With the same conviction
Pierre Veilletet

THE 2003 GLOBAL PRESS FREEDOM WORLD TOUR

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PREDATORS OF PRESS FREEDOM 44
that travesty of justice in Havana. If God and Stalin are together somewhere, what would they say? No one, perhaps not even they expected to witness such a grotesque and sinister farce again, one not seen since those cold war films, which back then, of course, were said to reflect “crude anti-communism.”

Even if it means being accused of crude anti-Castroism, you have to recognise that the old methods have been recycled in the tropics in 2003: sentences ranging from six to 28 years in prison! Not for exercising the universal right to free speech, since that scarcely exists in Cuba anyway, but just for being suspected of wanting to exercise it one day.

Unfortunately, 2003 has engraved other images on our memory. As all the TV stations in the world showed it over and again, you will remember the US tanks stopping on a bridge in Baghdad and suddenly opening fire on the Palestine Hotel which, as the same TV stations had already told us at great length, was housing a large number of reporters. Apparently the gunner and the officer who authorised the shelling were one of the few not to know. What level of ignorance can you have in a general staff? A painstaking investigation carried out by Jean-Paul Mari at the request of Reporters Without Borders picked the case apart and did it objectively. In addition to the report, there is the complaint filed in Spain by cameraman José Couso’s widow and Reporters Without Borders. Our organisation now has a team of jurists, and this unprecedented legal appeal against a “military error” – to use the evasive euphemism provided for public opinion – shows how determined we are that our role should not longer be limited to sounding the alarm and issuing condemnations. We also want to demand reparations whenever it can be proved that a crime has been committed. Because if the murderers feel protected, their impunity will bring out this vocation in others and our work would be incomplete if we did not attend to the needs of the victims’ families.

THE LITANY OF DEATH CONTINUES

Every year, we would like to be able to announce to you that the sad litany is finally beginning to decrease. But this will not be the case for 2003, a black year if ever there was one. More than 120 journalists are still imprisoned and 42 were killed, mainly in Asia and the Middle East (in the Iraq war), compared with 25 in 2002. Moreover, all of the other so-called “indicators” have increased notably: 766 journalists detained, at least 1,460 physically attacked or threatened, and 501 news media censored. To this we should add the many other signs that are harder to quantify. We will return to them because they point to a worrying evolution in retaliatory methods.

Africa? The death of Jean Hélène was unfortunately not isolated. Covering a war is proving to be more and more dangerous, and armed conflicts persist in many countries. Moreover, in Paul Biya’s Cameroon, Omar Bongo’s Gabon, Lansana Conté’s Guinea, Obiang Nguema’s Equatorial Guinea, Paul Kagame’s Rwanda, Gnassingbé Eyadéma’s Togo and Robert Mugabe’s Zimbabwe, journalists must face the wrath of aging regimes clinging to power and protective of their authority. They all balk at liberalisation, especially when broadcasting is involved. Indeed, independent news media are becoming scarce throughout Africa and journalists continue to flee with a heavy heart.
In Asia, the dictatorships have the biggest prisons in the world for journalists who refuse to give up. At least 200 journalists were jailed – and in many cases tortured – in Asia last year. In Nepal for example and in Burma, where one of the few outsiders to enter the prison world described it as a “real hell.” No one needs reminding that North Korea has no idea what press diversity is and China discourages anything that is not propaganda. What could be called “judicial harassment” prevails almost everywhere. Tried and tested forms of this can be found in Turkey, despite a slight relaxation aimed at improving the country’s image for the European Union, and in former Soviet bloc republics such as the relentless Azerbaijan (with more than 100 physical attacks on journalists), Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan – countries with absolute censorship.

The war in Iraq has not improved press freedom or the safety of journalists in the Middle East, where it is now well established that Iran stands out for its brutality. The murder of photographer Zahra Kazemi on 10 July in Tehran’s Evine prison was the most outrageous evidence of that. Encouraging signs of emancipation in Sudan and the Maghreb have been resisted by the old absolutist reflexes of control at all levels and mistrust at all times.

As for the Americas, a lopsided division endured. Press freedom is generally respected in most countries, but is violated every day in Cuba, Haiti and Colombia, which continues to be the region’s most dangerous country. Four journalists were killed there. In North America, the confidentiality of sources was too often challenged.

ACTIVISM REVIVES HOPES

So, it was undeniably a bad year, especially if examined in detail. But to you in particular, to those of you who accompany us and who have perhaps been supporting us for some time by buying these books of photographs, which help finance our activity, we owe you more than this grim catalogue and the regret that it inspires. That could give the impression that we are giving in to despair, and it is not so. On the contrary, we reiterate our enduring conviction that it is the positive side of the balance sheet that should dictate what we do.

Our priority in this area is still support for journalists in prison and news media in difficulty. It is financed from the sale of books of photographs, calendars and a few other activities. In other words, we are talking about your support. It enabled us to make 130 grants in the form of direct assistance to the families of imprisoned journalists, payment of medical bills and payment of legal fees. The countries where we have given this kind of help include Cuba, Burma, Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire, China, Haiti and Vietnam.

How can we give way to discouragement when this kind of activism, these efforts – sometime unseen but always tenacious – revive hopes? All the more so when they lead to victory on one front or another. And that’s how we view the release of Moroccan journalist Ali Lmrabet, as a victory. Lmrabet was condemned to three years in prison for lèse-majesté in a cartoon, for an irreverent drawing of the king! The Reporters Without Borders-Fondation de France 2003 laureate was finally freed in January 2004, after seven months in prison.

These activities would not take place without the basis on which they are built, that is to say, the work of our (extraordinary) researchers, who gather information about press freedom violations, analyse and interpret them, and always try to get to the bottom of matters, often to the point of conducting fact-finding visits for further investigation in the field. The findings from
Frontal, bloody repression is deliberately being replaced by insidious, apparently legal harassment, economic pressures and protection of personal privacy, to mislead public opinion. In short, they continue to hound journalists, but they are doing it with more finesse.

