



2006 Annual Report

ASIA

King Gyanendra of Nepal demonstrated in 2005 the full force of hatred a head of state can harbour towards the press. The Himalayan monarch, who is drawn to absolutism, was responsible for more than half of all recorded censorship cases worldwide. The royal administration censored news in the country's many publications and on independent radio stations a total of 567 times. Journalists who resisted him by streets demonstrations and in the courts forced him to back down to some extent. This unprecedented campaign even ended in a general strike after an independent radio had its broadcast equipment seized.

The picture in Nepal typifies the struggle throughout Asia with the old demons of totalitarianism. North Korea, a graveyard for freedom, is still in the grip of numbing propaganda from its leader Kim Jong-il. In Burma, the military tries to keep everything under control by imposing relentless advance censorship. While China, a burgeoning power, keeps its journalists in a state of servitude to bias. In Laos, journalists have been turned into bureaucrats with no chance of contradicting the line of the sole ruling party.

But Asia is also a region of democracy. India is a fine example of pluralism of information. Tens of thousands of privately-owned dailies, radio and TV stations provide news for a billion inhabitants in ever greater freedom. Indonesia is also a land of freedoms, but few media yet risk in-depth investigation into the corruption that is undermining the country. New Zealand is flourishing at the head of Asian countries in the World Press Freedom Index established yearly by Reporters Without Borders, while many Australian journalists feel themselves under threat from a draft anti-terror law introduced by the government in September 2005. Journalists would be at risk of penalties of up to five years in prison if they cover a police operation or speak about the detention of a suspect under the law without permission.

In South Korea, despite a new law on newspapers that imposes a duty of "social responsibility" on the media, the government respects pluralism. In Taiwan, President Chen Shui-bian has given way to the temptation to impose some controls on opposition media. But the right to inform the public on the island, threatened by a forced reunification by Beijing, remains a reality.

JOURNALISM NOT WELCOMED

From Kabul to Bangkok, press freedom was violated in 2005 by elected leaders, incapable of accepting criticism or that the law should be paramount. Afghan President Hamid Karzai has allowed the editor of a women's magazine to languish in jail for nearly three months, accused of blasphemy by the conservative judiciary. In Thailand, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who is allergic to criticism, has lodged multiple defamation suits, both criminal and civil, against independent journalists and press freedom activists. In Indonesia, the press group *Tempo* is being harassed by businessman Tomy Winata who is trying to obtain a hefty sum in damages.

India is gradually consolidating its position as the Asian press freedom giant. The diversity of its media, both written and broadcast, is matched by a zeal for investigative journalism. This year a privately-owned TV channel brought down around a score of deputies after trapping them in a corruption case. While the country's 40,000 newspapers play a vital role in the exposure of abuses and social problems. However, violence in Kashmir and the north-eastern states makes work difficult for many reporters.

Its neighbour Pakistan remains attracted to control and censorship. Omnipresent military secret services continue to harass investigative journalists, while the Urdu-language press is closely watched. Under an onslaught from the Jihadists, the president, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, has stepped up pressure on the most radical media. At the same time he has closed an FM radio accused of relaying a BBC World Service Programme on last October's earthquake.

The Afghan press has been given a rough ride. On one side, the Taliban have stepped up attacks on the media. A young radio journalist died when he was blown up by a mine and the presenter of a religious programme was seriously injured. On the other side, the conservatives, linked to the president of the Supreme Court, hound the independent press with fatwas and threats, particularly the privately-owned *Tolo TV*, winner of a 2005 Reporters Without Borders - Fondation de France press freedom award.

In Bangladesh, Jihadist terror has been added to the already serious existing threats. At least 55 press correspondents have been the target of harassment for articles deemed "non Islamic". Militants of the

ruling parties are not to be outdone. Engaging in threats, beatings, burnings and abusive judicial complaints, deputies and ministers will go to any lengths to silence the press.

The return of tension in Sri Lanka, where a covert state of war exists, has struck a hard blow at Tamil journalists, targets of groups both favourable and opposed to the Colombo government. Media that carry out investigations, like *The Sunday Leader*, have suffered constant threats and bombings.

In Bhutan, the king announced that he wanted to abdicate in favour of his son after the first democratic elections set for 2008. In the meantime, the royal administration authorised the foundation of private publications. Other kingdoms like the Sultanate of Brunei and Tonga, have little time for an independent press.

