things, by limiting the ownership and control of broadcasting companies by newspaper proprietors and vice versa. Religious bodies, political organisations and advertising agencies were among the various entities that were prohibited from owning and operating broadcast stations.

The draft Bill circulated in 2006 had only a few vague restrictions on cross-media ownership and laid down few criteria for eligibility. But with no



**Held back by police:** Indian police restrict journalists at the entrance of the Terrorist & Disruptive Activities building. Indranil Mukherjee/AFP



**Dangers on the job:** Few female journalists report in India's troubled regions due to lack of security, restricted mobility, and harassment and discrimination in the workplace. Artwork by Simon Schneider.

specified applicable laws, thinly disguised front organisations of political parties and religious bodies have already established themselves in the broadcast sector.

### Community radio policy announced

Early in December, the MIB announced detailed policy guidelines on community radio services (CRS). This was a long-delayed correction for the unduly restrictive policy introduced in December 2002, which reserved community radio for 'well established education institutions'. Even so, the policy as it stands now is rife with clauses requiring CRS applicants to meet a number of stringent requirements. In the case of aspirants other than publicly funded and managed educational institutions, sanction for entering the CRS domain would be subject to clearance from the Home Affairs Ministry and the Defence Ministry, not to mention the allocation of a radio

**Women are severely under-represented in India's troubled regions, particularly those who report in the field. Respondents point to the lack of security in conflict-ridden states, restricted mobility and 'the threat from within' – harassment and discrimination in the workplace.**

frequency by another ministry.

Programs broadcast over the community radio are enjoined to serve a 'specific well-defined local community' and to be relevant to the 'educational, developmental, social and cultural needs' of the community. Broadcasts that relate to 'news and current affairs and are otherwise political in nature' are specifically proscribed. Sponsored programs would not be permitted except where the sponsor is an arm of the government. Advertisements and public announcements that yield revenue would be permitted to the limit of five minutes in an hour's broadcast.

This regime of policy may be compared with that prevalent in the realm of private radio broadcasting. Early in 2006, the government carried out a round of auctions of FM radio frequencies for private broadcasters. The vast majority was granted to companies or entities that were already strongly established in other sectors of the media. Entertainment Networks, a company owned by the Times of India Group,

which happens to be the largest enterprise in the print media, won 25 FM radio broadcast circles, to add to the seven that it already owned under its brand name, Radio Mirchi. South Asia FM, a company controlled by Sun TV, won no fewer than 23 FM circles in the northern part of the country. This is separate to the 18 it won in the south through its affiliate company, Kal Radio.

Apart from this, newspaper groups were granted broadcast licences in precisely those regions where they were most strongly established. Illustratively, the Rajasthan Patrika group, a significant player in the newspaper space in Rajasthan state, was awarded four FM circles in the state, while Malayala Manorama and Matrubbhumi, the two largest newspaper groups in Kerala, were awarded four each in their home state, and the Mid-day group of Mumbai was given six circles, all of them in highly lucrative metropolitan cities. HT Media and Entertainment, with its significant print media presence in Delhi and Mumbai, was awarded radio licences in both these cities, as well as the two metropolitan centres of Kolkata and Bangalore.

### Harassment and intimidation

A vaguely defined 'program code' continues to be applied by the government, though erratically and inconsistently. FTV, a satellite channel that provides coverage of global fashion events, was ordered off the air in April 2007 for ostensibly telecasting 'obscene' content that violated the code. A few days later, a business channel was ordered to cease telecast because it had carried the advertisement for a liquor brand.

Early in March 2006, BV Seetaram, the editor of an evening newspaper in the city of Mangalore in Karnataka state, was arrested by local police for supposedly causing injury to religious sentiments. His arrest led to considerable public outrage. Though he was successful in obtaining bail from the local courts, he has not managed to secure a judicial injunction to prevent further harassment by the authorities.

Working conditions for journalists continued to remain indifferent through the year. The pervasive spread of the contract system of employment has created a psychosis of insecurity. And following the large scale layoffs that HT Media resorted to, following its decision to go public and seek listing on the stockmarkets, professional opportunities for senior and middle-level journalists have shrunk.

Journalist unions have campaigned during the year for the establishment of a new Wage Board, following the expiry of the term of the previous wage settlement. Though the demand has been conceded in principle, there has been little forward movement since.

### Journalism in conflict zones: the experience in India

Though guaranteed a reasonable degree of freedom under the law, India's media does come under pressure. Particularly in conflict zones, pressure is exerted from various quarters such as: laws governing national security, and, often more violently, from security forces and armed insurgent groups in conflict areas such as Kashmir, the north eastern region of India and states impacted by Maoist groups and right-wing groups all over the country.

Between September, 2006 and January, 2007, the IFJ conducted four missions to volatile regions in India: Assam, Manipur, Kashmir and Chattisgarh. Roundtable meetings were held with local journalists in each area, to discuss press freedom issues and possible solutions. Attendees were drawn

from different media houses and associations; and also different media (print, broadcast and radio). A special effort was made to reach out to the regional language press in these areas.

These discussions uncovered a number of emerging issues, and gave rise to five key needs to tackle, going forward.

Journalists from the four regions all described the tense, high pressure climate in which they must work. Those from Assam, where 16 journalists have been killed between 1991 and 2006, said they faced 'threats from all sides' – from politicians, militants and security forces. Journalists in Manipur, where there are 20 armed insurgent groups for a population of two million, also find themselves caught in the middle when there is conflict between groups. Respondents from Kashmir felt more pressure from the security forces than militants, in what they call "state terrorism". Kashmir journalists face institutionalised intimidation, such as passport renewal dependent on compliant behaviour, humiliating monitoring by the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and censorship. Meanwhile, in Chattisgarh, journalists described pressure to take sides or 'compromise' their reporting in the polarised climate of pro and anti-Maoists. So-called 'Special Police Officers' (SPOs), essentially armed civilians had become a law unto themselves. A common method of intimidation was to beat up villagers in front of journalists, as a warning of possible reprisal if certain lines were crossed.

Journalists negotiate many dangers in their working environment, both overt and hidden. As well as negotiating pressures from police, paramilitary, armed insurgents and Maoist groups, journalists in Assam and Chattisgarh are often literally in the crossfire of warfare, bomb blasts and land mines. Since the beginning of the insurgency, thousands of people have disappeared in Kashmir, and many stories are suffocated by censorship and withholding of official information. Self-censorship is also common in Kashmir; as one participant said, 'No story is worth your life'.

In Assam and Chattisgarh in particular, participants said inaction by authorities contributed to a climate of impunity, where attacks and even the murder of journalists, are rarely prosecuted. Of the 16 journalists killed in Assam, there has been only one inquiry. Affected journalists and their families are also reluctant to pursue criminal cases for fear of further harassment.

Intimidation and threats aren't the only way India's press is muzzled. There have been incidents of direct intervention in the distribution of newspapers, and cable operators have been pressured into stopping the telecast of critical programs. There is also a trend of registering false court cases against journalists as a method of harassment. The *Chattisgarh Special Public Security Act 2005* prohibits the media from reporting activities that can be termed 'unlawful' and places several other restrictions on the media. Official sources are often reluctant to talk about anything controversial, while government PR departments issue handouts which many publications run verbatim as legitimate news.

Participants felt that job insecurity impacts directly on press freedom and quality of journalism. Working conditions are often precarious, and in some regions the supposedly statutory wage board awards are no more than a distant dream as most journalists are very poorly paid. There is also the constant fear of being fired if one's reporting offends the editor or owner.

Unregulated growth of the media industry and poor pay and conditions has resulted in many poorly skilled, so-called

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'journalists' resorting to unethical practices and giving the profession a bad name.

Many publications survive mostly on government advertisements and notices, which gives the government more power to exert pressure on editorial content.

Women are severely under-represented in India's troubled regions, particularly those who report in the field. Respondents point to the lack of security in conflict-ridden states, restricted mobility and 'the threat from within' – harassment and discrimination in the workplace.

Assam and Chattisgarh participants mentioned that the polarised political atmosphere in the state tended to be reflected in the journalist community too. The experience was similar in Kashmir, to the point that there is much suspicion and distrust of colleagues. There is no unifying journalist organisation in some of the states, and participants from all regions stressed the importance of building relationships between rural and metropolitan media organisations to support more isolated outlets.

Having heard the concerns of journalists from India's conflict areas, the IFJ has identified five key needs to be addressed.

First, the journalists must be trained to monitor violations of press freedom and journalists' rights. Then systems should be set up to communicate and highlight such violations through alerts.

Journalists in conflict areas must be provided with safety training followed up with professional skill development workshops on topics such as conflict reporting and gender sensitive reporting. Finally, there should be training in union/association building skills, to help media workers present a stronger, united front and assert their rights to report objectively, free from pressure and harassment.

■ **Report by Sukumar Muralidharan, South Asia Program Manager, International Federation of Journalists, M.L.Talwar, Treasurer, All India Newspaper Employees Federation, Asim Kumar Mitra, Former Secretary General, National Union of Journalists India (NUJI). Emails: [sukumar.md@gmail.com](mailto:sukumar.md@gmail.com); [talwarm1@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:talwarm1@yahoo.co.uk); [nujindia@vsnl.com](mailto:nujindia@vsnl.com)**

## MALDIVES

### OLD GOVERNMENT, NEWER GAGS

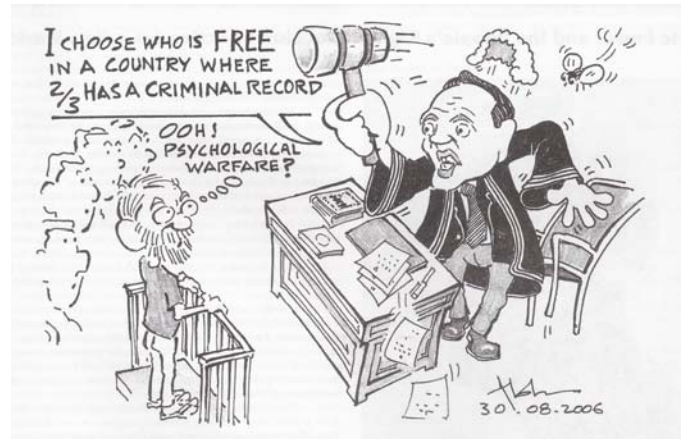
In the past twelve months, Maldivian President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom's 28-year regime has continued to harass, intimidate, and arbitrarily arrest and imprison journalists, despite his claims to support democratic reform and freedom of the press.

The government has particularly targeted media outlets critical of the regime. According to an international delegation of press freedom NGOs, including the IFJ, which undertook a fact-finding mission to the Maldives in May 2006, the state has made a 'concerted effort to target' the *Minivan Daily* newspaper, the only pro-opposition daily in the Maldives. Journalists working for its sister outlet Minivan Radio, still officially banned in the country, have also faced state-sponsored harassment and persecution, as have reporters for the *MinivanNews.com* website.

Maldivian chief of police, Adam Zahir, was officially cautioned in September 2006 by British police for sending an expletive-laden death threat to Ahmed Moosa (Sappe), the editor of the pro-opposition *Dhivehi Observer* tabloid website. There are no reports of journalists working for pro-government media outlets facing similar harassment.

Legislatively, the Gayoom government has also failed to make good on its promises to overhaul draconian media laws, despite commanding a large majority in parliament. What legislation the government has proposed – billed in the President's March 2006 'Roadmap to Reform' as a 'package of press freedom legislation' – has been criticised by international media and press freedom organisations.

The international mission found the proposed draft Bill on press freedom failed to meet international standards, and the restrictions on freedom of expression were too broadly and vaguely worded and therefore could easily be abused for political purposes. The draft Bill proposed a number of media



**No laughing matter:** Cartoonist Ahmed Abbas was sentenced to six months in jail for remarks made about Star Force police in an August 2005 article. Artwork by Ahmed Abbas. Courtesy of *Dhivehi Observer*.

crimes and failed to provide sufficient protective measures for freedom of the media.

The Minister for Information, Mohamed Nasheed, who drafted the proposed laws, dismissed criticisms, claiming the circulated Bills were 'poorly translated'. At the time of this report's publication, the Minister is by-passing parliament altogether and introducing private contracts for administrators of radio stations who wish to broadcast on five new frequencies made available by the government. A radio station that is awarded a broadcast license will have to sign a contract that mirrors the much-maligned Broadcast Bill.