SOME WRONGDOERS GET MORE CUNNING

Our various press and communications operations are more visible but they have the same goal – to rip apart the veil of silence and combat the resignation or indifference that might otherwise take hold. These poster, advertising and video campaigns, which you may remember, are made possible by various partnerships (with the Saatchi & Saatchi agency and the Benetton group research centre, Fabrica, for example). They are designed to alert the public, sometimes in a deliberately eye-catching fashion, to subjects dear to us: “Journalists killed” ... “Year of Algeria” ... Libya (a side-effect of which was our grotesque suspension from the UN Commission on Human Rights) ... and “Cuba si, Castro no.” The Cuba campaign, which is still under way, included an unforgettable evening in a parisian theatre on 29 September.

What else? June saw a second “Star photos,” sponsored by Sophie Marceau. We inaugurated the first and only “House of Journalists” in Paris in December, offering a place where exiled journalists can stay. This beautiful project by Danièle Ohayon and Philippe Spinau was turned into reality with a major contribution from Reporters Without Borders.

As I conclude this evaluation, which necessarily has gaps, I see the need to underline a constant and point out a significant evolution. The constant? That press freedom is all the more threatened where there is either too much political authority (too many potentates of all kinds) or where there is too little, so that the rule of law gives way to violence. And the evolution? Not that the enemies of the press seem to be fewer or less determined. But that, aside from a few pathological cases that are well known to us, the wrongdoers are becoming more cunning. Frontal, bloody repression is deliberately being replaced by insidious, apparently legal harassment, economic pressures, protection of personal privacy, every kind of diversion including goodwill gestures to mislead public opinion. In short, they continue to hound journalists, but they are doing it with more finesse.

Finally, it unfortunately seems that the prevailing intolerance encourages manifestations of tension of every kind. Bans or threats to publicity campaigns, shows, books and films, live TV broadcasts with delayed transmission, self-censorship, compulsive recourse to lawsuits and prosecutions at the least wrong word, outrage made to order, oratorical prudence and rhetorical hypocrisy – isn’t free expression in the process of losing ground?

We obviously need to reflect more on this and seek appropriate responses. This means our work is not over. What more do we need to be roused to further action?

Pierre Veilletet
President, Reporters Without Borders - France
2003 was not a particularly good year for press freedom in Africa. Two journalists were killed in Côte d’Ivoire and a third was probably executed in Democratic Republic of Congo. There were many arrests and the independent press was in the process of disappearing in several countries.

The wars and intermittent fighting in some African countries played a major role in this decline. The dangers increased for journalists in Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia and the eastern part of Democratic Republic of Congo. The regular armies and the many rebel movements or militia operating in these countries attached growing importance to news control and posed an especial threat for both local and foreign reporters. It is becoming more and more dangerous to cover a war in Africa.

Journalists also counted among the targets of systematic repression by the aging regimes of leaders clinging to power. In Paul Biya’s Cameroon, Omar Bongo’s Gabon, Lansana Conté’s Guinea, Obiang Nguema’s Equatorial Guinea, Paul Kagame’s Rwanda, Gnassingbé Eyadéma’s Togo and Robert Mugabe’s Zimbabwe, the press was the victim of authoritarianism and a resistance to change. These leaders were increasingly intolerant towards an opposition and independent press and did everything possible to control news and information, using either strong-arms methods as in Zimbabwe, or more insidious procedures as in Gabon and Rwanda. Having had to endure the stubborn advocacy of open democratic systems by independent newspapers since the start of the 1990s, they have all dug in their heels at calls for the liberalisation of broadcasting. The state has kept a monopoly of radio and TV broadcasting in some 10 countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

The state media are closely monitored. Their journalists are subject to considerable pressure from their superiors and government officials. Several journalists are unfairly dismissed each year for not toeing the line set by the minister in charge of the media. In Swaziland, for example, the staff of the state radio and TV broadcaster are not allowed to interview the opposition or criticise the king, on pain of instant dismissal. In Zimbabwe, the state-owned press takes its orders from the powerful information minister, Jonathan Moyo, and has no compunction about launching blistering attacks on the privately-owned media. In many countries, the state radio and television are especially subservient and biased in favour of the ruling party during election campaigns.

PRESS DIVERSITY UNDER THREAT

The independent press is an endangered species in Africa. Worrying examples include the closure of The Daily News in Zimbabwe, the closure of several news media in Gabon, the continuing ban on any privately-owned press in Eritrea, the harassment of the only opposition newspaper in Djibouti and the censorship that was temporarily imposed on radio stations in Burundi and Chad. As well as direct, brutal censorship, more subtle methods were also used to silence discordant voices. Opposition newspapers were bought up by the government, others were created by the same rulers to give the impression of press diversity and the governments of several countries withdrew advertising from the most critical media.

The exodus of African journalists continued. Each year, more and more of them are fleeing the threats and reprisals that make their work impossible. Cameroon and Democratic Republic of Congo are gradually losing their reporters, sometimes resulting in the closure of newspapers or radio stations. At the same time, press freedom has declined in countries that
Many presidents have dug in their heels at calls for the liberalisation of broadcasting.

were traditionally cited as examples of modernity and respect for the rule of law. Free expression suffered serious setbacks in Niger and Senegal in 2003. The expulsion of RFI’s correspondent in Dakar and the closure of 10 privately-owned radio stations in Niger followed by the jailing in Niamey of one of its most famous journalists were clear signs of an increasing readiness to crack down on the press. Although less serious, the arrest of three journalists for the first time in many years in Mali served as a reminder there that press freedom can never be taken for granted.

**CONVICTIONS IN HATE MEDIA TRIAL**

The spotlight was also on hate media in 2003. For the first time since the end of World War II and the Nuremberg trials, journalists were convicted of inciting murder and violence. Three former leading journalists with Rwandan news media received sentences ranging from 35 years to life imprisonment for “inciting genocide” in 1994. These convictions by the International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda (ICTR) were the culmination of years of judicial investigation and procedure aimed at establishing the responsibility of certain radio and print media in hundreds of thousands of deaths. It was hoped these sentences would be a warning to those who continue to put out hate messages elsewhere in Africa. In Côte d’Ivoire, for example, several newspapers often cast oil on the flames, stirring up hatred towards foreigners and pitting communities against each other. Despite several calls to order by the United Nations and European Union, the situation had not improved at the end of 2003.