WIND OF CHANGE STILLED IN CHINA

China, a "cancer on the democratic body" in Asia, has piled up mass violations of freedom of expression. The political police have attacked Chinese journalists working for foreign media. Zhao Yan, 2005 Reporters Without Borders laureate, and Ching Cheong face the death penalty based on unfounded charges. President Hu Jintao and the Department of Publicity (formerly propaganda) have continued to crack down on the liberal media. After taking on the Nanfang press group in Guangdong, the communist party turned its fire on the daily *Beijing News*. At the same time, Internet censorship was rationalised, with the resolve to purge the web of any news of social unrest. As one editor put it: The government gives us permission to "entertain and to encourage consumption". Despite promises to the contrary, foreign correspondents are still tightly controlled when they raise sensitive issues. Police have manhandled at least 16 of them.

Hong Kong and Macao still benefit from their special status, even though issues considered sensitive for Beijing are avoided by a press that is mainly owned by press groups that invest elsewhere in China. The editor of an independent newspaper in Hong Kong was the victim of a mysterious murder attempt.

The press enjoys relatively good conditions in Mongolia, even though the public media are tightly controlled by the government. In Japan, freelance journalists and foreign correspondents suffer from discrimination by the "kisha" clubs.

17 JOURNALISTS MURDERED

For the third year in succession, the Philippines, with seven murders, ranked after Iraq on the sad list of the world's most dangerous countries for the press. Despite the arrest and conviction of some killers, particularly the police officer who murdered Edgar Damalerio in 2002, journalists are always at risk when they expose corruption or trafficking.

Similarly, in Bangladesh (2), Sri Lanka (2), Nepal (2) and Pakistan (2), press killings have been perpetuated because of a climate of impunity. In Bangladesh, two provincial correspondents for national media were murdered. In Sri Lanka, the renowned Tamil journalist Sivaram, head of the online site tamilnet.com, was murdered in Colombo in April. He knew he was under threat because of his coverage of the political-military situation. Relangi Sevaraja, presenter of a TV programme critical of the Tamil Tigers was shot down in a street in the capital. No group admitted responsibility for these murders and the police have never identified those responsible. In Nepal, the editor of a local newspaper was murdered because of his articles about businessmen. Another journalist died in prison for lack of proper medical treatment. Two reporters working for western media were killed in Pakistan in an ambush in the tribal area of South Waziristan in which the *AFP* correspondent was wounded. Taliban groups and the security forces blamed the other for the killings.

A constant barrage of death threats and physical attacks make life impossible for hundreds of journalists. Threats arrived by text message in the Philippines, while in Bangladesh, armed groups send duly stamped letters to journalists and press clubs. The 583 cases of physical attack and threats in Asia represented more than half the cases of this kind recorded throughout the world in 2005.

The authorities and businessmen increasingly use defamation cases to try to restore their good name after the publication of compromising investigations or to hamstring media that are too free. Less serious than violence, this new tendency in Asia is however no less a threat to the right to inform the public. In

the overwhelming majority of countries, prison sentences are imposed for defamation cases. In Singapore, journalists and opposition figures live in fear of being ordered to pay swingeing amounts in damages.

Big gaps have opened up in Asia when it comes to press freedom. The continent has still not rid itself of the most authoritarian heads of state, but journalists, who are often in the front line in the fight for democracy, have this year demonstrated how much they care about their duty to keep the public informed.

Vincent Brossel
Head of Asia desk

AFGHANISTAN

The Afghan media played a crucial role in the run-up to September 2005 legislative elections, the first since the fall of the Taliban. At the same time, there was an escalation of violence and harassment towards the press throughout the country. A young reporter was killed and a score of others assaulted.

Religious conservatives, who stress the "Islamic" nature of the 2004 Constitution, attempt to silence all critical voices. In this way, editor of the magazine *Haqq-e-Zan* (Women's Rights) Ali Mohaqiq Nasab was sentenced by a court in Kabul to two years in prison after being found guilty of blasphemy at a biased trial after carrying articles condemning archaic practices such as stoning.

The Supreme Court and the Council of the Ulemas, both bastions of conservatism, are the main bodies resisting the emergence of pluralism in news and information. Throughout the year, they have campaigned against cable television, the Internet and women journalists. In March the President of the Supreme Court, Fazl Hadi Shinwari, demanded a ban on TV stations deemed anti-Islamic, particularly the privately-run terrestrial *Tolo TV*, winner of a 2005 Reporters Without

Borders – Fondation de France press freedom award.

For their part, the Taliban, who are very active in the south-east, secretly re-launched *The Voice of the Sharia*, the sole radio that had been allowed to operate under their regime. Supporters of Mullah Omar and some warlords' henchmen struck at members of the press. A young reporter was killed in a bomb attack, while the presenter of a religious programme escaped a murder attempt and several offices housing media were blown up.

Although these attacks have not forced the Afghan media to drop its forthright tone, the upsurge in violence has hampered coverage of news, particularly in some regions. Moreover, the jumpiness of the international armed forces, particularly the Americans, has made the job of foreign and Afghan reporters even more difficult.