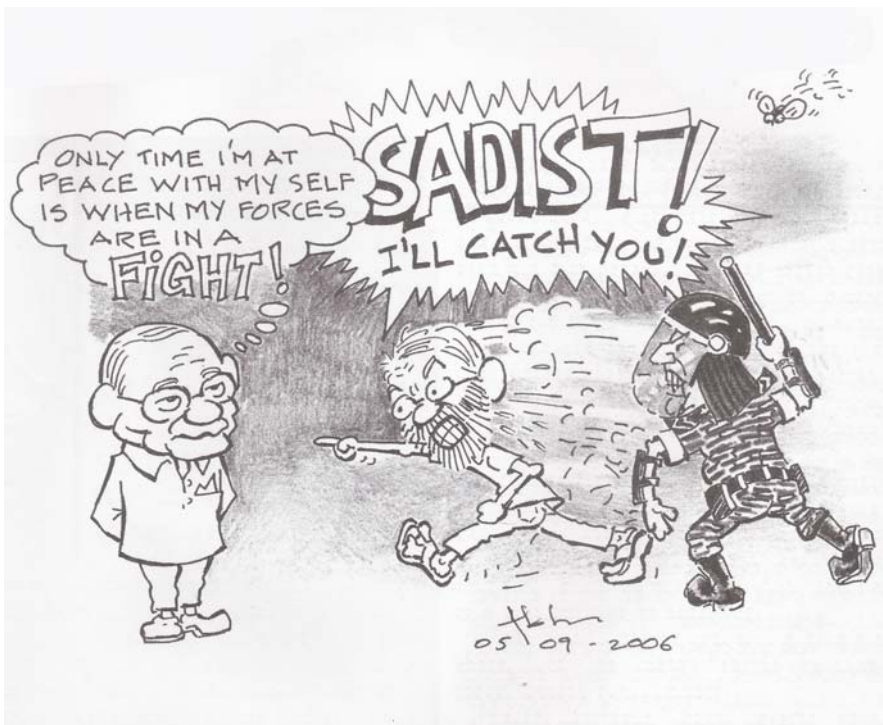
The new contract includes a ban on broadcasting anything that could be construed by the information minister as 'bringing disrepute to a certain sex or age group', 'bringing confusion to a person or party', 'denigrating the dignity and rights of children', or 'material that may suggest the promotion of a certain side in an election campaign'.

### Ongoing Harassment of Opposition Journalists

The U.S. State Department's 2006 Country Report on Human Rights for Maldives reads like a dossier of abuses against working journalists. It also cites cases where foreign correspondents were harassed inside the country.

One of the incidents in the report states; "On November 4, police brought Phillip Wellman, a foreign national accredited to *MinivanNews.com*, and a freelance British journalist affiliated with *The Observer* to a police station for questioning and requested they delete audio files and photos. The two refused and were released without charge after four hours. Subsequently, the two were asked to leave the country; they were held at the airport over night before being permitted to board flights the following morning.

"The government issued a press release claiming they were not genuine journalists accredited to 'reputable news





organisations,' and accusing them of attempting to destabilise society. Both reporters denied those charges. One had a valid work permit issued by the government and *Minivan*, his employing organisation in the country."

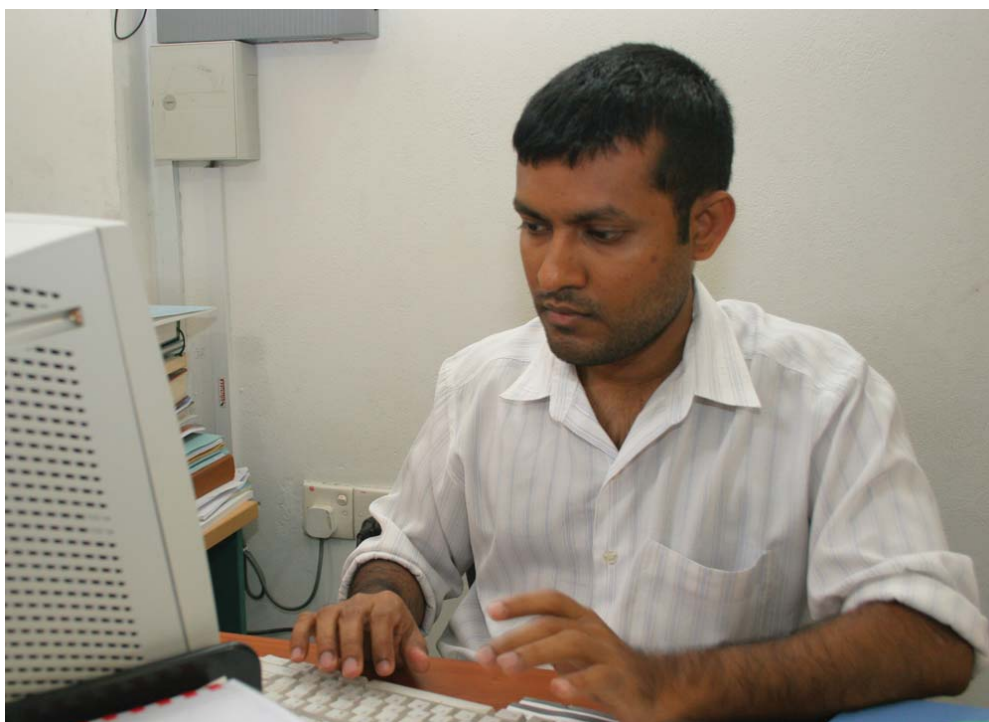
The government spokesperson, Mohamed Shareef, told reporters at the time that both journalists would be free to return to the Maldives 'after a period of two weeks'. When Wellman returned to the Maldives in January 2007, however, he was summoned to the Department of Immigration and told to leave the country or face deportation. When questioned by *MinivanNews.com* about Wellman's deportation, the controller of immigration, Ibrahim Shafiu, who is also the co-ordinator of President Gayoom's Dhivehi Rayyethunge Party, said 'I do not care whether we are attacking the press and journalism...he is a foreigner and he is not welcome here'.

Throughout the year a number of female journalists working with opposition media outlets were subjected to defamatory smear campaigns by pro-government websites. Articles published by these websites featured sexual allegations and personal photos of perceived pro-opposition women. Some of these websites included the women's mobile phone numbers and e-mail addresses along with their photos. The women reported receiving numerous harassing communications as a result. Although the government jams the *Dhivehi Observer*, which also spreads malicious, personal information about women in government, the state has taken no steps to block pro-government websites.

In the most recent government attack against opposition media outlets, on April 13, 2007, unidentified assailants hacked into the *MinivanNews.com* website. The front page of the website was altered to display a picture of President Gayoom with the banner 'Our Nation, Our Culture', and the quote 'our strength is our unity, don't let anyone break it. Protect this country from those people who are trying to corrupt it'.

### Widening space for dissent

However, despite the best efforts of many within the government to muzzle the press, the space for freedom of expression and dissent widened in 2006. In the face of constant



Disobedience to order: *Minivan Daily* sub-editor Nazim Sattar faces trial over an article.

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duress, the *Minivan Daily* managed to continue publishing, as did a plethora of weekly political magazines that are deeply critical of the political establishment, such as *Adduvas*, *Manas* and *Fiyes*.

A number of government ministers and officials have also displayed a greater willingness to engage with media that is independent of the state. Foreign Minister Shaheed, Attorney General Saeed, Tourism Minister Shougee, Deputy Gender Minister Aneesa, Spokesperson Shareef and Ambassador Sobir all gave interviews to *MinivanNews.com* – a website boycotted by the government in 2005.

■ Report by Paul Roberts, Managing Editor, *MinivanNews.com*. Email: [paulroberts79@gmail.com](mailto:paulroberts79@gmail.com)



**Dragged by her hair:** Fathimath Shaheeda, *Minivan Radio* editor, claimed police punched her in the face and dragged her by her hair at an August 2006 protest.

## NEPAL

### CHALLENGES FOR THE MEDIA IN A NEW DEMOCRACY

Nepal marked some landmark chapters in its modern political history in 2006. The year began under the restrictive rule of the royal regime, imposed in a coup in February 2005, but concluded with the formal end to the decade-long insurgency that had claimed over 13,000 lives.

After mass protests and revolutions in April, Nepalese King Gyanendra was forced to reinstate the kingdom's dissolved parliament and end the 14-year rule by the autocratic monarchy. Then on November 21, Nepal witnessed the signing of an historic peace accord between the government and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) which brought an end to 10 years of bloodshed.

The restoration of democracy to Nepal was a welcome reprieve for the Nepalese media, who had faced serious challenges after the royal coup.

Intimidation, harassment, planned and systematic attacks and the detention of media professionals were part of daily life under the royal regime. But efforts have now been made to rebuild and restructure the Nepalese media, following the restoration of democracy. To this effect, the government has nullified all anti-media ordinances and policies implemented by the erstwhile royal rulers.

On May 26, 2006, the government formed a task force to ensure effective implementation of the *Working Journalist Act 2051*. They scrapped the controversial one-door advertisement policy on June 2, 2006, which had effectively been an economic blockade on independent media, and established a team to draft the Right to Information Bill and Right to Privacy Bill. The Right to Information Bill was later tabled in the House of Representatives.

On December 16, an interim constitution was promulgated which expressed a commitment to media freedoms. The interim constitution also guarantees fundamental rights, including freedom of the press.

Despite the restoration of democracy and these positive developments, a safe and open environment for journalists in Nepal is by no means guaranteed. Violations of media rights continue even today, only the nature of attacks has changed. Nepalese journalists are still facing threats and attacks from Maoists, various groups and political parties, and recent violence indicates that journalists' safety and their ability to report freely is under continued threat.

#### Media situation during the transitional period

This period of political transition has been difficult for Nepal and for journalists in particular, as various incidents have undermined both the peace situation and the country's

**Enforcing the Right to Information Act and Working Journalists' Act is a major issue that needs to be addressed in Nepal, and there are still many challenges ahead for the professional development of the media. The Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) believes that the media should be restructured to address all the challenges of the Nepalese media.**



**Historic accord:** 10 years of bloodshed ended in November, when the Nepalese government and Community Party of Nepal signed a landmark peace accord.

fledgling democracy. The attack on *Kantipur* complex on August 3, 2006, where around 150 protesters brought work to a complete halt for over three hours, is one example. Journalists also face death threats and intimidation, and there have been some cases involving the police and army assaulting journalists.

Even though the Maoists have publicly declared their commitment to press freedom, kidnappings, threats and attacks from Maoist cadres still occur regularly. Attempts to silence media criticism have continued during the transitional period, while there are regular reports of attacks and threats on the media by criminal groups and smugglers.

#### Media situation after the beginning of Terai unrest

Towards the end of 2006, unrest in the eastern and central Terai region was triggered by a movement launched by the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF), Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha (JTMM) and other groups. The Terai movement threatens to derail the country's fragile peace process that had appeared so promising just a few months earlier. There have been blatant attacks targeting journalists, while radio stations were gagged to curb their growing independence. Likewise many attacks against journalists were aimed at stifling freedom of expression and the press.

The movement in the Terai region has mainly affected 10 districts, Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari, Saptari, Janakpur, Parsa, Bara, Sarlahi, Mahottari and Rautahat. In Terai alone, after the unrest, 35 journalists, three media houses and two Federation of Nepal Journalists (FNJ) branches were attacked. Similarly, 40 journalists received serious threats and harassments and 19 were displaced from their workplace. Fourteen vehicles belonging to journalists and media institutions were vandalised and 53 dailies and weeklies were forced to cease publication due to insecurity and shortage of printing papers. Eleven cases of obstacles to free flow of information have also been reported during this period.

Enforcing the *Right to Information Act* and *Working Journalists'*

Act is a major issue that needs to be addressed in Nepal, and there are still many challenges ahead for the professional development of the media. The Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) believes that the media should be restructured to address all the challenges of the Nepalese media.

### Positive Trends

#### Cabinet Scraps Media ordinances

On May 9, 2006 the government annulled the ordinances promulgated to amend some Nepal Acts concerning media, and the ordinance relating to controlling the NGOs and local administrations. The royal government had issued the ordinance amending half a dozen media-related laws, including banning the broadcast of news over FM radio stations and raising the license fees of FM radio stations.

#### Supreme Court Suppresses Article 18 of National Broadcasting Act

On May 18, 2006 the Supreme Court suppressed Article 18 of the *National Broadcasting Act (1992)* and Article 15(1) of the *Publications and Newspapers Act (1991)* as incompatible with a constitutional provision guaranteeing press freedom.

The first article gave the government the right to cancel the licenses of radio and television stations that broadcast news. The second allowed the government to restrict or censor coverage of sensitive issues. The Supreme Court issued its ruling in response to a petition filed by advocate Narayan Kandel, and instigated by the FNJ.

#### Task force formed for implementation of Working Journalists Act 2051

The government formed a task force on May 26 to effectively implement the *Working Journalist Act 2051*. The task force was formed in response to the demand made by the Working Journalist Struggle Committee. Joint secretary of the Ministry of Information and Communication, Ratna Raj Pandey, is the coordinator of the task force, which includes representatives from the FNJ, Nepal Press Union, Press Chautari, Working Journalist Struggle Committee and other media related bodies.