Nonetheless, there was one positive development. The fight against impunity bore fruit for the first time in Africa. Six people received long prison sentences in January 2003 at the end of an exemplary trial for the murder of journalist Carlos Cardoso in Mozambique. The case is worthy of note, and should serve as a model for other African countries to follow. It should also be a warning to the murderers of journalists who are still at large in Angola, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria and elsewhere that they, too, will one day have to answer for their actions.

Jean-François Juliard
News editor at Reporters Without Borders

More details, country by country, at www.rsf.org

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The exodus of African journalists continues

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Jean Hélène, 48, who had been Radio France Internationale’s correspondent in Côte d’Ivoire for several months, was shot dead outside police headquarters in Abidjan on 21 October 2003. He had gone there to interview government opponents who had just been released after several days in detention. A policeman, Sgt. Théodore Séry Dago, was charged with shooting Hélène, but he was not the only person to blame.

FOREIGN JOURNALISTS – “THE COUNTRY’S ENEMIES”

Some Ivorian news media had a major role in encouraging this hostility. The print media, in particular, kept up a constant barrage of verbal attacks, insults, baseless accusations and calls for violence, targeted above all at RFI and French journalists. Daily newspapers that support the government such as Le National, Notre Voie and L’Œil du Peuple repeatedly published attacks on these “other enemies of Côte d’Ivoire,” these “media that are the accomplices of the rebels,” these “journalists implicated in the attempted coup.” The opposition press regularly responded in kind, providing grist for the mill of the pro-government media.

“IT THINK I HAVE A SOLUTION TO ALL OF CÔTE D’IVOIRE’S PROBLEMS EXCEPT THE PROBLEM OF THE PRESS,”

President Gbagbo said

Within a few months of the start of fighting in September 2002, hostilities resumed in the news media war and, in the eyes of much of Abidjan’s population, foreign journalists became “the country’s enemies.” It was just one step from there to turning them into targets for elimination – a step that Sgt. Dago took in October 2003.

THE AUTHORITIES NEVER REACTED

Hélène had been personally singled out in the press attacks. Notre Voie, the newspaper of the ruling Ivorian Popular Front (FPI), described him as a “modern-day slaver trader” and “corrupt predator carrying out the dirty job of destroying Africa” in October 2002. The authorities never reacted to these dangerous charges despite repeated appeals from Reporters Without Borders, the European Union and the United Nations. On the contrary, in an address carried by the state radio station at the end of 2002, an FPI parliamentarian urged the country’s youth to demand an explanation from RFI and Agence France-Presse (AFP), these media that “tarnish Côte d’Ivoire.”

When asked by Reporters Without Borders in April 2003 what measures he planned to take to deal with this problem, President Laurent Gbagbo replied: “I think I have a solution to all of Côte d’Ivoire’s problems except the problem of the press.”

Nonetheless, the president must confront the issue. Calling “his” press to order would be a good way to start. The country’s other political leaders should then follow suit. To prevent any recurrence of this kind of tragic event.

For more, see www.rsf.org
There was unusual early-morning activity outside the law courts in the Abidjan business district of Plateau on 20 January. Two armoured personnel carriers took up position in front of the building while riot police assembled within the perimeter wall.

At 8 a.m., special correspondents from the major French newspapers and the few foreign correspondents still based in Abidjan arrived together at the law courts. They were welcomed by a police officer who assured them there would be no problems. “You have reserved seats, we’ll take you to them,” he said. A few yards away, a small group of Sgt. Dago’s supporters glared at the French reporters. They were wearing T-shirts that said “Séri is innocent. Free Séri Dago!”

**SGT. DAGO PLEADS NOT GUILTY**

Presiding judge Ahmed Lanzéni Coulibaly let military prosecutor Ange Kessi open the trial. “The services of the military tribunal had never been called upon so much since its creation in 1974,” he said, deploring “the surge in military crime and delinquency since the start of the Ivorian crisis.” The president of the Ivorian bar association, Jean Louis Métan, stressed the “constructive and destructive role of the media” before going on to criticise Reporters Without Borders secretary-general Robert Ménard for saying there was a need to “put pressure on Gbagbo.”

A smiling Sgt Dago entered the courtroom at around 11 a.m., after removal of the white hood covering his face. When the photographers jostled each other in a scramble to take pictures, the judge ordered their eviction. They were roughly escorted from the courtroom to the cheers from Sgt. Dago’s support committee.

A few moments later, Hélène’s grim-faced brother and sister, Thierry and Catherine Baldensperger, entered the court together with the family’s lawyer. They identified themselves and were accepted as plaintiffs. The lawyers for the
defence then challenged the right of RFI and Reporters Without Borders to be co-plaintiffs, but the court dismissed their arguments.

In the afternoon, the court heard the investigating judge’s indictment. It was a damning report that concluded that Dago “deliberately killed Christian Philippe Baldensperger, also known as Jean Hélène.” Dago pleaded not guilty. But he was confused by the judge’s skilful questioning, as he was by the testimonies of a dozen witnesses, including the former national police director general, Adolphe Baby.

“THERE WILL BE MORE JEAN HÉLÈNES!”

The second day of the trial began with the pleas of the civil plaintiffs. Jean-Marc Delas demanded 143.5 millions CFA francs (about 220,000 euros) in damages on behalf of the family. The lawyers acting for RFI and Reporters Without Borders requested one CFA franc in damages for moral wrong. In the afternoon, the military prosecutor requested a sentence of 15 years in prison for Sgt. Dago.

The verdict and sentenced were handed down at 6 p.m. on the third day. Sgt. Dago was condemned to 17 years in prison and expulsion from the police. “I am innocent, I am innocent,” the defendant cried and then collapsed into his chair. Hélène’s family and the other civil plaintiffs were not present for the verdict as the French consular officials had discouraged them from returning to the law courts “for security reasons.”

Barred from the courtroom by the police, members of the Dago support committee screamed threats at the group of foreign journalists as they left: “You will be killed, all you whites! There will be more Jean Hélènes!”

Christophe Koffi

Sgt. Dago was condemned to 17 years in prison and expulsion from the police

CÔTE D’IVOIRE 2003

2 journalists killed
1 imprisoned
2 arrested
At least 16 physically attacked
At least 6 threatened
Jonathan Moyo’s appointment as information minister in early 2000 by President Mugabe, who has been in office since independence in 1980, marked a turning point for Zimbabwe’s news media. A former political science professor, Moyo had written some very scathing articles about Mugabe a few years earlier, criticising his authoritarianism and mismanagement of the economy. Today, the turncoat is an all-out Mugabe supporter.