In a country in which nearly 65 % of the population is illiterate, TV and radio have strategic importance. There are now at least 59 FM radio stations, while the written press has been weakened by constant financial problems. Many publications are financially dependant on political parties, NGOs or religious groups.

AUSTRALIA

The re-election of conservative John Howard as prime minister was immediately followed by the preparation of new laws that could turn out to be a threat to freedom. The anti-terror law proposed by the government in September 2005 bans coverage of a police operation, referring to the detention of a suspect or invoking protection of sources in terrorism cases. Journalists face prison sentences of up to five years for violating the new law.

Australia does have a pluralist press, despite recurrent problems of media concentration, but it is also facing the challenges to press freedom inherent in a democracy.

Two journalists on the *Herald Sun* are at risk of prison for refusing to reveal their sources. Several reporters were prevented from investigating conditions in prisons and detention camps for asylum-seekers.

BANGLADESH

A wave of Islamist and Maoist bombings struck a harsh blow against a country already mired in endemic political violence. Once again this year the press was not spared. Three journalists were killed and at least 95 physically attacked. The ruling conservative alliance accuses the independent press of every ill.

The government – an alliance of conservatives and Islamists - which for a long time played down the presence in the country of Jihadist groups, has been forced to recognise the extent of the danger. After a series of suicide bombings against judges, police officers and journalists, the Interior Minister Lutfuzzaman Babar acknowledged that it represented a “challenge”. However it was this minister and his predecessor who led a crackdown against journalists and human rights activities who were investigating this new threat.

Elsewhere, 55 news correspondents were singled out for harassment for writing articles considered “non Islamic” by armed groups. Militants of ruling parties were also not to be outdone. Engaging in

threats, beatings, burnings and abusive judicial complaints, deputies and ministers will go to any lengths to silence the press. Threats forced more than 70 journalists to flee their local areas during the year.

Despite the violence and harassment, the media, particularly the national dailies, continue to investigate the corruption and nepotism that undermine society. Outside of the *BBC World Service*, there are few independent FM radio stations. The country has four privately-owned TV channels, but keeping their licences depends on their demonstrating a certain compliance with the government.

Violence against the press is particularly virulent in the south-western Khulna region where Maoist armed groups attack “class enemies”. Two journalists were murdered there in 2005.

Journalists themselves are not exempt from criticism, particularly over the politicisation of some media and corruption linked to the low salaries journalists receive.

BURMA

Burma's generals for mysterious reasons transferred the country's capital to Pyinmana, an isolated city in the mountains near the centre of the country. But the junta renewed its attacks against the democratic movement, by keeping Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest and several thousand political prisoners, including renowned journalist Win Tin, in prison.

Seven journalists had sentences reduced during the wave of prison releases in January and July 2005. Among them was Sein Hla Oo, detained in harsh conditions for nearly 11 years. On the other hand, Win Tin whose name appeared on a list of those freed was not released by the authorities, apparently wary of the influence of this close adviser to Aung San Suu Kyi, sentenced to 20 years in jail. The 75-year-old has not been allowed to read or write in his prison cell in Insein jail for the past 16 years.

Burma is also a paradise for censors. Scissors in hand, the agents of the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division check every article, editorial, cartoon, advertisement and illustration ahead of

publication. In 2005, they even began going through death notices placed in Burmese newspapers. They strike out all references to the United Nations, accused of wanting to overthrow the government. More seriously, the authorities censor all independent news on the bird flu epidemic. Diplomats in the region are concerned that there is a blackout of information on this H5N1 virus.

In Burma, a journalist can earn a seven year prison sentence simply for having an unauthorised fax, video camera, modem or a copy of a banned publication. It is also forbidden to watch Burma's top independent channel *DVB TV*, which is broadcast from Norway by satellite.

International pressure on Burma has increased the paranoia of the military government that has ruled since 1988. On the occasion of the national day holiday at the end of November, Gen. Than Shwe urged his compatriots to be "extremely vigilant", because the western powers were trying to dominate others through the media and human rights. The number of visas issued to foreign journalists was drastically cut back in 2005.

CAMBODIA

It was a bad year for press freedom. Prime Minister Hun Sen, who likes to dismiss journalists as “frog hunters”, attacked the most critical voices. The head of government harassed journalists who investigated the signing of a controversial border agreement with Vietnam.

The arrest in October 2005 of Mam Sonando, head of one of the country's very few independent radio stations, provided a signal about the intentions of the government. Accused of having defamed the prime minister in an interview with a French-based opposition figure on the border question, the founder of *Sombok Khmum* (Beehive FM 105), faces charges of

“broadcasting false reports” and “incitement to a crime”. As of 1st January 2006, Mam Sonando was still in prison and suffering harsh conditions.