#### Government scraps TADO, forms Media Council

The government also scrapped the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Control and Punishment) Ordinance (TADO), in June last year. TADO allowed security forces to detain persons accused of terrorism for a year without taking them to court. When the ordinance was promulgated in 2002 it permitted such detention for 90 days. Since the government was using TADO against various journalists, the annulment of TADO is a



**Inspirational struggle:** The FNJ's relentless crusade for press freedom is an example to the world.

positive step to ensure the protection of press freedoms and freedom of expression.

#### Media Suggestions Commission

On June 13, 2006, the government formed a seven-member high-level Media Suggestions Commission under the chairmanship of MP and senior advocate Radheshyam Adhikari. The commission has been constituted for incorporating the electronic media into the Press Council, in view of the rapid developments and expansion of electronic media, television and print media at the governmental, non-governmental and private sector levels.

#### Press freedom addressed in Government-Maoist peace agreement

On June 16, a meeting between the leaders of seven political parties and Communist Party of Nepal (CPN - Maoist) signed an 8-point peace agreement. The agreement in its second point states, 'expressing commitment to competitive multi-party governing system, civil liberties, fundamental rights, human rights, press freedom and democratic norms and values including the concept of rule of law, [the seven parties and the Maoists] will carry out their peaceful activities accordingly'.

#### SPA - Maoist agreement expressed commitment to complete press freedom

The historic agreement between the Maoists and the Seven Party Alliance expressed a full commitment to complete press freedom. The agreement also expressed its commitment towards a competitive multi-party democratic system, civil liberties, fundamental rights, human rights, rule of law and all other norms and values of democratic system.

#### Press Freedom guaranteed in interim constitution

Heads of eight mainstream political parties, including the CPN (Maoist) signed the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007, on December 16, 2006. The Interim Constitution, under its preamble, has expressed a full commitment to complete press freedom. The Interim Constitution guarantees freedom of expression for every citizen under the Fundamental Rights in Part 3 Article 12 (3)(A). Similarly, the Interim Constitution under Article 15 has guaranteed publication, broadcasting and printing rights. Right to information and right to privacy are guaranteed in Article 27 and 28 respectively.

#### Defending democracy

Nepal's media has always been at the forefront of upholding and defending the banner of liberty, democracy and freedom. The media has seldom bowed to pressure tactics employed by different political groups and has dared to expose the excesses and atrocities committed time and again.

On one hand, the restoration of democracy has paved the way for the restructuring of the country, resolving problems through the process of electing a constituent assembly. On the other hand, the state is facing a new problem, that of addressing various demands from different communities. At such a critical juncture, the role of media has never been more vital.

In an ever-fragile political climate, the people of Nepal will rely upon the Nepalese media's continued fight to protect the pillars of democracy.

■ Report by Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ). Email: [fjnepal@mail.com.np](mailto:fjnepal@mail.com.np)

## PAKISTAN

### ABUSED AND FETTERED

In 2006, according to the figures compiled by the IFJ, Pakistan became the third most dangerous country in which to be a journalist. Four journalists have been killed in the last year, and kidnappings, torture and assaults are frequently used to control and silence the media. The high rate of journalists murdered and attacks on freedom of expression, combined with a near zero rate of prosecution for these crimes, indicates Pakistan is sliding further away from a free, safe and open society.

#### Fatally silencing journalists

Journalists in Pakistan are regularly the victims of targeted attacks, often with fatal results.

Hayatullah Khan is one journalist who paid the ultimate price for his work. Khan was the North Waziristan correspondent for two dailies, *Ausaf* and *Nation*, and a photographer for the European Pressphoto Agency (EPA), as well as the General Secretary of the Tribal Union of Journalists. His body was discovered on Friday June 16, 2006, six months after his abduction. It is believed Khan was murdered in response to his coverage of an explosion that killed senior Al Qaeda member Maza Rabia. Khan's reports and photographs contradicted the Pakistan government's official version of events. Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz promised a judicial enquiry into Khan's murder. An investigation led by High Court Justice Mohammed Reza Khan has been completed, however the results have not been made public.

Links have also been made between the murders of three other media persons, and their work. These include Mohammad Ismail, a senior journalist and Bureau Chief of Pakistan Press International (PPI), Maqbool Hussain Sail, correspondent of the news agency *On-Line*, and Munir Ahmed Sangi, cameraman for the Sindhi-language Kawaish Television Network (KTN). More details of these cases can be found on page 31.

#### Journalists in danger

Government officials, the police and military intelligence officers are often behind systematic, and frequently brutal, attacks on journalists.

*Kawish* journalist Mehruddin Marri, who was abducted on June 27, 2006, was released on October 24 after four months of torture by military intelligence officers. Marri suffered months of interrogations, beatings, and torture, including electric shocks, in an attempt to make him confess ties with the Baluch nationalist movement.

Similarly, Saeed Sarbazi, joint secretary of the Karachi Press

**The government, including its regional arms, exerts enormous influence through its advertising spending within the media. According to Information Minister Muhammad Ali Durrani, the government advertising spend is between 700 to 800 million Pakistan rupees per year. While there are official denials to the contrary, there is widespread suspicion that the budget is used to reward those newspapers which are favourable to the government, and punish those who aren't.**



**Pakistan's most vulnerable:** Journalists on the Afghan border, like this one interviewing an injured Taliban suspect, face great danger. Banaras Khan/AFP.

Club, senior sub-editor of daily *Business Recorder* and member of the All Pakistan Newspapers Employees Confederation's National Executive Committee, was abducted by intelligence officers on September 20 and returned two days later, after being beaten and kicked until unconscious and accused of being a terrorist.

Senior journalist and union leader Cr Shamsi was brutally bashed on the orders of the Federal Minister for Labour who told his security guards to 'fix' Shamsi. The attack occurred on September 13, after the journalist approached the minister outside parliament and demanded the implementation of the Seventh Wage Award.

A few days later, police attacked journalists at a public meeting of a religious organisation in Lahore on September 17. Wadood Mushtaq, from *ARYONE World*, received serious wounds on his face and jaw, while ATV's Malik Zahid and Mohannad Nazi suffered internal injuries and a fractured arm respectively.

More recently, the Pakistan police force stormed the offices of private broadcaster Geo TV on March 16, 2007, after it continued to televise public protests against the dismissal of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, despite a covert gag order from the government.

Several media employees were beaten as the police destroyed equipment, furniture and broke windows.

Although Information Minister Mohammed Ali Durrani

**There are no safety structures provided for journalists reporting in areas of conflict. While foreign correspondents posted in conflict zones are protected by various rights to their person and families by their employers, local Pakistani organisations do not take such responsibility.**

denied the raid was ordered by the government, President Musharaf later apologised to Geo TV in a personal phone call, then appeared on television to publicly apologise in a national address.

### **Terrible targeting of family members**

A new disturbing trend has emerged in Pakistan: targeting journalists' family members.

Bashir Khan, the child brother of Hayatullah Khan, was brutally murdered on September 26, 2006, in what was apparently a message to his family, who had been active in trying to expose the journalist's killers.

Unfortunately this is not an isolated case. On August 31 Taimur Khan, the 16-year-old brother of BBC correspondent Dilawar Khan Wazir, was found tortured and murdered in volatile South Waziristan, a tribal-ruled region along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

The murder of Taimur Khan may have been a message to Wazir, who had received numerous threats for his reporting.



**Brother killed as warning:** Dilawar Khan Wazir was abducted, blindfolded, interrogated and attacked in November. Two months earlier his 16-year-old brother was murdered, likely as a warning to Wazir. Aamir Qureshi/AFP



**Harrowing escape:** Daily Express journalist Suhail Qalander escaped his captors in the North West Frontier Province, after almost two months of alleged torture.

### **Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Balochistan**

The most vulnerable journalists in Pakistan are undoubtedly those operating in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and in Balochistan. These areas, which adjoin the Afghanistan border, are becoming a magnet for reporters interested in peering through the 'window on the war on terror'.

Despite the richness in stories it is a ruthless and lawless region, caught in a power struggle between political agents, tribal elders, clerics, and even the Taliban.

Local journalists in the area report massive difficulties in doing their job. Many are simply not paid by their employers, and little protection is offered despite the immense dangers journalists face.

### **Power of the Purse**

The government, including its regional arms, exerts enormous influence through its advertising spending within the media.

According to Information Minister Muhammad Ali Durrani, the government advertising spend is between 700 to 800 million Pakistan rupees per year.

While there are official denials to the contrary, there is widespread suspicion that the budget is used to reward those newspapers which are favourable to the government, and punish those who aren't.



**March for rights:** The PFUJ campaign for journalists' rights and conditions.

### Wages and Conditions

Low economic conditions of the working journalist have weakened the strength and calibre of Pakistan's newspaper industry. Published reports show that out of some 5,000 newspaper workers, including non-journalist newspaper employees, around 85 per cent are working on contract, on a lineage basis, receive daily wages or have no appointment letter.

This is a huge issue which is of critical importance to the future of journalism in Pakistan. The central issue is the non-implementation of the Seventh Wage Award. Pakistan newspapers owners are bound to pay the wages set out in the Seventh Wage Board decision, which was handed down on October 8, 2001, and backdated to 2000, as stipulated by the *Newspapers Employers Act (Conditions of Service) 1973*, and passed by the National Assembly.

However, despite constant campaigning by the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) and other unions, with international support from the IFJ and national journalists' unions from around the world, and regardless of promises made by the government, no progress has been made in implementing this award.

With the last formal pay increase some eight years ago, there is massive frustration and anger at the employers' stance. It is deeply corrosive on the morale of journalists and has diminished the profession within the eyes of society. Veteran journalists complain that the situation is leaving the industry open only to ideologues or the marginalised.

The PFUJ has campaigned vigorously for the implementation of the award, however its hands have effectively been tied by the government's refusal to implement basic International Labour Organisation standards, including the right to withdraw labour.

### The way forward

It is clear that Pakistan's journalists face massive difficulties in their work. The key starting point to address these issues must be with journalists' own employers.

There are no safety structures provided for journalists

reporting in areas of conflict. While foreign correspondents posted in conflict zones are protected by various rights to their person and families by their employers, local Pakistani organisations do not take such responsibility.

Additionally, there is no excuse for the non-payment of the Seventh Wage Award. By disgracefully holding out on this issue, the media owners have severely undermined the morale of their workers. The government must be prepared to intervene and must resolve to take much tougher action to ensure a more secure, satisfied and unified media for Pakistan.

Although the government espouses its commitment to a strong and free media, their actions, or rather their lack thereof, do not inspire confidence.

It is critical that all attacks on journalists are investigated swiftly, thoroughly and with full transparency, to send a strong message that those who seek to harm journalists will be brought to justice.

A free and safe media is vital to a healthy, strong and vibrant democracy, and Pakistan will continue to retreat from this goal, unless something is urgently done to protect journalists' rights and safety.

■ **Report by: Maheen Rashdi and the Pakistan Federation Union of Journalists (PFUJ), with excerpts from the delegation report of the IFJ-PFUJ International Mission for Press Freedom and Journalist Safety in Pakistan (the full report is available on [ifj@ifj-asia.org](mailto:ifj@ifj-asia.org)). Email: [maheenar2002@yahoo.com](mailto:maheenar2002@yahoo.com)**

## SRI LANKA

### GASPING FOR FREEDOM

A review of the past year reveals that Sri Lanka failed to improve its media environment, particularly with regard to freedom of expression, the safety of working journalists, access to information and the transformation of the state-owned media landscape into a truly independent public service media.

Sri Lanka has seen a general erosion of the due process of law, democratic governance and above all the peace process. Basic freedoms have been seriously violated in certain parts of the country, and human rights abuses have increased with the descent into conflict.

It is clear the Sri Lankan media is facing a critical situation.

#### Deterioration of human rights and media freedom

The past year has seen Sri Lankan journalists' safety and security come under increasing threat. Across the island, but particularly in the conflict areas in the North and East, armed groups including the government's Armed Forces, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Karuna faction and various other paramilitary groups prevent journalists from gathering and disseminating information. The renewed violence in Sri Lanka means journalists face extreme dangers daily, and the political and economic instability severely limits their ability to provide quality, independent journalism.

A disturbing culture of impunity protects those who threaten media freedoms. Despite the Inspector General of Police Victor Perera's March 6 announcement that police had arrested over 400 persons since September 2006 on charges of abduction, including 'ex-soldiers, serving soldiers, police officers and underworld gangs and other organised elements', it is unclear whether the police will prosecute these offenders to the full extent of the law without political interference. It is also unclear whether these arrests include suspects of terrorism against media personnel and journalists.