It was Moyo who, as information minister, drafted the very harsh Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). As soon as it was adopted, it made life impossible for journalists, especially those in the private sector such as the staff of Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ), the group to which The Daily News and The Daily News on Sunday belong. Under this law, the media are required to request operating licences from a commission of seven government-appointed members, and all journalists have to apply for individual accreditation.

THREATS AND UNFOUNDED ACCUSATIONS

Considering the law to be unconstitutional, the ANZ’s management refused to register with the commission in January 2003. Irked, the government warned that the ANZ was not above the law. Several Daily News journalists were arrested during the next few months. Others were subjected to mistreatment, threatened or harassed for one reason or another. Each time the authorities invoked the AIPPA or another harsh law, the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), which is just an amended version of an old colonial law used during the Ian Smith years.

As some of the ANZ’s shareholders live in London, the government felt entitled to claim that the press group was run by “enemies of the country” based abroad. In fact, the main shareholder is Strive Masiyiwa, a Zimbabwean businessman who lives in South Africa. Because of its articles denouncing corruption and mismanagement, The Daily News was accused by the authorities of being used by the United States or the United Kingdom to destabilize Zimbabwe.
Morgan Tsvangirai of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change as the country’s leader. Thereafter, most officials refused to give the newspaper interviews. The police were also told not to make any comments to *The Daily News* journalists.

**COURTROOM BATTLE**

Meanwhile, the attacks against the newspaper stepped up. Veteran fighters loyal to Mugabe chanted patriotic slogans outside the newspaper’s editorial offices in 2000. A few days later, stones were thrown at the facade of the building. A powerful bomb wrecked the group’s printing press in January 2001. Many observers said the authorities were the only ones to have the kind of explosive used. Then one of the newspaper’s founders, Geoff Nyarota, was the target of a murder attempt by someone who said he was sent by the government. This was quickly denied by the intelligence services.

The final blow came in September 2003 when the government ordered the closure of *The Daily News* on the grounds that, in the absence of licence, it was operating illegally. Police occupied its editorial offices and the group’s printing works. The ANZ immediately filed a court petition. A new battle began, one that would be played out in the courtrooms.

On two occasions, five of our directors, including executive director Sam Sipepa Nkomo, were arrested and brought before a judge. The courts ruled in favour of *The Daily News* five times in 2003 after it petitioned to be allowed to reopen. Each time, the government defied the courts by preventing the newspaper from appearing.

The high court finally ordered the police to leave the ANZ’s premises on 21 January 2003, and the police complied. We at once brought out a special, eight-page issue hoping that our misfortunes were over. For the time being, at least.

**ZIMBABWE 2003**

- 3 journalists imprisoned
- 27 arrested
- 6 physically attacked

John Gambanga

For more, see www.rsf.org

*A powerful bomb in January 2001 wrecked the printing press of the group to which *The Daily News* belongs*
Nothing is stirring in Eritrea. It is still Africa’s biggest prison for journalists and one of the last countries in the world without an independent, privately-owned press.

Pressure from the international community has proved ineffective. Neither human rights organisations nor western governments have succeeded in getting President Issaias Afeworki to change his mind.

The situation is unique: on 18 September 2001, the government closed down all the privately-owned newspapers and imprisoned the leading journalists. Since then, the only source of news for Eritreans has been the government press and the few foreign radio stations that can be received. At least 14 journalists are languishing in prison somewhere. Their families know very little of their fate. In most cases, they do not even know where they are being held.

The latest official statements are not particularly encouraging. In August 2003, the information minister described the imprisoned journalists as “traitors” and “spies in the pay of enemy countries.” If they are brought to trial on these charges, they could be condemned to death.

In August 2003, the information minister described the imprisoned journalists as “traitors” and “spies in the pay of enemy countries.”
In the United States, the attitude of the administration of President Bush towards press freedom varies according to whether it relates to American territory or beyond its borders.

In Cuba, President Fidel Castro has tried to crush dissent through a major dragnet operation through its ranks. Seventy-five dissidents were arrested for “acts against the State”. Among them were 27 independent journalists, of whom the best known was Raúl Rivero. Their crime? To have published articles abroad and to have met US diplomats. Their weapons? Typewriters and pens seized in searches of their homes. In perfunctory trials in which they were denied a proper defence, they were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 14 to 27 years in prison. Their colleagues who are still at liberty have been under threat of joining them in jail. The crackdown provoked international protest but consolidated the government’s news monopoly.

In Haiti too, the state of press freedom is extremely worrying. President Jean-Bertrand Aristide sows terror among his detractors by allowing acts of violence to be committed with total impunity. Journalists have been the first in line. Two murders of journalists in 2000 and 2001 have gone unpunished. In 2003, some 40 journalists were threatened or attacked by “chimeras”, thugs recruited by the government from the shantytowns to carry out its dirty work. At the end of the year a rising number of demonstrations calling for President Aristide to resign were accompanied by an increase in attacks on the press.

With five journalists killed in Colombia in 2003, this country remains the most dangerous in the region for the profession. Four journalists were killed after exposing instances of corruption or fraud implicating local politicians and even collusion between them and armed paramilitaries of the extreme right or communist guerrillas, who control or seek to control whole regions. Subjected to their constant intimidation and that of the army, newspaper staff are too cowed to effectively inform the public. Threats, assaults, kidnappings and murder are still the daily lot of journalists. Moreover, since the adoption of an anti-terror law that threatens the protection of sources, the Alvaro Uribe Vélez government itself is also becoming a potential threat to the press.

In the United States, the attitude of the administration of President Bush towards press freedom varies according to whether it relates to American territory or beyond its borders. In the first instance, the situation is satisfactory overall. However the US Army was responsible for the death of five journalists in Iraq and the work of journalists seeking to report on the Guantanamo prison in Cuba where terrorist suspects are held, is very closely monitored.