After this, associates of Hun Sen threatened to have arrested two correspondents for international radios *Voice of America* and *Radio Free Asia*, who were forced to flee the country.

In 2005, *Radio France Internationale*, in particular its programmes in the Khmer language, was allowed to broadcast in the capital on FM. Meanwhile, the French-language daily *Cambodge Soir* celebrated its tenth anniversary.

CHINA

Faced with growing social unrest, the government has chosen to impose a news blackout. The press has been forced into self-censorship, the Internet purged and foreign media kept at a distance.

Arrests of journalists, particularly Chinese contributors to foreign media, continued in 2005. Ching Cheong, a Hong Kong reporter with a Singapore daily was imprisoned for "espionage". While Zhao Yan, contributor to the *New York Times*, winner of a 2005 Reporters Without Borders - Fondation de France press freedom award, is to be tried for "disclosing state secrets". In Tibet, five monks were arrested for working on an underground publication, while in Muslim Xinjiang, the editor of a literary magazine was sentenced to three years in prison. As of 1st January 2006, at least 32 journalists were in prison throughout the country.

Every day, Chinese editors receive a list of banned subjects from the Propaganda Department, renamed the Publicity Department. These include demonstrations by peasants, the unemployed or Tibetans - nothing escapes the censors who stoke up a climate of fear within editorial offices. When the army opened fire on villagers in December, draconian measures were put in place: The press was banned from carrying anything but reports from the official *Xinhua* news agency, foreign reporters were persona non grata in the region and every reference to the village was erased from the Internet.

In the same way, the announcement of the death of former prime minister Zhao Ziyang, ousted in

1989, was banned by the government, his name missing from television, discussion forums and search engines. In December the press was banned from publishing a single word on the death in exile of journalist Liu Binyan, dubbed the "conscience of China".

At least 16 foreign journalists were arrested by police in 2005 while investigating sensitive issues. China has given no promises to guarantee their freedom to work ahead of the 2008 Olympic Games.

Television and radio are subjected to even greater control than the written press. The propaganda department imposed sanctions on *Guangdong TV* presenters seen as exercising too much freedom. Foreign channels are not accessible to most citizens and are censored if they refer to human rights, Taiwan or the Falungong spiritual movement.

One newspaper editor put it like this: The government gives us permission to "entertain and to promote consumption". It is precisely in these sectors that foreign press groups are permitted to invest. Despite promises announced when it joined the World Trade Organisation, China has never opened its market to foreign news media.

Journalists remain free in Hong Kong, although a poll revealed that nearly half the population believes they operate self-censorship. The authorities have so far proved incapable of clearing up a murder attempt with a letter bomb against the editor of the daily *Ming Pao*.

EAST TIMOR

The government of Mari Alkatiri, visibly angered by media independence, tried to bring the privately-owned daily *Suara Timor Lorosae* in line in February by calling for a boycott of the newspaper and evicting it from its offices.

In December, the prime minister initiated a reform of the criminal code, penalising press offences. Journalists will face up to three years in prison for

defamation of anyone in a public authority role, a backward step that was condemned by many journalists. This tougher line came after various voices were raised to condemn poor governance of the country. In 2005, the bishop of Dili said that the country was mired in corruption and lack of openness. President Xanana Gusmao and the UN tried to defuse tensions between the authorities and the press, but without much success so far.

INDIA

The media, particularly new media, has been able to take advantage of a favourable climate for press freedom to boost its development. In regions shaken by armed separatist or Maoist movements, journalists are regularly caught in the crossfire.

Around a dozen deputies were forced to resign in December after being filmed by journalists on the privately-owned TV station, *Aaj Tak*, in the act of accepting bribes. The investigative press remains marginalised, but is not afraid to tilt at the powerful.

After years of protectionism, the government in New Delhi has allowed foreign press groups to buy shares in Indian media. A sprinkling of licences has also been granted to private radios.

In Kashmir, despite the ongoing peace process, the violence has still not ended. Around a score of reporters have been physically attacked by police during 2005. At least five others have been wounded in blind bomb attacks by radical separatists. The editor of the daily *The Great Kashmir* has been the victim of judicial harassment by the local authorities.

In Andhra Pradesh state in the country's south-east, the government has launched an offensive against Maoist groups. N. Venugopal, editor of a regional bi-monthly, spent two weeks in prison on the basis of unproven accusations of intellectual support for this armed movement,

Journalists who may have covered Maoist activities can be jailed for up to three years, under a security order passed in the neighbouring state of Chhattisgarh.