#### Growing hate speech, intolerance and incitement to violence

There is a growing concern regarding hate speech and incitement to violence by political forces, such as the *Jathika Hela Urumaya* (JHU) and the National Movement Against Terrorism (NMAT). Champika Ranawaka, a member of both these entities and now Minister for Environment and Natural Resources in the incumbent government, publicly advocated for the brutal suppression of democratic dissent, even through extrajudicial means, in a February 2007 newspaper interview. To date, the government has not distanced itself from the Minister's statement.

On several occasions, the president and a number of government leaders have labelled journalists who voice critical political and social opinions as traitors to the country who are working in collusion with LTTE. On April 6, Minister of Health and Nutrition Nimal Siripala de Silva called journalists, 'dogs with rabies', in need of inoculation. On April 7, Minister Mervin de Silva abused journalists as 'running dogs of various forces'. These comments came after a series of exposes on the activities of the Health Ministry which alleged gross corruption.

Coupled with the culture of impunity, this kind of open and brazen targeting of journalists and activists by those holding high public office is a dangerous and disturbing trend which raises serious concerns for the safety of journalists.

#### Arrest and detention without charge, closures without reason

Munusamy Parameshwari, a 23-year-old female freelance Tamil journalist working for the Sinhala weekly *Mawbima*, was arrested by the Terrorist Investigations Unit on November 21 2006 and detained for four months. After widespread condemnation by local and international media freedom organisations, Parameshawaree was released on March 22, 2007 without a single official charge made against her. She was the victim of a persistent hate campaign by government ministers, select media and ultra-nationalist voices. Blatant lies and baseless allegations were hurled in a reprehensible attempt to distort public opinion against her. Even after her release, government ministers have continued to vilify her on her alleged links with LTTE.

On March 13, 2007, the accounts of Standard Newspapers (Pvt) Ltd., the publishers of *Mawbima* and *Weekend Standard*, were frozen under instructions from the government.

*Mawbima* had a reputation for publishing critical reports on the government.



**Free at last:** Munusamy Parameshwari, 23, ecstatically accepts a bouquet of pens upon her release from over 100 days imprisonment without charge. Pradeep K Pathirana, *Daily Mirror*.

### Anti-terrorism and emergency regulations and extrajudicial arrests

The human rights violations that take place as detailed above are facilitated by the existence of the *Prevention of Terrorism and Specified Terrorist Activities Regulations*, which pose a serious threat to democratic governance and fundamental rights in Sri Lanka. Coupled with the draconian Emergency Regulations, the anti-terrorism regulations have already resulted in journalists and media personnel being arrested, detained and questioned by the police. On February 5, 2007, three trade unionists were abducted from three separate locations in the suburbs around Colombo. After continued protests against their disappearance, the government announced three days later that they had been arrested under the Emergency Regulations for suspected ties to the LTTE, proving the extrajudicial abduction of the suspects.

### The plight of Tamil journalists

Since 2001, apart from one Sinhala journalist, every journalist and media person murdered in Sri Lanka has been a Tamil. Tamil journalists, especially in the north and east, have been subject to intimidation and harassment on a daily basis by the security forces and by armed groups. Certain Tamil newspapers have been set on fire and distributors have been forbidden to sell them. Newspaper offices have been looted, burnt, and

bombed. The increased violence and the abductions and disappearances, with total impunity, make it impossible for journalists to conduct their professional duties.

The scarcity of essential items in the northern peninsula of

**On April 6, Minister of Health and Nutrition Nimal Siripala de Silva called journalists, 'dogs with rabies', in need of inoculation. On April 7, Minister Mervin de Silva abused journalists as 'running dogs of various forces'. These comments came after a series of exposes on the activities of the Health Ministry which alleged gross corruption.**



**Price of protest:** Sunanda Deshapriya was named on a death list of journalists alleged to be traitors to the nation.

Jaffna has also had a fatal impact on newspaper publishing and journalism. The lack of newsprint in the region has reduced some newspapers to publishing only a few copies of their paper, which they post on the walls of the northern towns for public consumption.

All parties in the conflict have committed attacks against the media, including the LTTE, Government Security Forces, the Karuna faction and various other paramilitary and armed groups.

The silencing of alternative voices in Sri Lankan society is further widening the divide between communities, and in the current environment will only jeopardise the possibility of sustainable peace in Sri Lanka.

### Public Service Journalism Award 2005-2006

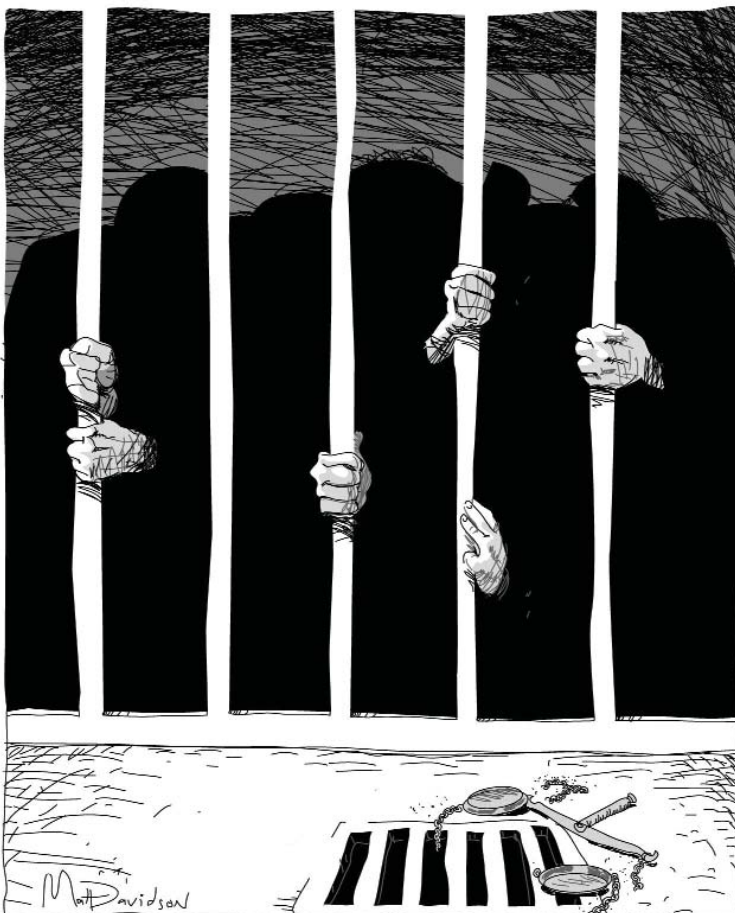
In Colombo on September 12, 2006, prizes were awarded to journalists in nine provinces leading up to the Public Service Journalism Award event. The overall national prize winner was Mr. Nandasiri Weligamage, from Galle in the southern province, for an article on how a community defeated dengue fever.

### South Asian mission

On October 24, 2006, a delegation comprising Mazhar Abbas, Bureau Chief, AFP, Karachi, and Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) Secretary General, Jacqueline Park, IFJ Asia Pacific Director, Laxmi Murthy, IFJ Program Manager, and Sunanda Deshapriya, Convener for Free Media Movement (FMM) met the Hon. Keheliya Rambukwella, Minister and Defence Spokesperson for the government of Sri Lanka. The delegation was part of the South Asian Editors' Mission visiting Sri Lanka in response to the precarious condition of media workers and recent deterioration of the security situation in the country. The delegation presented a letter from IFJ President Christopher Warren furnishing details of media workers killed during the last two years. Mr Rambukwella assured the delegation that he would look into each of the cases mentioned.

### Sri Lankan provincial journalists' national congress formed

The Sri Lankan Provincial Journalists' National Association held their inaugural meeting on December 20, 2006, in Colombo. This was the first time district organisations had come together to form a national



In Sri Lanka, draconian emergency regulations and anti-terrorism regulations have resulted in many media persons' arrest and detention. Artwork by Matt Davidson.





**A mother's despair:** In Sri Lanka, a mother's face shows intense pain as she protests over the death of her journalist son, Sampa Lakmal de Silva. Photo by Buddika Weerasingha

association to promote journalist safety, professionalism, gender equality, job security, fair wages and public service journalism values. More than 180 journalists from 20 districts, including

**Since 2001, apart from one Sinhala journalist, every journalist and media person murdered in Sri Lanka has been a Tamil. Tamil journalists, especially in the north and east, have been subject to intimidation and harassment on a daily basis by the security forces and by armed groups.**

war-torn northern and eastern provinces, participated in the meeting. Journalists from Jaffna were not able to participate due to the prevailing war situation on the peninsula. A 40-person-strong working committee comprising office bearers of district organisations was elected on the day and office bearers will be elected by the committee at a later stage. Five journalists' organisations will serve in an advisory capacity in the working committee.

■ Report by Sanjana Hattotuwa; Sunanda Deshapriya; Luvini Ranasinghe. Email:sheshapriya@sltnet.lk

# AFGHANISTAN

## MEDIA WORKERS KILLED

### **Abdul Qodus – July 22, 2006**

Abdul Qodus, a 25-year-old cameraman for Aryana TV, was killed in a suicide bombing in Kandahar. He was covering an earlier suicide attack when a second person, strapped with explosives, arrived 40 minutes later at the scene and blew himself up. Qodus was severely injured and later died in hospital.

### **Karen Fischer and Christian Struwe – October 7, 2006**

German nationals Karen Fischer and Christian Struwe, journalists for *Deutsche Welle*, were shot dead in their tent in the Baglan province, north of the Afghan capital, Kabul. Both were in Afghanistan to report on the historic sites of Bamiyan, including the remains of the large Buddha statues that were demolished by the Taliban in 2001. Afghan Interior Ministry expressed deep regret that they were travelling without a guide.

### **Sayed Agha and Ajmal Naqshbandi – March 5 and April 8, 2007**

Sayed Agha and Ajmal Naqshbandi, the driver and journalist's fixer of Daniele Mastrogiacomio, a correspondent for Italian newspaper, *La Repubblica*, were brutally murdered by the Taliban, in Helmand, Southern Afghanistan. Agha was murdered by the Taliban, during an attack on March 5, in which Naqshbandi and Mastrogiacomio were taken hostage. Although Mastrogiacomio was later freed on March 19, after the Afghan government agreed to release five Taliban prisoners in exchange for him, the government refused to intervene on behalf of Naqshbandi. As a result, on April 8, the Taliban declared that they had beheaded Naqshbandi.

## MEDIA WORKERS ARRESTED

### **Mir Haider Mutahar – August 24, 2006**

Mir Haider Mutahar, Chief Editor of non-governmental newspaper *Arman-e-Mily*, was arrested by national security officers and kept in custody for one hour. During the interrogation, Motahar was asked to explain a satirical news piece that he published about the Taliban.

### **Khalil Naramgo – October 28, 2006**

Khalil Naramgo, writer for *Payame Mojahed*, was arrested by the Kabul Prosecutor's office, after Farooq Wardak, the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, accused Naramgo of defaming and insulting him in an article. Naramgo was released on November 2 after agreeing to sign an apology and promising to not write any more articles critical of government officials. *Payame Mojahed's* Editor, Hafez Mansoor, claims that he was also questioned by the Prosecutor's office in relation to the article.

### **Shahpoor Arab – March 11, 2007**

*Pajhrwok Afghan News* freelancer, Shahpoor Arab, was detained by the Anti-Terrorism department in the Central Logar province after reporting a rocket attack on the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) base, which left two dead and one injured. He was released two days later.

## MEDIA WORKERS ATTACKED

### **Umid Yakmanish – May 7, 2006**

Tolo TV cameraman Umid Yakmanish, was criticised and beaten by two members of the Afghani parliament while he was recording a scene of conflict amongst the congressmen. The two parliamentary members were Khyal Mohamad Husaini and Fazlullah Mujadidi.

### **Aryana TV – May 29, 2006**

During a massive riot over a fatal traffic accident involving a US army truck in Sara-e-Shamali, violent protesters destroyed Aryana TV owned property and burnt company vehicles in their attempt to storm into the broadcaster's building. Despite the raid, Aryana TV continued its transmission, broadcasting live scenes of the riot. Police were unable to assist due to the vast size of the demonstration.

### **Three journalists beaten by national security officers - June 13, 2006**

National security officers physically assaulted three unknown journalists, confiscating their mobile phones and keeping them in custody for three hours in Kotal-e-Khairkhana, north of Kabul. One of the journalists was arrested and beaten after seeking permission to photograph local casualties from an American forces vehicle accident. The other two journalists were later assaulted after making inquiries into their colleague's arrest.