IMPUNITY STILL AT WORK

At least three other journalists were killed while doing their job in Brazil (2) and Guatemala (1). While in Colombia repeated murders can be explained by the continuing impunity enjoyed by killers, in Brazil, Costa Rica and Mexico, genuine investigations have led to the arrests of suspects, even to trials. In Chile and Peru, some investigations have been reopened into old cases. These incidents of genuine progress remain however fragile. In Argentina, the killers of photographer José Luis Cabezas obtained a significant reduction in their jail terms, legal yes, but
baffling in terms of the trauma caused by the journalist’s murder in 1997. In Brazil, a journalist’s killer won a surprise release just three months after being sentenced to 18 years in prison.

In several Latin-American countries, the press has had to pay the price of political instability. In Bolivia and to a lesser extent in Peru, journalists were caught up in the climate of protest. Several media and journalists were attacked or threatened, mainly by security forces trying to break up rioting that led to the resignation of Bolivian President Sanchez de Lozada. In Guatemala, the presidential election campaign saw a large number of physical attacks on journalists – one of whom was killed – linked mainly to the controversial candidacy of former dictator José Efraín Ríos Montt. In Ecuador, rather than respond to charges that his campaign was financed by a drug-trafficker, President Lucio Gutiérrez chose to threaten legal action against the daily El Comercio, that made the revelations.

Once again there is a marked difference between the powerful national press which no longer comes in for serious intimidation and the local or regional press which is still locked in conflict with local politicians, officials or police, who react badly to criticism.

In Mexico, Argentina and Peru, the majority of assaults have been aimed at local media. In Brazil, one of the two journalists killed worked for a radio station in a town in the northeast of the country. Sadly, the national press does not always demonstrate solidarity with colleagues in the regional press and these press freedom violations sometimes pass unnoticed.

Venezuela remains a special case. There were more than 80 incidents of attacks or threats against journalists, mostly during the general strike against President Hugo Chávez, in January and February. Although most of them were down to supporters of the president, angry at the anti-Chávez stance of the main media, there were a few attacks against pro-government media. The numerous threats proffered by the government against the press following the opposition strike were not carried out and press freedom had recovered a precarious stability by the yearend.

**PROTECTION OF SOURCES UNDER THREAT**

Legislation in several countries reflects an unfinished democra-tisation process. In Panama, Chile and Ecuador there are laws that still protect the “honour” of officials and politicians despite a statement adopted by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH) which has called for their removal. In Costa Rica, the press has spoken out against the inhibiting effect of the criminal code that punishes the publication of insulting remarks. In the Dominican Republic three journalists were arrested after criticising President Mejía. Running for a further term in 2004, he appears to have won control of the biggest independent press group by bankrupting its owner.

In South America as in the North, protection of sources is still under threat. In Paraguay and Chile, journalists are summoned to reveal their sources. In the United States judges threaten to imprison for “contempt of court” those who refuse to identify their informers. Finally, in Canada police still see journalists as “representatives of the law” and seek search warrants to seize pictures from newspapers, which they consider useful to their investigations.

**In Latin America, the local press is subject to much harassment and intimidation**

More details, country by country, at www.rsf.org
Pour les vacances, vous êtes tenté par Cuba, ses plages de rêve et ses rythmes endiablés ? Attention ! Au-delà des clichés, le soleil cubain ne brille pas pour tout le monde. En mars 2003, le régime castriste arrêtait et condamnait à de lourdes peines de prison près de 80 journalistes, opposants et défenseurs des droits de l’homme. Pour avoir osé parler de démocratie dans leur pays, certains passeront jusqu’à 28 ans derrière les barreaux… Sachez où vous mettez les pieds !
The weekly *Pèlerin Magazine*, which agreed to sponsor Bernardo Arévalo Padrón after he was sentenced to six years in prison in November 1997, wanted to meet him at his home a few days after his release on 3 November 2003.

Just a ream of white paper. But this unexpected present with which we arrived at his home was enough to light up the face of Bernardo Arévalo Padrón, a giant with a broad smile. In his little house in Aguada de Pasajeros, a town with 31,000 inhabitants, he would at last be able to get back to his work as an independent journalist.

This force of nature aged 37, who has spent a total of six years in Cuban jails, was reunited with the open air and his wife Libertad just a few weeks before.

Arrested on 18 November 1997 and imprisoned for calling President Fidel Castro a liar in a radio broadcast, Bernardo has not changed. “He is even stronger,” his fair-haired wife says.

“Sponsored” by the weekly *Pèlerin*, through Reporters Without Borders, Bernardo regularly received tokens of support from readers in the form of letters or packages. “These gestures were a great help,” Bernardo now says. Especially as the treatment meted out to Cuban prisoners is a permanent violation of a human being’s basic rights.

Bernardo was held in several detention centres. But he spent the biggest part of his prison term with 28 non-political detainees in a cell meant for 20 inmates. This overcrowding was all the more unbearable as his cell-mates used to steal his letters and give them to the police in the hope of getting remission. There was also the revolting food, the teeming bedbugs, the ever-present humidity and the violent guards.

His head, nose and lips still bear the marks of the baton blows he received on 11 April 1998, the day he dared to shout: “Down with Fidel!”

Together again with what he holds most dear (“the sun, my family and fresh air”), this rock-like man seems to have recovered his steely physical condition and unfaltering spirit. Two weeks after his release, only his shaved head and permanently hoarse voice give away the six years spent in prison. His chronic back pain, exacerbated by a spell in a forced-labour camp, comes and goes.

Bernardo is back in his little house in Aguada, where he lives with his parents-in-law, his 12-year-old niece and his wife. Married five years before his arrest and now aged 43, Libertad is a committed Catholic. She waited for her husband. Frail but firm.

The morning of his release, his first call was to her: “We met at the church to pray. It was a promise we had made together.” Four days later, Bernardo left for the capital, Havana, 140 km away. “I absolutely had to visit my family and friends and I had to sign the Varela project1.” By adding his voice to this ambitious initiative, Bernardo reaffirmed his priority: to carry on defending the rights of the oppressed with determination.

Brought up on a diet of revolutionary propaganda, the young man’s destiny seemed to be headed in a very different direction 15 years ago. Recruited as a state security agent, his job was to monitor human rights activists and report them to the authorities. But then his brother, aged 17, died from a heart ailment for lack of treatment. The young policeman suddenly felt the “revolution” was built on lies and, on his brother’s grave, swore to “fight communism until I die.”