INDONESIA

Despite his statements in support of press freedom, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono took no serious steps to act on them. On the contrary, the penalties laid down by the criminal code for press offences were strengthened and a new anti-terror law gave far-reaching powers to the security forces.

Although relatively secure from the violence that scars the country, the press still had to contend with an escalation in defamation claims. Two journalists on a weekly on the island of Sumatra were imprisoned for nine months. Despite a recommendation from the president of the Supreme Court, the magistrates prefer to try journalists under the criminal code rather than under the more liberal press law.

Businessmen and politicians sometimes mobilise crowds of supporters to harass the media. Sulawesi island's main daily, *Radar Sulteng*, was forced to suspend publication in June 2005 after several thousand people demonstrated in front of its offices.

The government started a reform of the criminal code to include heavier prison sentences for press offences, particularly defamation and disclosing state secrets. Security forces were given new powers, especially monitoring of communications in response to terror attacks by Jemaah Islamiya. A number of sources confirmed that this surveil-

lance was frequently extended to the Jakarta-based foreign press.

The earthquake and tsunami that devastated Aceh, in the north of Sumatra, in December 2004, paradoxically led to the province being opened up to the foreign press. Despite some restrictions imposed by the army, which resulted in around six journalists being arrested or expelled, the international spotlight broke a news blackout in the region that had lasted more than one year. The media in Aceh, particularly the daily *Serambi Indonesia*, raised their profile by providing information to survivors of the tsunami about the aid provided by international organisations and the government.

Further, the August 2005 peace agreement between the government and the guerrillas in Aceh had beneficial effects for press freedom, as the media were less and less targeted by the security forces and the separatists.

In a country, mired in corruption, the press has not been spared. The Alliance of Independent Journalists (AIJ) launched a campaign against corruption within the profession in December. It accused officials and companies of earmarking funds to buy positive reports and accused colleagues of practising "envelope journalism". For its part, the government once again postponed adoption of a law on access to information that would make it easier for the press to investigate corruption.

LAOS

Nothing changes in Laos. The press, under the direct control of the Ministry of Information and Culture, serves up the propaganda of the sole party. Only the English-language Vientiane Times and French-language Le Rénovateur occasionally carry news that diverges from the official line. A majority of the people gets its news from Thai or international radio that put out programmes in Lao.

The security forces try to stop the foreign press from coming into contact with the isolated groups of Hmong guerrillas. A report put out in 2005 by

France 2 produced a wave of sympathy for these peoples who have been decimated by the Laos army. Broadcast of this programme by TV5 was interrupted in Laos.

Two Hmong are still imprisoned in Vientiane for having served as guides in 2003 to Belgian journalist Thierry Falise and French cameraman Vincent Reynaud. Thao Moua and Pa Phue Khang were sentenced on 30 June 2003 for “obstructing justice” and “possession of arms” after a trial condemned as unfair by Amnesty International to 12 and 20 years in prison.

MALDIVES

Faced with demonstrations for political and social change, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom chose to react with force, using police crackdowns and news censorship. In this climate, democratic leader and journalist Mohamed Nasheed was arrested a few weeks after his return from exile. The management of the daily *Minivan*, launched in July 2005 by people close to the Maldivian Democratic Party, have suffered repeated lawsuits and arrests.

The sentencing of journalist Jennifer Latheef to ten years in prison marked a new stage in a crackdown against the opposition press. *Minivan*, which employed her, was forced to appear in August in photocopied form after its printer was threatened

by the security services. Previously two of its journalists and a photographer were arrested. In total, five journalists on *Minivan* are facing some kind of legal action. An arrest warrant has been issued against the editor Aminath Najeeb.

During legislative elections in January, government media, especially the *Voice of the Maldives*, only allocated a very small amount of space to the opposition. The leading newspaper, *Haveeru*, is controlled by the former minister for youth and sport. The daily *Aafathis* is owned by the brother-in-law of President Gayoom, while the third daily, *Miadhudaily*, is directly controlled by the head of state. Information minister, Ahmed Abdullah, heads the editorial team.

NEPAL

With his coup on 1st February 2005, King Gyanendra tried to forcibly erase 15 years of press freedom. But the independent media, although severely censored and harassed, put up a resistance. For their part, the Maoists continued their policy of intimidating journalists who condemn their abuses.

On 1st February 2005, the king, tempted by a return to absolute monarchy, declared total war against the press. The army invaded newspaper offices to impose censorship and FM radios were banned from putting out any news. The government also cut all communications. The lifting of the state of emergency at the end of April did not really improve the situation. In 2005, Nepal was alone responsible for more than half of all cases of censorship worldwide. Reporters Without Borders counted 567 instances, while 145 journalists were physically attacked or harassed.