### **Noorullah Rahmani, Qais Ahamd and other Tolo TV crew members – July 29 and 30, 2006**

Tolo TV reporter Noorullah Rahmani, his cameraman Qais Ahamd, and their driver were beaten and thrown to the ground by a dozen gunmen as they were heading to a police station to seek an official comment on a demonstration they were covering in Kabul. According to Rahmani, the police witnessed the attack but did not intervene. In another incident on July 30, two Tolo TV journalists were returning to their TV station after recording a public protest when a group of gunmen beat them up and confiscated their camera.

### **Radio Isteqlal – August 11, 2006**

Unknown assailants set fire to Radio Isteqlal's building in the Logar province. All technical devices and transmission materials were burnt and damaged as a result of the arson attack.

### **Gabriele Torsello – October 12, 2006**

Italian freelance photographer, Gabriele Torsello was abducted and held hostage by five armed men on his way to Kandahar. He was later freed on November 3, purported to be in good health. Torsello claimed that during his captivity, he never saw daylight and was kept in chains.

### **Khan Wali, Rahmat Gul, Abdul Muaid Hashmi – January 13, 2007**

National security forces shot an Aryana TV vehicle transporting Khan Wali (Ariana TV), Rahmat Gul (Associated Press) and Abdul Muaid Hashmi (*Pajhrwok Afghan News*), in the Alingar district of the eastern Lahman province. The reporters were traveling back from a story they were covering on poppy eradication. The shooters have allegedly been identified and

detained.

#### **Ziaurhman Lalakhil – April 3, 2007**

Ziaurhman Lalakhil, a reporter for Shpin Ghar Radio, was beaten and imprisoned by police for three hours in the Baticot district of the eastern Ningarhar province. Lalakhil was arrested while photographing a farmers' protest against police for the eradication of their poppy cultivations.

#### **MEDIA WORKERS THREATENED AND HARASSED**

##### **Malawi Mukhtar Mufleh – January 31, 2007**

Malawi Mukhtar Mufleh, chief editor of monthly magazine *Feker* and leader of the Nahzat-e-Islami Party, received a series of death threats via his mobile phone after appearing on a round-table program on Shamshad TV. High ranking members of a Jahadi party were alleged to have made the threats. In response, the Afghan government has supplied Mufleh with police protection.

##### **Muhammad Yar – February 26, 2007**

Muhammad Yar, editor in chief for *Benawa Site*, alleges he was detained by a security department for one hour in the southern Kandahar province. Yar says he was frisked, but nothing suspicious was found on him.

##### **Muhammad Zahir Qasimyar – March 6, 2007**

Muhammad Zahir Qasimyar, editor in chief for *Afghanistan-e-Jawan* weekly, was threatened by an unknown group of gunmen in Kabul. The gunmen warned Qasimyar to not write any articles on warlords.

## **BANGLADESH**

#### **MEDIA WORKERS KILLED**

##### **Jamal Uddin - March 6, 2007**

Jamal Uddin, a 25 year old correspondent for the ABAS news agency and local daily *Dainik Giri Darpan* in Rangamati, in the southwest of Bangladesh, was found dead near the Bangladesh Tourism Complex. Uddin had been missing from his home in Kathaltala since March 5. His body was found under a tree near the Rangamati Lake with a rope around his neck. He had injuries to his face and a broken neck. Uddin's family and colleagues rejected the suicide verdict of the post-mortem report and demanded a fresh investigation into the case. Police claimed that they found an audio cassette on Uddin's body, where he recorded a suicide note. However, police refused to allow his colleagues to listen to the audio. One suspect has reportedly been arrested.

#### **MEDIA WORKERS TORTURED**

##### **Shafiqul Islam Shafiq – October 28, 2006**

Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) arrested Shafiqul Islam Shafiq, correspondent of private photo agency *Focus Bangla*, from Shikdari Bazar, Bagmara Upazila in Rajshahi. He was accused of having contact with extremists. Later Shafiq was handed over to police and jailed. During Shafiq's hearing at the magistrates' court, he alleged that RAB members gave him electric shocks and tortured him for eight hours by hanging him upside down at their office. The RAB official also reportedly threatened that if Shafiq spoke to anyone about the torture he would be implicated in 10 murder cases. Shafiq said that while he was nearly unconscious the officials took three signatures on blank paper. The Officer in Charge of Bagmara

police station, Motiar Rahman, told reporters that Shafiq confessed to the police about his involvement with extremists. On November 1, Shafiq applied for bail to the first class magistrate court but the prosecution sought more time for interrogation. "If he does not confess, he will be killed in crossfire," RAB officials allegedly threatened.

#### **MEDIA WORKERS ATTACKED**

##### **Attack on Dainik Andolaner Bazar – May 30, 2006**

BNP lawmaker Shahidul Islam's cadres attacked Quality Press at Courtpara area and stopped the publication of *Dainik Andolaner Bazar* daily for continuing to run critical reports on the local government. The cadres attacked and threatened the press employees and snatched the documents required to print the newspaper. As a result, no issue of *Dainik Andolaner Bazar* came out on May 30. The newspaper earlier sought security for its reporters and staff from the local administration.

##### **Eight journalists assaulted – June 1, 2006**

Eight journalists were injured as police charged a journalists' procession with batons in Satkhira. The journalists, wearing black badges, were staging a silent procession from Satkhira Press Club, protesting the May 29 attack on journalists in Kushtia by the ruling party cadres. Police swung into action when the demonstrators tried to enter the Deputy Commissioner's office to submit a memorandum. The injured journalists were Kalyan Banerjee of *Dainik Prothom Alo*, M Qamruzzaman of *UNB* and *Amar Desh*, Habibur Rahman of Channel I, Mozaffar Rahman of *Dainik Janmohumi*, Raghunath Kha of *Dainik Patradoot*, Manirul Islam of *Dainik Ajker Kagoj*, and photojournalists Ashrafuzzaman Asha and Tamjibur Rahman Tamjid. Defying police obstruction, the angry journalists later formed a human chain on the court premises. They also submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister and the State Minister for Home Affairs demanding immediate arrests and punishment of the culprits involved in the attack on journalists in Kushtia.

##### **Arson attack on Dainik Jugantor – July 25, 2006**

Islami Chhatra activists attacked and set fire to the offices of *Dainik Nayadiganta* in Ullapara, in response to critical articles of a possible MP candidate.

##### **Ajizar Rahman - August 28, 2006**

Bangladesh Awami League leaders of Khetlal, Joypurhat attacked Ajizar Rahman, the Khetlal correspondent for *Dainik Prothom Alo*. Abdul Majid Mollah, Upazilla General Secretary of Awami League, led the group, which also included Publication Secretary Sirajul Islam Sarder, Secretary of Cultural Affairs Golam Mohiuddin, President of Jubo League Enamul Hoque Fight and several others. They beat Ajizar and stole his money and mobile phone. The attackers then threatened to break his hands and legs if he published any news against their views. Reports of clashes between the local groups of Awami League were published in several dailies in the lead up to the attack.

##### **University correspondents attacked – September 16, 2006**

A group of Chhatra League activists attacked university correspondents at the Dhaka University campus for attending an opposing group's press conference. Around five minutes into the press conference, organised by the misplaced leaders of the Chhatra League, the Chhatra League's current leaders arrived and attacked journalists with rods, sharp weapons, hockey sticks and iron bars. A number of journalists were injured, among them Palash Sarker, correspondent for *Dainik Jai*

*Jai Din*, Kamrul Hasan Khan from the *Daily Star*, Mazharul Anwar Khan Shipu from *Dainik Janakantha*, Niladri Shekhar from *Dainik Amader Shomoy* and Masumal Jaki from the *Daily Observer*. Kamrul Hasan Khan sustained serious head injuries. The Dhaka University Journalists' Association protested the incident, decided to boycott all news of Chhatra League, and filed a case with authorities.

#### **Rupgonj Press Club - October 2, 2006**

Cadres of local Jubodal launched an attack on a general meeting at Rupgonj Press Club in Rupgonj, near Dhaka. Relatives of local Jubodal General Secretary Ripon and several other identified criminals damaged furniture and injured seven journalists. The attackers went to the Press Club and asked the caretaker for the whereabouts of the journalists. When the caretaker refused to give the group the keys to the club, they assaulted him and broke into the Club. A. Sohel of *Dainik Manabzamin*, A. Hy Milon of *Dainik Jugantor*, Abul Hasan Asif of *Dainik Inqilab*, Khalil Sikdar of *Ajker Kagaj*, Abdul Kalam Shakil of NTV, Ashiqur Rahman Hannan of *Dainik Sangbad* and Maqbul Hossain of *Dainik Dinkal* all sustained injuries.

#### **Ansar Hossain – November 13, 2006**

A group of criminals attacked Ansar Hossain, correspondent for *Dainik Amar Desh* and news agency BDNews24, at his Noniya Chara house in Cox's Bazar. The miscreants allegedly attacked him with sharp knives for his articles on criminal activities. A case has been filed with the Cox's Bazar Police Station in connection with this attack.

#### **Shafiq Ahmed, Monju Hossain, Shimanto Khokon, Sajedur Rahman, Monir Hossain – November 23, 2006**

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) activists attacked journalists in front of the BNP central office in Naya Paltan in Dhaka, leaving at least five injured. The activists accused the group of poor coverage and misreporting of BNP party programmes. The injured included Shafiq Ahmed, reporter, Monju Hossain, cameraman for STV, Shimanto Khokon, reporter, Sajedur Rahman, cameraman for RTV, and Monir Hossain, cameraman for ATN Bangla. BNP activists also attempted to vandalise a van belonging to ATN Bangla parked on the party office premises. One of the BNP leaders immediately came down to the street and brought the situation under control. Later in a press release the party leaders apologised for the incident and gave assurance that the culprits would be punished.

### **MEDIA WORKERS THREATENED AND HARASSED**

#### **Zahurul Islam – May 13, 2006**

Lal Chand, the leader of a group of miscreants which has alleged links to the BNP, threatened Zahurul Islam, correspondent of *Dainik Ittefaq*, in Daulatpur Upazilla of Kushtia. Islam had published an article which alleged Lal Chand was responsible for the kidnapping of a farmer. Chand said the journalist would be killed by "crossfire", a euphemism for unlawful killing by law-enforcement. Lal Chand also mentioned that he could not kill the correspondent because the killing might put local MP Bachchu Molla in trouble. Lal Chand has about 50 charges, including murder cases, pending with different police stations.

#### **M. Zahed Chowdhury – May 15, 2006**

Tazul Islam, assistant sub inspector of police threatened to break the legs and hands of M. Zahed Chowdhury, staff reporter of *Dainik Desh Bidesh* and correspondent of *Dainik Purbakone*. The

incident happened due to the publication of a report in *Dainik Desh Bidesh* and *Dainik Purbakone* on police corruption.

#### **Ahsan Habib – May 28, 2006**

Ahsan Habib, correspondent of *Dainik Prothom Alo* in Ranisongkoil was beaten by police, including Abu Sayeed, the officer in charge of Ranisongkoil police station. Habib was covering a transport workers meeting when police started beating him in response to an article Habib had written about local police torturing a businessman in their custody. Habib was then taken to the police station where he sustained more beatings and verbal abuse before his father arrived to post bail.

#### **Jasim Mahmud – June 24, 2006**

Jasim Mahmud, correspondent of *Dainik Prothom Alo* in Chatkhil, Noakhali, received death threats from Alauddin, the youth wing of BNP (the ruling coalition), after he published a critical article on the group.

#### **Kazi Ishaq Ahmed and Sohelur Rahman – July 26, 2006**

Police official Farid Ahmed threatened to kill Kazi Ishaq Ahmed, correspondent of *Dainik Janakantha* and Sohelur Rahman, correspondent of *Dainik Dinkal* after the newspapers published reports of Ahmed's illegal activities.

#### **Jahanara Ferdous – July 28, 2006**

The local Chhatradal (the student wing of the ruling party) President Muhammad Zahir Uddin Arif verbally abused Jahanara Ferdous, a female reporter with the local *Weekly Jahur*. Members of the group went to her house and threatened to kill her. Arif and the local ruling party cadres also distributed leaflets with vulgar and unpleasant allegations against the journalist in Porshorum market earlier in the month.

#### **Moniruzzaman Payel – September 7, 2006**

Moniruzzaman Payel, Editor and Publisher of *Dainik Bancharampur Barta*, a local newspaper published from Brahmanbaria, east of Dhaka, was forced to flee his home in fear of a BNP supported attack. On September 7, General Secretary of Bancharampur Upazila BNP MM Ilias locked up the office of *Dainik Bancharampur Barta* with Moniruzzaman inside. He managed to flee through the back door, after which armed cadres led by Upazila Chhatradal Secretary Emdadul Haque Syed launched a search for him. Moniruzzaman was forced to go into hiding. The cadres then issued threats to his relatives and family members. On October 5, Moniruzzaman sought security from the District Commissioner and Police Super in fear for his life.