He started tuning in regularly to *Radio Marti*, which broadcasts to Cuba from Miami, home to more than a million Cuba exiles. Less than two years later, he left the police and became a railway worker.

He launched an independent news agency called *Linea Sur* (Southern Line) in 1996, producing reports on human rights violations which he sent to a press agency in Miami.
Bernardo continued to be vigilant in prison, jotting down the problems of everyday prison life in a New Testament which he got by bribing a guard. For page after page, his notes weave in and out of the gospels. A example: “Friday, 27 November 1998. The non-political prisoner Alexis Gonzalez Ibanez threw his piece of meat to the ground this morning. The guards summoned the ‘garrison’ and they took him to their office. They made him clean the floor until he was exhausted. The next day he went on hunger strike.”

On leaving prison, Bernardo hoped to recover his old job as a railway worker. But the authorities refused. So he went back to his former “mission” as an independent journalist. Hence his delight at being brought some paper from France, as this work resource is almost unobtainable in Cuba. Although he raises a finger to his lips every now and again to remind you that the walls have ears in Cuba, and although he is watched by the police, he presses on regardless.

Careful? “I’m not sure about that,” says Libertad, raising her eyes towards heaven. Reunited with her husband two weeks before their 11th wedding anniversary, she often trembles: “I’m afraid he will go back to prison!” The only solution is exile. The couple had filed a request to go and live in Spain in 1997, before Bernardo’s arrest. But their application was overtaken by events.

Now they are applying to go to the United States. They hope to go together with Bernardo’s mother, who is old and sick. There, this Cuban hopes to be able to continue making his contribution to the only project that interest him today: “Freedom for the entire people.”

Sophie Autignac
For more, see www.rsf.org

1 The Varela Projet is a petition that was launched by Oswaldo Paya Sardiñas, the head of the Christian Liberation Movement, an illegal opposition party. The petition calls on the national assembly to hold a referendum on a proposed amnesty for political prisoners and the creation of a pluralist society. More than 20,000 people have signed the petition, which conforms with a referendum procedure envisaged in the Cuban constitution.

CUBA 2003

30 journalists imprisoned
5 arrested
5 physically attacked

MEDIA SPONSORING

Since 1989, Reporters Without Borders has been urging news organisations in France and elsewhere in the world to sponsor journalists who are in prison for just doing their job. Sponsors are invited to support imprisoned fellow journalists so that their cases are not forgotten and so that the publicity given to their cases can give them some protection from those who put them in jail.

By writing to journalists in prison, contacting their families, protesting to the relevant authorities, regularly requesting their release and getting viewers, listeners, readers and Internet users interested in their cases, sponsoring news organisations can provide real support for these men and women whose only crime is wanting to report and explain the news. There are 200 of them throughout the world today.

Bernardo Arévalo Padrón was supported by: A Nous Paris !, Amiens Métropole, Asociacion de la Prensa de Madrid, Canoa-Periodico Digital: micanoa.com, El Dorado/Isto E, El Mundo, El País, El Punt, Grupo Correo (El Correo, El Diario Vasco), Imágenes Americanas, L’Hebdo, La Demièrre Heure, La Presse, La Tribune de Genève, Le Courrier Picard, La Gazette de Dijon, Le Figaro Etudiant, Mon Quotidien / L’Actu, Notre temps, Paris Match, Pèlerin Magazine, Quo, Radio Suisse Romande, RFO/AITV and RTL.

The statement made by Libertad in support of her imprisoned husband Bernardo, and photos taken as he left prison.
Colombia

THE HEMISPHERE’S MOST MURDEROUS COUNTRY

The deaths of five journalist headed the long list of violations against journalists and news media. The bane on everyone’s life was the fighting between guerrillas and paramilitary groups for the control of entire regions, where there was virtually no reporting. But the problems posed by state agents did not lag far behind.

Patrolling paramilitaries

Five journalists killed, about 60 kidnapped, threatened or physically attacked, and more than 20 forced to leave their region, if not their country – the toll of press freedom violations was particularly heavy in 2003. What’s more, these figures were not exhaustive as many journalists preferred to remain silent about the threats they received for fear of being even more at risk.

INCREASINGLY INTOLERANT SECURITY FORCES

In the attacks on the press, suspicion fell on politicians and the security forces more than in previous years. Four of the five murdered journalists had accused local politicians of corruption or fraud, or had condemned violence by the security forces. The death of Luis Eduardo Alfonso, who should have benefited from a government programme for the protection of journalists, raised questions about the efforts of the authorities to ensure the safety of the press.

Underlying this grim state of affairs was the total impunity enjoyed by those who kill journalists. The authorities respond to those clamouring for justice by pointing to the lack of resources and the scope of the task in a country where there are tens of thousands of violent deaths each year. However, one can question their interest in combatting impunity when the investigation into the 1999 murder of the famous journalist and humorist, Jaime Garzón, concluded with the trial of two small-time criminals who were probably just scapegoats. At least 10 journalists were meanwhile detained, threatened, physically attacked or prevented from working by security forces who were increasingly intolerant towards the news media, especially when they were reporting on the armed conflict.

Furthermore, President Alvaro Uribe Vélez’s government appeared increasingly to represent a potential threat to the press after the adoption of an “anti-terrorist statute” that undermines the confidentiality of sources.

JOURNALISTS ABANDON SOME REGIONS

The three main armed groups continued to commit press freedom violations. The paramilitary United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia (AUC) with Carlos Castaño still as their main leader, the Marxist guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) led by Manuel Marulanda, and the Guevarist guerrillas of the National Liberation Army (ELN) led by Nicolás Rodríguez Bautista all continued to target journalists suspected of helping the opposing camp. In the regions controlled by armed groups or where armed groups are fighting for control, the public no long has access to freely reported, reliable news.

In some regions, journalists must also reach a compromise with the army, which is also concerned to control news reporting. The situation in the field is often so complex that journalists are unable to identify their aggressors. Rosa Omaira, a journalist in the western department of Choco, had to leave her town for Bogota because of threats blamed on the FARC. But once in the capital, she reported receiving threats from the AUC, which forced her to change her address several times. The links between some politicians and armed groups makes the environment even more complex and dangerous for the press.