Faced with censorship and mass sackings, the media community showed great courage, demonstrating almost every day, despite a crackdown by the security forces. On 16 September alone, 87 journalists were arrested, around a score of whom were clubbed by police. A general strike was called at the end of October after police raided the offices of independent radio *Kantipur FM*.

The government used every possible means to try to bring the privately-owned press to its knees, including interfering with editorial independence (Some 15 journalists were sacked under pressure), unfair allocation of public advertising, increases in franking costs for newspapers, disruption of distribution, threats of non-renewal of TV and radio licences and so on.

The media defended their rights before the courts. The Supreme Court found in favour of press freedom, demanding the release of journalists and defending the right of radio stations to put out the news. On the other hand, the same court approved a new media law, promulgated in October that set up tight controls on journalistic work and media ownership. Fines for defamation were multiplied by ten.

Journalists were particularly exposed in zones held by Maoists, making up almost half the country. The rebels continued to destroy media infrastructure such as public television offices near Nepalgunj, in the south. Under threat of reprisals by Maoists or the security forces, more than a dozen journalists took refuge in the cities.

NORTH KOREA

In 2005, the government invited a handful of foreign journalists to cover the national team's qualifying matches for the 2006 World Football Cup. But the North Koreans still live under the yoke of propaganda devoted entirely to the personality cult of Kim Jong-il and national socialism.

Kim Jong-il features on the cover of a manual for journalism students as "the great journalism professor". It says that "the Dear Leader is always at the side of journalists and teaches them in detail how to resolve their problems. The Dear Leader encourages them to write excellent articles that win the approval of the masses."

The entire North Korean press, particularly the *Rodong Shinmun* (The Worker's Newspaper), the *Korean Central News Agency*, national television *JoongAng Bang Song*, is under the direct control of Kim Jong-il. Each journalist is indoctrinated so as to be able to render, without mistakes, the grandeur of the late president Kim Il-sung and of his son Kim Jong-il. The press is also responsible for demonstrating the superiority of North Korean socialism over bourgeois and imperialist corruption. A typing error can be very expensive: dozens of North Korean journalists are sent to "revolutionary" camps for a simple spelling mistake.

Elsewhere, Song Keum-chul, of state television was put in a concentration camp at the end of 1995, for having set up a small group of critical journalists. Nothing has been heard of him since.

The official news agency announced in November 2005 that the US network *CMN* had "dug its own grave" after broadcasting a report on human rights in North Korea, which showed a public execution. The authorities in Pyongyang threatened to ban the Atlanta-based network access to the country. On the other hand, in May a team from the American network *ABC* was given permission to film a report on economic reform.

Media headed by North Korean exiles have set up in South Korea. The online daily *Dailynk.com* and the radio *Freedom NK* do their best to provide news to their compatriots, despite the extremely limited spread of the Internet and scrambling of the airwaves.

Despite police campaigns to check radios (every radio, once sealed up, can only be tuned to official radio frequencies) a growing number of radios do enter by the Chinese border, allowing some people to listen to broadcasts from South Korean radio or to *Radio Free Asia*.

PAKISTAN

President Pervez Musharraf alternately directed his ire on the media challenging his alliance with the United States and the investigative press that exposes corruption and abuse of power. The work of journalists in the tribal zones and Kashmir remains as dangerous as ever.

In May 2005, parliament adopted contradictory amendments to the law on electronic media. They liberalised the sector, but gave the authorities the right to seize equipment, withdraw licences, initiate investigations and to make arrests without a warrant. Any infringement of the law could mean up to three years in prison. In November police applied the law, closing *Mast FM 103* radio for relaying a special programme on the earthquake from the Urdu service of the *BBC World Service*.

Although badly shaken by Jihadist terrorism, Pakistan has a dynamic and pluralist press. The English-language publications are freer of control than the popular Urdu newspapers. But investigative journalists are constantly targeted by military security services, which have no hesitation in harassing anyone they find troublesome. This was the case with Rashid Channa, a journalist with the daily *Star*, kidnapped for several hours in Karachi.

On the other hand, a special court in Quetta dropped charges in March against journalist Khawar Mehdi whom the army had held secretly and tortured for several weeks for having accompanied two French reporters to the Afghan border in 2003. Gen. Musharraf accused the journalist,

who was forced into exile, of having betrayed his country for a few dollars.

Two correspondents for the foreign press were killed in the tribal zones and the murder investigation has gone nowhere. Journalists must deal both with threats from the Taliban and the surveillance and the obstruction of the military. In December, a correspondent for two national dailies was abducted in mysterious circumstances in Waziristan, after he contradicted the official version of the death of an al-Qaeda leader.