#### **Jatin Majumder – October 14, 2006**

Cadres of VP Jainal in Feni, southeast of the country, threatened to kill Jatin Majumder, correspondent of *Dainik Jugantor*, if she didn't retract her report on VP's Jainal's activities in Jugantor.

### **OBSTACLES TO THE DOMESTIC FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION**

#### **Jahangir Alam – July 18, 2006**

Security personnel at the Dhanmondi office of Awami League (AL) barred Jahangir Alam, reporter of *Dainik Prothom Alo* from covering AL President Sheikh Hasina's meeting with the party's grassroots level leaders. Earlier, similar restrictions were imposed on journalists of a number of national dailies and television channels including *Dainik Jai Jai Din*, *Dainik Dinkal*, *Dainik Sangram*, NTV, RTV, Channel I, Bangla Vision and Boishakhi Television. AL sources said Hasina was unhappy with the recent coverage of her programmes in *Dainik Prothom*

Alo and directed the officials not to permit the daily's correspondent any access to AL programmes. Journalists of the other newspapers present at the AL office protested the move and left the office.

#### **Journalists' entrance prohibited in secretariat – October 31, 2006**

Home Secretary SM Johurul Islam announced a new order prohibiting journalists' entrance into the secretariat after office hours. All the journalists who hold accreditation cards have to abide by the new order. The Home Secretary told journalists the new order was issued in the interest of the security of the nation. He also said that all the government orders and statements would now be sent to the Press Club so the journalists would not have to come to the secretariat for information. However, not all journalists are members of the National Press Club and journalists argued the new restrictions would make it much harder to get information.

## **BHUTAN**

### **MEDIA WORKERS MISSING OR DISAPPEARED**

#### **Shantiram Acharya – January 16, 2007**

Shantiram Acharya, journalist for the *Bhutan Report* and *Bhutan Jagaran*, has been missing since January 16, when he was taken from his home in the Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal by Bhutanese security personnel. His arrest was based on accusations that he was a member of the Communists Party of Bhutan (CPB-MLM), however the party has confirmed that he was never affiliated with their group.

### **MEDIA WORKERS ARRESTED**

#### **TP Mishra – July 24, 2006**

TP Mishra, Editor of the *Bhutan News Service*, was detained for more than seven hours by police in Kamalpokhari. During his detention, he reportedly received bruises on the right side of his forehead, and his recorder was confiscated. Mishra was arrested while reporting on a demonstration organised by Bhutanese refugees in front of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in Kathmandu.

### **ADMINISTRATIVE, LEGAL AND ECONOMIC PRESSURE ON MEDIA WORKERS**

#### **The Bhutan Reporter – March 5, 2007**

*The Bhutan Reporter* was on the verge of shutting down after it could no longer afford the production costs of its monthly publication. The World Association of Newspapers (WAN) however, agreed to provide financial aid in March, when the *Reporter* embarked on an international campaign to the overseas Bhutanese community and international media community for assistance. WAN has agreed to finance the *Reporter* for three months and assist it in finding long-term sponsorship. Operating since 2004, the publication has been a vital source of information to the Bhutanese refugee camps based in Nepal.

## **INDIA**

### **MEDIA WORKERS KILLED**

#### **Arun Narayan Dekate - June 10, 2006**

Arun Narayan Dekate, a rural correspondent for the Marathi

daily *Tarun Bharat*, was stoned on his way home on June 8, and died two days later in hospital from the injuries he sustained. According to local reports, Dekate had recently exposed an illegal gambling racket and his tip-off to police about the activities of alleged gambling boss Dhampal Bhagat had resulted in several arrests.

### **MEDIA WORKERS ATTACKED**

#### **Syed Shujaat Bukhari - June 10, 2006**

Syed Shujaat Bukhari, a Kashmir-based correspondent for *The Hindu*, was forced into an auto-rickshaw by two armed men, and was later pushed out of the moving vehicle and shot at. He fortunately escaped from his perpetrators when his attacker's gun jammed. Bukhari was also the victim of abduction in 1995, and an attack in 2001.

#### **Afzal Khan - November 15, 2006**

Afzal Khan, a reporter for *Hindsat* in Bhopalpatnam, Chhattisgarh, was beaten and threatened as a result of an article he published concerning Salwa Judum, a state-supported anti-Maoist campaign. Khan sustained injuries to his hand and head from the attacks. Khan has been previously subjected to threats by Salwa Judum, including an announcement made by the group that they would kill him and his family if he did not join them.

#### **Three journalists injured in protest - December 8, 2006**

Three journalists who were reporting on a protest in Seoraphuli, in West Bengal's Hooghly district, were injured when police resorted to using batons against the demonstrators. The protest was in relation to the forcible acquisition of farmland to set up a car manufacturing plant in the Singur village of the Hooghly district.

#### **Afrida Hussain - March 31, 2007**

Afrida Hussain, a journalist for Northeast Television (NeTV), was physically attacked by security officers when attempting to meet and interview a group of protesters inside the Guwahati Medical College Hospital. Hussain was dragged, kicked and punched which required her to be admitted to hospital for treatment. Hussain was trying to interview a group of women fasting in protest at the disappearance of their husbands, supposed militants of the United Liberation Front of Assam.

### **MEDIA WORKERS THREATENED AND HARASSED**

#### **Cable TV operators in Kashmir threatened – May, 2006**

Due to mounting pressure by a rebel group called the al Madina Regiment, four cable TV channels, Star Movies, Star World, AXN and Reality TV, were suspended on May, 9, 2006, on grounds that they were 'obscene'. The next day, 40 channels were also suspended, due to threats made from different militant groups when they visited the offices of various cable TV operators. Broadcasting resumed the next day; but cable TV operators again suspended their transmission on May 12, due to fears of inadequate protection from the authorities and the risk of suicide attacks. After a demonstration staged by 150 operators, and assurances from several militant groups, service was back on the air on May 14.

#### **DN Bezboruah, Prasanta Rajguru and two other journalists – June 8, 2006**

Four journalists including DN Bezboruah, a former Editor of *The Sentinel* and former President of the Editors' Guild of India and Prasanta Rajguru, Executive Editor of *Amar Asam*, were emailed threats by Paresh Barua, the Commander in Chief of

the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), in Guwahati, Assam. The threats were based on Baruah's accusations that the journalists were trying to create an atmosphere of confusion during talks between the Indian government and ULFA, launched under the 'peace initiative'.

#### **Manoranjana Sinh - October 12, 2006 and January 30, 2007**

Manoranjana Sinh, a reporter for NE-TV in Assam, India, and her husband, Matang Sinh, were harassed by members of the Youth Congress when trying to leave the television station. Young Congress members threatened to tear off Sinh's clothes and refused to allow her and her husband to leave the building. NE-TV had earlier broadcasted a story about the Chief of the Youth Congress being issued a non-bailable warrant for involvement in illegal activities.

In a separate incident, Sinh later was subjected to threats on January 30, this time by the United Liberation Front of Assam. They demanded that she either prove her allegations made that the group were working with the government or stop the broadcast and leave the region, failing which she was warned of 'dire consequences'.

## MALDIVES

### MEDIA WORKERS JAILED

#### **Abdullah Saeed – still in imprisonment**

Abdullah Saeed, reporter for pro-opposition publication *Minivan Daily*, is still serving a life imprisonment sentence imposed on April 18, 2006 on grounds of drug possession with intent to deal. Saeed and the *Daily* are still defending his innocence, claiming the accusations against him were fabricated by the police during their crackdown on opposition leaders. Saeed was arrested on October 13, 2005, when police allegedly found drugs in his clothing whilst he was at the police station appearing before a summons.

#### **Ahmed Abbas – November 2, 2006**

Ahmed Abbas, a cartoonist for the *Minivan Daily*, was sentenced in absentia, to six month's imprisonment, convicted for inciting violence against the police. The conviction was based on remarks Abbas made in an article published on August, 2 2005, in which he criticised the Star Force, an elite unit of the Maldivian police. However, it is also alleged that Abbas' imprisonment was motivated by his role as a prominent critic against the government.

### MEDIA WORKERS ARRESTED

#### **Fathimath Shaheeda – May 14 and August 30, 2006**

Police arrested Fathimath Shaheeda, editor for Minivan Radio, on unlawful assembly charges for participating in a pro-opposition rally. In a separate incident during a protest on August 30, she claimed that she was ill-treated by the police, including her being punched in the face and dragged along the ground by her hair.

#### **Phillip Wellman and Graham Quick – November 3, 2006**

US reporter Phillip Wellman, working in the Maldives for online newspaper *Minivannews.com* and Graham Quick, a freelance photographer for the UK *Observer*, were arrested, interrogated and later deported from the Maldives. Their arrest occurred as a result of them reporting on the arrest of around 30 activists, associated with the government opposition, the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP).

#### **Nazim Sattar – January 17, 2007**

The trial against Nazim Sattar, *Minivan Daily's* sub-editor, is still uncertain after his trial hearing was postponed on January 17 with no date given for his next hearing. Sattar is facing the charge of 'disobedience to order', over an article he published on August 2, 2005. If found guilty, he could face up to six months in exile, imprisonment or house arrest.

### MEDIA WORKERS THREATENED AND HARASSED

#### **Ahmed Moosa (Sappe') – May 6 and September 10, 2006**

Ahmed Moosa (Sappe'), a UK-based editor for the pro-opposition tabloid website *Dhivehi Observer*, was denied renewal of his Maldivian passport. On September 10, he received an expletive-laden death threat via email, allegedly sent by the Maldivian Chief of Police, Adam Zahir. The British Police have officially cautioned Zahir for his actions.

#### **Mariyam Seena – February and March, 2007**

In the first quarter of 2007, Mariyam Seena, a journalist for Minivan Radio, was allegedly the victim of a vicious Internet campaign in which slanderous and false information about her was published on a series of pro-government websites. Although the Maldivian government has the power to block websites that produce slanderous information about government officials, they have not taken action against websites targeting opposition or independent journalists.

### MEDIA WORKERS RELEASED FROM JAIL

#### **Jennifer Latheef – Freed August 16, 2006**

Jennifer Latheef, a documentary filmmaker, human rights activist and photojournalist for the paper *Minivan Daily*, was pardoned by President Gayoom on August, 2006 as part of a political deal between the government and the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). Latheef was sentenced to ten years in jail on October 18, 2005 for allegedly conducting a 'terrorist act', while protesting the deaths under torture of five prisoners of conscience. She was convicted for throwing a stone at a police officer during the demonstration.

#### **Mohamed Nasheed (Anni) – Freed September 21, 2006**

Mohamed Nasheed (Anni), former journalist for the magazine *Sangu*, and now Chairperson of the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), was released from detention after a political deal was struck between the government and the MDP. Anni was arrested on August 12, 2005 for participating in a peaceful demonstration calling for democratic reform. He was officially charged on August 22 for sedition and terrorism. Nasheed was imprisoned from 1991 to 1993, and again from 1996 to 1998 for his writings.

## NEPAL

### MEDIA WORKERS ATTACKED

#### **Ganesh Rai, Deepak Bhattarai, Shyam Shrestha, Rajneesh Bhattarai, Bimal Gautam – May 4, 2006**

Armed soldiers reportedly attacked Ganesh Rai, journalist for the *Kantipur Daily*, Deepak Bhattarai, news coordinator for Kantipur Television (KTV), cameraman Shyam Shrestha, KTV intern reporter Rajneesh Bhattarai and journalist Bimal Gautam. The five media workers were assaulted and their equipment confiscated while they were trying to cover an accident between a Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) ambulance and a passenger mini-bus.



**Journalists United:** The Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) on World Press Freedom Day, May 3, 2006. Photo courtesy of Kantipur Publications.

#### **Katinpur Publications - December 4, 2006**

A driver for one of Kantipur Publications' media vans was stopped and beaten by six assailants while on his way to Chappara, transporting press materials. The attackers claimed Kantipur Publications was disseminating false news.

#### **Local journalists from Birgunj- January 29, 2007**

Violent demonstrators belonging to the Madhesi People's Rights Forum (MPRF) attacked journalists and media houses in Birgunj. Journalists were singled out and beaten, while others attempted to escape from the violence. Local media houses were also vandalised by the MPRF protest.

#### **Nitesh Mathema and Ram Saraf - February 2, 2007**

Photojournalists Nitesh Mathema of *Bypass Daily* and Ram Saraf of *Annapurna Post* suffered injuries to their backs and legs after members of the Armed Police Force attacked them with batons. Both journalists were covering a demonstration in Birgunj of Parsa, a central district of Nepal.