The situation has become unliveable in Arauca, an oil-producing department adjoining Venezuela. After the death of Efrain Alberto Varela in 2002, a second journalist was killed in 2003, seven others were kidnapped, three were detained, two were physically attacked, and one was arrested and charged with “rebellion.” Many of Arauca’s journalists left the department at the start of April 2003 after their names appeared on blacklists circulated by armed groups. Thirteen of those who left the region later returned but thereafter went out only in groups and accompanied by bodyguards. An unprecedented situation.

For more, see www.rsf.org

COLOMBIA 2003

4 journalists killed
2 imprisoned
3 arrested
11 kidnapped
8 physically attacked
31 threatened
Physical attacks, machine-gunning of homes or radio stations, harassment, open or anonymous threats – many forms of pressure are used. Most of the journalists injured in 2003 were covering demonstrations at the time. But some attacks had precise targets. Armed pro-government thugs known as “chimères” shot at, or tried to set fire to the homes of Radio Métropole journalists Nancy Roc and Goudou Jean Numa. Following repeated, credible death threats against Radio Haïti Inter journalists and two months after the December 2002 attack on me – in which my bodyguard, Maxime Seide, was killed – we had to close down the radio station on 22 February 2003 for our own protection. In a further attack on a privately-owned radio station, thugs armed with machine-guns opened fired on the studios of Radio Caraïbes in Port-au-Prince on 28 October.

The purpose of these threats is to silence the media or at least force them to censor themselves. On 2 May, Radio Kiskéya director Liliane Pierre-Paul received a package containing a 12 mm cartridge and a written message threatening her with death. The message was signed by so-called popular organisations allied with the ruling Lavalas party, including one called Dòmi nan Bwa, which was responsible for the 2001 murder of journalist Brignol Lindor. These armed groups are at war with anti-government protesters and attack journalists they see as spearheading the opposition to President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

JOURNALISTS TARGETED BY MILITANTS

The spiralling violence accentuated at the end of 2003, striking at news media of various political tendencies through their journalists, who thereby paid the price of the prevailing intolerance and impunity. Radio Pyramide in St. Marc, north of the capital, a privately-owned station considered to be pro-government, was ransacked by armed Aristide opponents on 11 November. Anti-government demonstrators also attacked journalists from Radio Solidarité, another pro-Lavalas station, on 17 December. But such cases were rare, while the attacks on journalists by pro-Aristide chimères increased in frequency in an unprecedented climate of violence on all sides.

Statements by certain parliamentarians and government members were seen as legitimising violence against journalists

Verbal attacks on the press by influential members of the government or ruling party have been symptomatic of the new tendency. There is no official censorship or legal restriction of press freedom, but justice minister Calixte Delatour and secretary of state for communication Mario Dupuy, in 21 September statements broadcast by several Port-au-Prince radio and TV stations, threatened the press with implementation of an old telecommunications law introduced by dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier in October 1977, although it was superseded by clauses in the 1987 constitution condemning censorship and protecting journalists’ sources and private enterprise.

Parliamentarian Nahoum Marcellus on 28 September accused several radio stations of receiving funds from abroad to wage an anti-government campaign and he urged government supporters to deal with them. Such statements by parliamentarians and government members...
and church sermons by pro-Lavalas priests, sometimes in the president’s presence, were seen as legitimising violence against journalists.

UNSHAKEABLE IMPUNITY

In a country where words can be all-powerful, the systematic nature of the threats and attacks on the press is sustained by an unshakeable impunity. None of the legal initiatives and appeals by journalists who have been the target of physical attacks has ever been successful. The politicisation of the police plays a major role in making this climate of impunity possible.

In a country where words can be all-powerful, the systematic nature of the threats and attacks on the press is sustained by an unshakeable impunity

UN independent expert Louis Joinet condemned, “the absence of any real political will to combat impunity, especially the impunity that protects the ‘chimères,’ whose role is particularly worrying for the country’s future.”

This climate of impunity is also sustained by government interference in judicial matters. The deliberate choice to let the Jean Dominique and Brignol Lindor murders go unpunished was without question the source of the dangerous spiral of brutal and deliberate attacks against the press in 2003. The presumed instigators of Dominique’s murder in April 2000 and Lindor’s murder in December 2001 move about freely and some of them hold important positions in the state apparatus. The chances of obtaining justice in 2003 were even slimmer.

In the case of my husband, Jean Dominique, the investigating judge’s final report and indictment did not see the light of day until four months after the murder attempt that was supposed to silence me for good. Issued after an investigation of almost three years marked by obstruction and bloodshed, the judge’s report concluded with the indictment of just three small-time thugs who had been detained for three years. Faced by the prospect of a trial without justice, we filed an appeal in Haiti on 3 April 2003, the third anniversary of the murder, demanding the indictment of the instigators. On 4 August, the Port-au-Prince appeal court called for a new judicial investigation. It also ordered the prosecution of the three persons already charged. However, the case is now temporarily blocked by the appeal filed by the three detainees, which has had the effect of holding up any new investigation.

The Lindor family also brought an appeal after being denied the civil plaintiff status necessary in order to challenge the conclusions of an investigation. Several witnesses of the lynching of Lindor, which was preceded by official calls for his murder, have had to leave the country after themselves receiving threats.

DANGEROUS POLARISATION

As Haiti slides a little further into anarchy every day, the Haitian press is caught in a dangerous polarisation. On the one hand a governmental propaganda machine, with a presidential personality cult that is unprecedented since the end of the dictatorship, uses the state-owned media and certain privately-owned media that are subsidised or controlled by the government. On the other hand, some privately-owned media have become participants in a campaign to remove the president. A key victim of this polarisation is the public’s right to objective news reporting.

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The facts are often outrageously distorted or at least carefully selected by the many partisan media that just cover political events. Street demonstrations are covered or ignored depending on which side the participants support. Until recently, the independent press still carried investigative reports about the realities of a moribund economy, the extent of corruption and the peasant majority’s criminal neglect by a dysfunctional state. But unfortunately this has been replaced by the simple relaying of statements by one politician or another. The dangerous attempts of some journalists to stay above the melee, remain objective and respect the facts just make them the targets of intolerance. Today, the entire press is a target, and press freedom with it.