The local press operates with difficulty in Kashmir, which was shaken by a major earthquake on 8 October 2005. After largely facilitating access for hundreds of Pakistani and foreign journalists, the army in December imposed restrictions on the movement of reporters and a *BBC* team was sent back from a remote region.

More generally, the authorities take a dim view of investigations by foreign journalists. In August, three film-makers, two Swedes and one Briton of Afghan origin, were held for two weeks for filming near a military base. Despite a thaw in relations with India, a journalist from New Delhi was expelled in July.

Confronted by a radical press that fosters jihadism, the authorities launched a major operation in Karachi in July to shut down hate media. But searches and arrests also affected less radical journalists.

PHILIPPINES

Journalists in the Philippines pay a high price for their outspokenness, with the year marked by seven murders and as many murder attempts. Despite throwing more resources into the battle against this violence, the government is struggling to rebuild confidence. President Gloria Arroyo, weakened by a series of scandals, tried to stop the press from doing its job of safe-guarding democracy.

Former police officer Guillermo Wapile was on 29 November 2005 sentenced to life imprisonment for the 2002 murder of journalist Edgar Damalerio. This triumph over impunity was overshadowed by the murder three days later of young radio journalist George Benaogan on Cebu island.

After Iraq, the Philippines is the most dangerous country for journalists. They are murdered, as was Marlene Esperat in March, for investigating corruption, but also for their forthright criticism of local authorities. The journalist Philip Agustin was shot down on the orders of the mayor of Dingalan who had had enough of his attacks.

These murders are often preceded by text message threats or the sending of macabre packages. The publisher of a political magazine, Glenda Gloria, had a funeral wreath delivered to her home in August with the message, "From your faithful friends".

Politicians and officials exposed by the local press use other less radical methods to silence their critics. In 2005, at least five journalists, including Raffy Tulfo, writer of the "Shoot to kill" section of a local newspaper, were given prison sentences for defamation. Elsewhere four media were closed, like *dxVR FM* radio which had its licence withdrawn in July by the mayor of a town on Mindanao island.

Grappling with communist and Islamist guerrillas, the government, under pressure from the army, included a ban on press interviews with "terrorist groups" in its controversial anti-terror legislation.

SINGAPORE

More than a year after coming to power, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, son of the country's strong man, Lee Kuan Yew, had not begun any liberalisation of the media. Despite statements in support of an "open" society, the ruling party still does not brook any criticism.

Questioned by the international press about Singapore's position in the 2005 World Press Freedom Index (140th out of 167), senior minister Goh Chok Tong called it a "subjective measure computed through the prism of western liberals". He also defended the Singapore model for controlling the media, saying that a press that was too free was "not necessarily good for the entire country".

Relatively independent for regional and international news, when it comes to domestic politics Singapore's press, still controlled by associates of Lee Kuan Yew, is in the grip of a rigorous self-censorship. The government threatens journalists, foreign media and opposition with defamation suits seeking dizzying amounts in damages.

The government uses around a score of draconian laws, particularly those on the granting of licences for publications, on films, religious and political website managers and on national security, to stifle any criticism.

Freelance film-maker Martyn See was accused of breaking the law on films by putting out a "partisan" documentary, "Singapore Rebel", a portrait of an opposition figure Chee Soon Juan. In August police seized all copies of the film and the videotapes on which it was recorded. The film puts See at risk of a penalty of up to two years in prison or a fine of almost 500,000 euros.

In 2005, Hong Kong-based financial website FinanceAsia.com, apologised and agreed to pay compensation after the authorities threatened a lawsuit against it over an article it posted on a Singaporean investment company with links to the government.

SOUTH KOREA

Besides the adoption, in July 2005, of a new law containing repressive articles that impose “social responsibility” on the media, Roh Moo-hyun’s government carried out no major offensive against the press.

Accused of every ill by supporters of the president, the conservative press, represented by the three dailies *Chosun Ilbo*, *Dong-a Ilbo* and *JoongAng Ilbo*, were particularly targeted by the new press law. Forced to set up internal “publication committees” of salaried staff and to reform their sales arrangements, these papers continue to more or less dominate the market.

In July the TV station *MBC* revealed the existence of secret phone tapping during the 1990s, inclu-

ding of journalists. But the author of the scoop, Lee Sang-ho, found himself summoned by the prosecutor’s office for violating the privacy of those whose phones were tapped by the secret services.

The case did however confirm that the secret services regularly mount surveillance on journalists. In August, the management of the daily *MoonHwa Ilbo* complained that its journalists’ phones were being tapped after it published an investigation into corruption within a department of the secret services.

Finally, the law on national security still allows the government to censor publications and block access to websites deemed favourable to North Korea.