#### **Shambhu Bhandari, Bijaya Pathak, Bikram Luitel and Mohan Manandhar - February 4, 2007**

Journalists Shambhu Bhandari, Bijaya Pathak, Bikram Luitel and Mohan Manandhar were beaten brutally with sticks by the Janatantrik Forum (MJF) cadres, at Tanki Sinwary of Biratnagar, an eastern town of Nepal. The journalists were at Tanki Sinwary to report on a peace rally.

#### **Kantipur Publications - March 27, 2007**

An unknown group calling itself the eastern command of the Nepal Defense Army (NDA), claimed responsibility for hurling a bomb at the regional office of Kantipur Publications in Biratnagar, an eastern city of Nepal. No damage occurred to the office as the bomb did not explode.

#### **Kantipur Daily - April 3, 2007**

Members of the Madhesi People's Rights Forum (MPRF) set ablaze copies of the *Kantipur Daily* that were being transported to Saptari, an eastern district of Nepal. The MPRF attackers unloaded the newspaper copies from the transporting vehicle and set them on fire, on the basis that the newspaper was not publishing their news.

### **MEDIA WORKERS THREATENED AND HARASSED**

#### **Shiva Puri - January 28, 2007**

Shiva Puri, a *Kantipur* reporter, received death threats from a demonstrator named Ram Krishna Gupta attempting to get

news published in his favour.

#### **Dharma Pal Raut and Shiva Narayan Shah - February 24, 2007**

Dharma Pal Raut and Shiva Narayan Shah, both employed by *Rajbiraj*, reportedly had their camera seized, photographs deleted and keys confiscated by members of Tharu Kalyankari Sabha. The organisation forced Raut and Shah to walk for one kilometre before their keys were returned.

#### **Gorkhapatra and Kantipur - March 16, 2007**

Newspaper distributors were threatened by cadres of the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) not to distribute or sell the Nepali language dailies *Gorkhapatra* and *Kantipur* on the premise that the papers were failing to give importance to the local language and Tera movement.

#### **Shaligram Pandey, Arjun Sharma, Ama Khadka, Shekha Adhikari, Chetan Dhamala, Krishna Bhattari, Anil Adhikari and Santosh Yadav - March 27, 2007**

Journalists Shaligram Pandey, Arjun Sharma, Amar Khadka, Shekhar Adhikari, Chetan Dhamala, Krishna Bhattarai, Anil Adhikari and Santosh Yadav were specifically threatened by Maoist activist Ritesh Shrestha. He threatened to kill them if they dared to write anything against him.

#### **Khem Bhandari - March 27, 2007**

Khem Bhandari, editor of *Abhiyan* daily, received death threats from a Maoist cadre at Mahendranagar of Kanchanpur, in the Far Western district of Nepal. The threats not only included danger to Bhandari's life, but also a ban on his publication.

## **PAKISTAN**

### **MEDIA WORKERS KILLED**

#### **Munir Ahmed Sangi- May 29, 2006**

Munir Ahmed Sangi, a cameraman for the Sindhi-language Kawaish Television Network (KTN), was shot dead when he was covering a story on a gunfight between members of the Unar and Abro tribes in the town of Larkana, in Pakistan's Sindh district.

#### **Hayatullah Khan - June 16, 2006**

Hayatullah Khan was found murdered six months after his abduction on December 5, 2005. He was allegedly abducted near the tribal area of North Waziristan, after reporting on an explosion that killed senior Al Qaeda member, Maza Rabia.

#### **Maqbool Hussain Sail - September 15, 2006**

Maqbool Hussain Sail, a correspondent with the news agency *On-Line*, died after being shot by unidentified attackers. Sail was reportedly on his way to the house of the local leader of the opposition party, the Pakistan People Party, when he was killed.

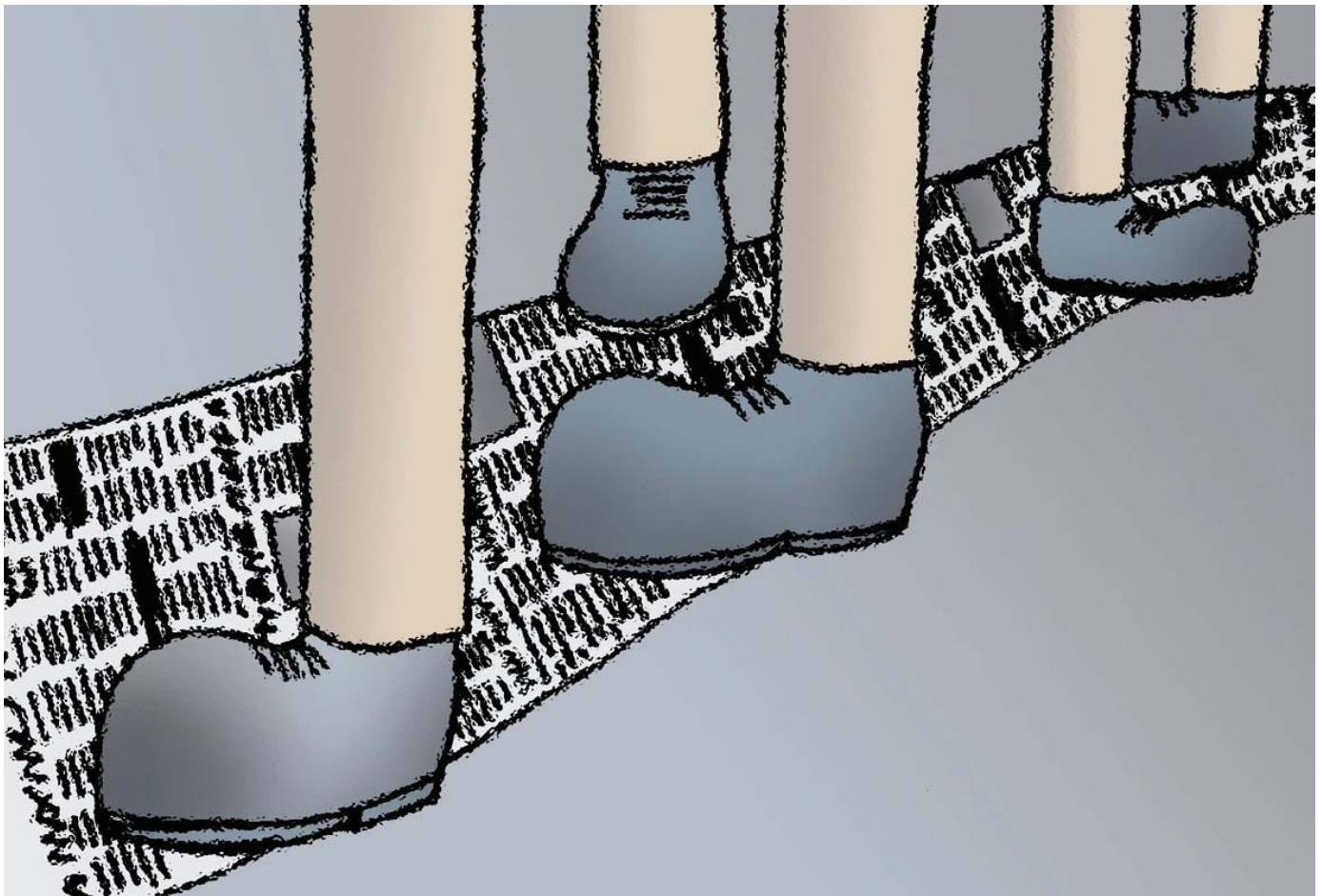
#### **Mohammad Ismail - November 1, 2006**

Mohammad Ismail, senior journalist and Bureau Chief of *Pakistan Press International (PPI)*, was brutally murdered when attacked by unknown assailants in Islamabad.

### **MEDIA WORKERS TORTURED**

#### **Saeed Sarbazi, September 22, 2006**

Saeed Sarbazi, Joint Secretary of the Karachi Press Club, Senior



Artwork by K. B. Abro

Sub-editor of daily *Business Recorder* and member of the All Pakistan Newspapers Employees Confederation's National Executive Committee, was released after being abducted and tortured on September 20.

**Mehruddin Marri – October 24, 2006**

*Kawish* journalist Mehruddin Marri was released from captivity, reportedly having been tortured during his four month detainment by intelligence forces, who arrested him on June 27. He was interrogated, beaten and suffered electric shocks and other forms of torture in an attempt to make him confess ties with the Baluch nationalist movement.

**Suhail Qalander – February 21, 2007**

Suhail Qalander, journalist for the *Daily Express*, and his friend Niaz Mohammad were found alive after being reported missing since January 2. They were abducted and imprisoned by criminal and tribal elements in the Khyber Agency of the North West Frontier Province in Pakistan. Both managed to escape during a gun battle, after more than a month tied up and tortured in captivity. Local reports suggest Qalander may have been targeted for political reasons. Demonstrations and rallies were held across Pakistan on February 19 in protest of his kidnapping and the government's failure to intervene.

**MEDIA WORKERS ARRESTED**

**Mukesh Rupeta and Sanjay Kumar – June 26, 2006**

Mukesh Rupeta, a Geo News correspondent, and Sanjay Kumar, a freelance cameraman were officially arrested and released on bail, for video recording the Jacobabad air-base in

Sindh. Previously, both were abducted and reported missing on March 6, 2006.

**Nasrum Minalah – November 29, 2006**

Suspected militants detained Nasrum Minalah, a journalist for Aaj TV, Peshawar, and banned the sale of newspapers in the tribal area of North Waziristan.

**MEDIA WORKERS ATTACKED**

**Thari Mirwah Press Club – June 14, 2006**

Fifty individuals reportedly attacked six media workers at the Thari Mirwah Press Club. The attacks consisted of punching, kicking and beating the press with sticks in response to a story on contractors' use of unsatisfactory material in the construction of irrigation watercourses.

**Peshawar Press Club – June 29, 2006**

The Peshawar Press Club was attacked by activists of the Pakistan Muslim League, who injured newsmen and staff members. Following the attacks, Khalil Afredi of the *Daily Khabrian*, Sudhi Afredi of the *Daily Frontier Post* and Abu Zar Afredi of the *Daily Express* were detained without charge for 24 hours for interviewing the wanted Head Cleric of Lashkar-e-Islami, Mangal Afredi. Reports also revealed the group Lashkar-e-Islami threatened Qazi Nasrullah of the *Daily Mashriq* and Qazi Rauf of the *Daily Express*, for reporting in favour of government policies.

**Cr Shamsi – September 13, 2006**

Senior journalist and union leader Cr Shamsi was brutally attacked by security guards of the Federal Minister for Labour



in Islamabad, after he demanded the implementation of the Seventh Wage Award.

**Wadood Mushtaq, Malik Zahid, Mohammad Nazi – September 17, 2006**

Police attacked journalists Wadood Mushtaq, Malik Zahid and Mohammad Nazi during a public meeting of a religious organisation in Lahore. Mushtaq received serious wounds on his face and jaw, Zahid endured internal injuries, and Nazi received a fractured arm.

**Dilawar Khan Wazir – November 21, 2006**

Dilawar Khan Wazir, a BBC Urdu-language reporter and journalist for the daily publication *Dawn*, was released after being reported missing on November 20. Wazir was unable to identify his abductors due to being blindfolded while he was harassed, physically attacked and questioned about his sources.

**MEDIA WORKERS THREATENED AND HARASSED**

**Masood Khan, Anwar Hakim, Haseen Ahmed, Zafarullah and Mohammad Ibrahim – November 10, 2006**

Masood Khan, Anwar Hakim, Haseen Ahmed, Zafarullah and Mohammad Ibrahim were harassed and detained by officials when travelling to the tribal region of Bajour to investigate the killings of 83 people that occurred on October 30.

**Saleem Shahzad and Qamar Yusufzai – November 18, 2006**

Saleem Shahzad, correspondent for *The Star*, and Qamar Yusufzai of the *Quetta* daily were abducted by the Taliban in Afghanistan, but were later released after more than a week in captivity.

**Kamran Rehmat – December 10, 2006**

Resident Editor of *The News* in Islamabad, Kamran Rehmat, was chased and harassed by two cars. It was suspected that the cars were from intelligence agencies. Rehmat lodged a police report of the attack, but no action seems to have been taken.

**Carlotta Gall and Akhtar Soomro – December 20, 2006**

*New York Times* correspondent Carlotta Gall and Pakistan photographer Akhtar Soomro were harassed by the police in Quetta, accused of interviewing Taliban leaders. Their computer and camera were seized during the interrogation.