SRI LANKA

The dormant war between security forces and the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) has had harmful consequences for the safety of journalists, particularly Tamils. Murders, arrests, threats and bombings have again become the daily lot for many reporters, particularly in the north and east of the country.

The election as president of left-wing nationalist, Mahinda Rajapakse, at the end of November 2005 and the appointment as prime minister of Ratnasiri Wickremanayaka, who has a radical stance on relations with the LTTE, have cast a new shadow over the peace process. During the campaign, the LTTE forced the Tamil population to boycott the poll after silencing opposing voices within the community.

Violence between Tamil factions, sometimes manipulated by the security forces, has had particularly

bloody results. The renowned Tamil journalist Dharmaratnam Sivaram "Taraki", head of the news website *TamilNet* and editorialist on the *Daily Mirror*, was gunned down in Colombo in April. After arresting one suspect, police abandoned the investigation.

Four months later, the TV presenter Relangi Sevaraja was murdered in the capital. She produced programmes that were critical of the LTTE, broadcast on a public channel.

The most independent media have not been spared. In October, arsonists attacked the printers of the press group publishing *The Sunday Leader* and *Irudina*, near Colombo. A few weeks earlier, an ultra-nationalist leftist deputy, a member of the coalition government, called the editor of the *Sunday Leader*, Lasantha Wickremetunge a "terrorist".

TAIWAN

Increasingly buffeted by the opposition, President Chen Shui-bian tried to intimidate some critical media, but Taiwan, a zone of freedom in East Asia, is blessed with a pluralist press.

In July 2005, a government body cancelled the licence of a pro-opposition TV channel *EETVS*, on the pretext that it was putting out too much news. The authorities also invoked its relaying of footage of singer Janet Jackson's bared breast at the final of

the US superbowl. In November, the government fined another pro-opposition channel *TVBS* after trying to get it shut down on the grounds that it was majority owned by foreigners.

Since journalists on the island are banned from attending all events organised by the United Nations, in particular the World Health Organisation, Taiwan, in April withdrew accreditation from two correspondents from China.

THAILAND

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who is intolerant of criticism, launched political and judicial harassment against some of the country's more independent commentators. There were at least eight cases of censorship 2005 and as many abusive defamation complaints.

A defamation trial brought by the company, Shin Corps, owned by the family of the head of government, against press freedom activist, Supinya Klangnarong, illustrated Thaksin Shinawatra's hounding of critics. Risking a prison sentence and a heavy fine, Supinya Klangnarong demonstrated to the judge that all he had done was point up a conflict of interests for Thaksin as head of government and of a company.

In September, family members of the prime minister, unleashed another offensive against press owner, Sondhi Limthongkul. After getting his political talk show pulled from the programmes of a national channel, several defamation complaints were lodged against him. Limthongkul hit back against his old ally, Thaksin, through people power and with the support of the King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who wields great power in the country,

managed to get the prime minister to back down and cancel his court actions.

Infuriated by its critics, the government in June closed two community radios and blocked several critical websites. Fm9225.com, which puts out several radio programmes online, was accused of endangering "the country's unity and security". All this without any legal basis.

Confronted by a bloody rebellion in the Muslim-majority south, the government swung between crackdown and dialogue. The press was not really directly affected, but the adoption of emergency law in July gave the security forces the right to monitor all communications and to censor news.

Two journalists were murdered in 2005, and police proved themselves unable to uncover either the motives or the perpetrators of the crimes. In the south, a journalist who was fiercely critical of some local figures was killed in February. The editor of a newspaper was murdered in November in the tourist centre of Pattaya. His colleagues said he had been threatened after publishing reports on prostitution rings.

VIETNAM

One section of the press does its best to push at the limits of censorship imposed by the sole party, at times to its cost. In January an investigative monthly was closed. In July a new law was adopted to bring the online press to heel.

The old guard of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) is unrelenting: it still considers the media to be propaganda organs. The official newspapers praise the party's actions and laud the virtues of socialism. While a more liberal press, including the daily *Tuoi Tre* (Youth), covers social issues, political self-censorship still holds sway in newsrooms. In 2005, a journalist on *Tuoi Tre* was accused of divulging state secrets for having copied an official memo about illegal practices in a pharmaceutical company.

At the start of the year, the Culture and Information ministry closed the monthly *Nha Bao va Cong Luan*, which in its first numbers challenged powerful figures. An article on popular discontent about a tourist development provoked the authorities' particular anger.

But the security apparatus concentrated its crackdown on the Internet, seen as a tool of economic development but also as a means of spreading "reactionary" ideas. At least six cyberdissidents and Internet-users were still imprisoned in the country on 1st January 2006. The government, in July 2005, stepped up its controls of cybercafés.