**ADMINISTRATIVE, LEGAL AND ECONOMIC PRESSURE ON MEDIA WORKERS**

**PFUJ protest against Seventh Wage Board – September 15, 2006**

The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) held a protest sit-in outside the Governor's House in Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar and Quetta. They were demanding wage increases for Pakistani journalists and the implementation of the minimum job conditions and wages set out by the Seventh Wage Board decision on October 8, 2001. Wages are still not being paid, and the government has done nothing to improve the economic conditions of journalists.

**Kamal Majeedullah, Syed Sallem Shahzad and Ralph D'Cruz – December 21, 2006**

A Karachi court judge indicted Kamal Majeedullah, Editor of *The Star*, and reporters Syed Sallem Shahzad and Ralph D'Cruz in a criminal defamation case filed by a leader of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM). The defamation suit concerned a front page story published by *The Star*, which alleged links between the now deceased underworld mafia boss, Shaib Khan, and the MQM.

**OBSTACLES TO THE DOMESTIC FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION**

**Press and Publication Authority (PAPRA) – December 15, 2006**

Newspaper reports suggested that a new press regulatory body called the Press and Publication Regulatory Authority (PAPRA) would soon be established in Pakistan. Concerns were raised by the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), since it claimed that the PAPRA would likely mirror the infamous 'black law' Press and Publication Ordinance from the 1960s.

**MEDIA WORKERS' FAMILIES TARGETED**

**Bashir Khan – September 26, 2006**

Bashir Khan, child brother of slain journalist Hayatullah Khan, was found dead. Bashir Khan's murder was allegedly a message to his family, who had been active in trying to expose Hayatullah Khan's killers.

**Taimur Khan – August 31, 2006**

Taimur Khan, the teenage brother of BBC correspondent Dilawar Khan Wazir, was murdered in South Waziristan. The murder of the 16 year old was likely a message to Wazir, who had received numerous threats for his reporting in the past two years. Two months after his brother's death, Wazir was kidnapped and attacked by unknown perpetrators.

**SRI LANKA**

**MEDIA WORKERS KILLED**

**Suresh Kumar and Ranjith Kumar – May 3, 2006**

As media workers gathered in Colombo to celebrate World Press Freedom Day, a group of unidentified men attacked the office of the *Uthayan* newspaper in the northern city of Jaffna. Suresh Kumar, the Marketing Manager and Ranjith Kumar, a worker in the circulation department, were killed during this attack. Five others were injured and the office was damaged. The police took 6 persons in custody.

**Sampa Lakmal de Silva – July 2, 2006**

Freelance journalist Sampath Lakmal de Silva was shot dead by an unknown group. He was abducted at 5.00am from his home in Borallagamuwa, south of Colombo. His body was found three kilometres from his home.

**Marithas Manojanraj – August 1, 2006**

Newspaper vendor Marithas Manojanraj was killed by a mine that detonated as he was on his way to Jaffna on July 27 to collect newspapers for distribution.

**Sathasivam Baskaran – August 16, 2006**

Sathasivan Baskaran, driver and the distributor of the Jaffna-based *Uthayan* newspaper, was shot dead in his *Uthayan* delivery vehicle after taking advantage of the temporary lifting of a curfew to deliver copies of the newspaper. He was shot in his clearly marked vehicle in an area controlled by the Sri Lankan armed forces.

**Sinnathamby Sivamaharajah – August 21, 2006**

Sinnathamby Sivamaharajah, managing director of the Jaffna-based Tamil newspaper *Namathu Eelanadu*, was shot dead in Vellippalai. As a consequence of the murder, the publication of the newspaper was stopped.

### **Rushika Prasadini – December 19, 2006**

Rushika Prasadini, a journalist, was injured in a car accident with another vehicle driven by a diplomat. She later died in Colombo as a result of her injuries. Her family is seeking justice for the tragic death; however, they are facing obstacles due to the involvement of diplomatic immunity.

### **Subash Chandrabos - April 16, 2007**

Subash Chandrabos, editor for Tamil monthly magazine *Nilam* and freelance journalist for *Aravali* and *Tamil World*, was shot dead during the evening at his home in Thirunavatkulam, near Vavuniya. It remains unknown the motives for his killing and whether it had any relation to his reporting, however the region of Vavuniya is renowned for being riddled with violence between rival Tamil militia groups.

## **MEDIA WORKERS MISSING OR DISAPPEARED**

### **Nadarajah Guruparan – August 28, 2006**

Nadarajah Guruparan, Director of News at Sooriyan FM radio, was abducted by an unknown group. He was released the same evening after a national and international campaign for his release.

### **Subramaniam Ramachandran, - February 15, 2007**

The correspondent of the Tamil dailies *Thinakkural* and *Valampuri* was abducted by an unknown group and is feared dead.

## **MEDIA WORKERS ARRESTED**

### **K Kumarathas – June 23, 2006**

K Kumarathas, a news editor of Jaffna-based Tamil daily *Uthayan*, was arrested by police in Moratuwa and was detained at the Mt Lavania police station for more than ten hours.

### **Parameswari Munusamy – November 24, 2006**

Parameswari Munasamy, a freelance female journalist aged 23 years old, was arrested by the Special Police Task Force at her boarding place in Wellawatta, south of Colombo. She was handed over to the Terrorist Investigation Division, but was released on February 24, 2007 after a national and international campaign.

### **Asoka Fernando – November 28, 2006**

The *Sunday Leader* photographer Ashoka Fernando was assaulted and arrested by the Maharagama police. Fernando was photographing an ongoing dispute at the Maharagama Buddhist Temple. He was given bail the same day.

## **MEDIA WORKERS ATTACKED**

### **Uthayan newspaper office – September 9 and 10, 2006**

According to the Managing Director of New Uthayan Publications, two incidents of intrusion and intimidation by armed personnel have taken place at the *Uthayan* newspaper office during curfew hours.

### **Voice of Tigers – October 17, 2006**

The radio station Voice of Tigers (VOT), the official radio station of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), was bombed by fighter jets belonging to the Sri Lankan Air Force.

### **Tissa Ravindra Perera – January, 2007**

A group of up to 30 policeman from the Homagama Police allegedly assaulted *Rivira Defence* journalist Tissa Ravindra Perera and his family. Mostly dressed in civil garb, they allegedly stormed the house of Perera's aunt and assaulted him, his wife and several other females, causing serious injuries.

### **Ajith Senavirathan and Ganasasiri Kottigoda - January 9, 2007**

An unruly mob assaulted two journalists, Ajith Senavirathan of *Lanka E-News* and Ganasasiri Kottigoda of *Haraya* monthly and the BBC Sinhala Service, whilst disrupting the first public rally of the United People's Movement in Nugegoda, Colombo. The mob also attacked another freelance cameraman who was taking photographs and confiscated his camera.

## **MEDIA WORKERS THREATENED AND HARASSED**

### **MAM Nilam – January 9, 2007**

During a press conference, Minister AHM Fowzie threatened MAM Nilam, a senior reporter of daily *Thinakkural*. The Minister threatened Nilam to stop reporting on allegations of corruption related to his Haj Pilgrimage or else his limbs would be broken.

### **Victor Ivan, Sunanda Deshapriya, Bandula Pathmakumara, Lasantha Wikramatunga – January, 2007**

In early January 2007, a death list was emailed widely, specifically naming four senior journalists for allegedly being traitors to the nation. The journalists named were Victor Ivan, editor of *Ravaya*, Sunanda Deshapriya convener for the Free Media Movement (FMM), Bandula Pathmakumara, producer and presenter on Swarnavahini TV's *Mul Pituwa* program and Lasantha Wikramatunga, editor of *The Sunday Leader*.

### **Ruwan Ferdinanadaz – January 22, 2007**

Ruwan Ferdinanadaz, Director Editorial of *Mawbima* newspaper, lodged a complaint at the Rajagiriya police station for death threats he received by phone. The anonymous callers were threatening Ferdinanadaz to desist from writing on any issue related to Gothabaya Rajapakse, the Defense Secretary, and Basil Rajapakse, Adviser to the President.

### **Pathma Kumari - March 30, 2007**

A group of armed men in civilian clothes visited the workplace of Pathma Kumari, provincial correspondent of *Lankadeepa* newspaper. She was provided security after journalists' organisations intervened.

### **Champika Liyanarachchby – April 17, 2007**

*Daily Mirror* editor Champika Liyanarachchby was personally threatened by Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, government defence secretary and brother of President Mahinda Rajapaksa, over a front page story which he believed took an anti-government stance. The *Daily Mirror* alleged in the article that the government was turning a blind eye to the Karuna faction flaunting its weapons in Pottuvil. In response to the piece, Rajapaksa warned that the government would not protect Liyanarachchby if the Karuna faction reacted violently to the story.

## **MEDIA WORKERS DISPLACED/SELF EXILED (INTERNATIONAL)**

### **Anurudha Lokuhappuarrachi, Rohitha Bashana Abeywardane and S Rajkumar – December 2006**

Three journalists Anurudha Lokuhappuarrachi, senior photographer for Reuters, Rohitha Bashana Abeywardane of the Hiru group and freelance column writer for the *Mawbima* newspaper, and S Rajkumar, News Manager at the Colombo bureau of Theepam TV, were forced to leave the country after receiving death threats. It is uncertain when they will be allowed to return back to Sri Lanka.

## ADMINISTRATIVE, LEGAL AND ECONOMIC PRESSURE ON MEDIA WORKERS

### Government introduces regulations for media – June 22, 2006

Minister for Information, Anura Priyadarshana Yapa, announced that cabinet had approved the reintroduction of state-controlled regulations for the media in Sri Lanka. *Press Council Law 1973* prohibits, amongst other things, the publication of cabinet decisions, cabinet documents, certain defence and security matters, and certain fiscal measures.

### Rajpal Abeynayake – October 10, 2006

Rajpal Abeynayake, editor of the state-owned *Sunday Observer*, was asked to leave his post as a consequence of an article published in his column on September 8. The article indirectly criticised a speech made by the President to Sri Lankan diplomats.

### Raja FM - November 11, 2006

Raja FM, a private radio station, was banned by the Ministry of Media and Information on the premise of broadcasting obscenities.

### Chandrasiri Dodawatta – November 20, 2006

Chandrasiri Dodawatta, Chief Editor of *Sinhala Daily Dinamina*, was removed from his editorship without reason. He is the third chief editor removed within a year from *Dinamina* newspaper, a state-controlled, public services media institution owned by the Lake House.

### Ranga Jayasurya, Lionel Yodasinghe and Prasanna Fonseka – December 20, 2006

Two senior journalists for the *Sunday Observer*, Ranga Jayasurya and Lionel Yodasinghe, were summoned to the headquarters of the Criminal Investigation Division (CID) of the police and questioned under the newly enacted Anti-Terror laws. This was in relation to a report they had published on defence matters. Another *Sunday Observer* journalist, Prasanna Fonseka, was also interrogated for the same issue.

### Government Minister incites violence against media - February 19, 2007

Champika Ranawaka, Minister for Environment and Natural Resources, made an abusive statement to *Ravaya* newspaper, advocating for the brutal suppression of democratic dissent, even through extra-judicial ways and means.

### Mawbima and the Weekend Standard — March 13, 2007

Bank accounts of Sinhala language weekly *Mawbima* were sealed by the government. Published by the Standard Newspaper, it was a critical newspaper with a wide circulation amongst the Sinhala population. By April 1, *Mawbima* and another Standard Newspaper publication, the *Weekend Standard*, closed down due to financial and other constraints.

## OBSTACLES FOR THE FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION

### Defence Ministry imposes unofficial censorship – September 20, 2006

In a letter sent to media institutions, the Ministry of Defence, Public Security, Law and Order indirectly requested that all news relating to national security be submitted to the Media Centre for National Security before publication, telecast or broadcast.

### Young Asia Television - March 19, 2007

Police entered and investigated the TV production house Young Asia Television. The officers said higher authorities requested they conduct the inspection. Young Asia Television is one of Sri Lanka's leading public service broadcasters, producing programs in English, Sinhala and Tamil dealing with peace-building, gender, human rights, reconciliation and democracy.

### Hate campaign against Human Rights defenders - March 27, 2007

Whilst press freedom groups were preparing their submissions for the 4th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, leading figures of the government and state-controlled media such as government mouthpiece the *Ceylon Daily News*, launched a vicious hate campaign on human rights defenders and media freedom activists.



The IFJ is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation that promotes coordinated international action to defend press freedom and social justice through the development of strong, free and independent trade unions of journalists. IFJ Asia-Pacific coordinates IFJ activities in the Asia-Pacific region. The IFJ works closely with the United Nations Human Rights Commission, WIPO and the ILO, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the European Union, the Council for Europe and with a range of international trade union and freedom of expression organisations. The IFJ mandate covers both professional and industrial interests of journalists.

Visit [www.ifj-asia.org](http://www.ifj-asia.org) or [www.ifj.org](http://www.ifj.org) for more information.