Michèle Montas
For more, see www.rsf.org

HAITI 2003

1 journalist kidnapped
18 physically attacked
8 threatened

Radio Haiti Inter director Jean Dominique, who was gunned down on 3 April 2000
Prison conditions were deplorable and torture was common practice. In Nepal, journalists were subjected to such torture as repeated violent blows to the soles of the feet, forced submersion in water and electric shock (especially to the genitals). Some were forced to spend weeks with a hood over their head and face. In all, the Nepalese security forces arrested, detained in undisclosed locations, tortured or threatened about 100 journalists in 2003. In Pakistan, intelligence agents tortured Khawar Mehdi Rizvi because of a report from the border with Afghanistan. In Burma, journalists are tortured during their first weeks in prison. Thereafter, they are held in terrible conditions, like thousands of other prisoners of conscience. The UN special rapporteur on Burma spoke of the “hell” of Burmese detention centres after visiting Insein prison.

Three journalists were condemned to death in 2003. In Afghanistan, the editor of an independent weekly and one of his journalists were the object of a religious fatwa after calling for a secular political system. Zaw Thet Htwe, the editor of a newspaper specialising in football, was condemned to death by a Burmese military court on the trumped-up charge of “attempted assassination of military junta leaders.” Meanwhile in Pakistan, editor Rehmat Shah Afridi has been in prison in Lahore for several years after being condemned to death at the end of a rigged trial.

North Korea has absolutely no press diversity. All the news media there are given over to the cult of Kim Jong Il’s personality. A news media boom was accompanied by more violence against journalists. India has seen record growth in TV and radio stations. Independent media, especially electronic media, are expanding quickly in Asia. But journalists who are bolder and adopt modern news standards are more likely to be the target of threats and violence. In a new development, there was an increase in physical attacks on journalists in China by local officials, private security guards and criminals in response to enquiries by reporters seeking exclusives in an increasingly competitive media environment.

SIXTEEN JOURNALISTS MURDERED

Seven journalists, mostly reporters or commentators with local radio stations, were murdered by contract killers in the Philippines in 2003, above all in the southern island of Mindanao.

In all, the Nepalese security forces arrested, detained in undisclosed locations, tortured or threatened about 100 journalists.
The toll could have been much worse – no fewer than five other journalists escaped murder attempts. Impunity encouraged the violence against the press, which had not reached this level since 1987.

A total of at least 16 journalists were killed while doing their job in Asia in 2003. Reporters Without Borders was continuing to investigate some 15 other cases. It was often hard to establish the exact reasons for murders in which journalism, politics and personal matters overlapped. A freelance journalist was killed in Japan, probably because of his investigations into Chinese criminal organisations. The presenter of a royalist radio station was gunned down in Cambodia. He was one of the victims of a wave of killings of prime minister Hun Sen’s opponents. The ever-obliging police made no effort to arrest the killers or identify the instigators.

Armed separatist struggles also caused losses in the ranks of the press. Two journalists were killed in India because of their coverage of the Kashmir conflict. One of them, the editor of a local news agency, was murdered in his office. A third journalist was kidnapped in the northeastern region of Assam by rebels who reportedly executed him.

A TV cameraman and a reporter were killed in the war which the Indonesian army resumed in Aceh in 2003. The reporter, Ersa Siregar was killed by army fire while still held by the rebel separatists who had taken him prisoner six months earlier. In Burma, a photographer linked to the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) was killed by the regime’s thugs during an attack on the motorcade of NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi in May.

At least 600 journalists were physically attacked or threatened in 2003. The level of violence rose again in Bangladesh to more than 200 cases of physical attacks or death threats against journalists by political activists, especially from the ruling party, or criminals. This undermined the ability of the press to freely cover key issues such as human rights violations, corruption and the collusion between politicians and organised crime. Although freed from the Taliban straitjacket, Afghan journalists still had to face threats from the thugs of the warlords. Some 10 independent journalists were threatened with reprisals by Afghan conservatives during a period of political tension in March and April. In Nepal, provincial journalists in particular had to endure threats from both security forces and Maoist rebels.

THE SCOURGE OF CENSORSHIP

More than 190 news media were hit by censorship. Governments and courts had an impressive arsenal at their disposal, one reinforced in some 10 countries by anti-terrorist laws passed after 11 September 2001 that provided for sanctions against media found guilty of putting out reports deemed subversive or threatening to state security. The propaganda department in China did not bother with the law. Journalists who created trouble, especially journalists with the liberal press groups in southern China, were simply removed from the posts. This was how the central government banned the press from covering the SARS epidemic in the first months of 2003.

Afghanistan’s supreme court, a conservative bastion, banned foreign TV channels. Indonesia’s army used martial law to impose a news blackout on the war in Aceh province. As a result, a local weekly had to close following threats against its editor.

The airwaves also scare dictatorships. North Korea branded foreign radio stations with Korean-language programming as “enemies in the pay of the imperialists.” China continued to jam the Chinese-language services of the BBC World Service and Radio Free Asia. Chinese Internet users were denied access to the websites of these news media, as well as those of many other organisations.

One of the worst pieces of news in 2003 came from Thailand, where prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra did his best to silence critical voices with the help of the army, which owns many electronic media. The quality of the Thai press nonetheless continued to be much better than that of its neighbours, especially Laos and Burma which could be mistaken for a parody of propaganda media. Some 10 privately-owned magazines tried to inform the public in Burma, but had to cope with prior censorship by the military authorities. Taiwan meanwhile continued its steady consolidation as one of Asia’s leading countries as regards press freedom.

The conservative ideology of “Asian values,” which exclude press freedom, were applied with varying degrees of determination in Malaysia, Singapore and the Sultanate of Brunei. The media in these countries can talk fairly freely about the international or economic situation but sensitive domestic political issues are banned. President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom of the Maldives, who was re-elected with 90.28 per cent of the vote in October, had little patience with press criticism.

Defying international criticism, the government and major news media in Japan continued to maintain the system of kisha clubs (press clubs) which exclude foreign and freelance journalists from access to government sources. In South Korea, President Roh Moo Hyun constantly criticised the conservative media but did not introduce any restrictive measures against the main conservative dailies.

In the Pacific, press freedom received a rough ride from the king of Tonga, who amended the constitution so that he could ban the only independent weekly for good. The conservative government in Australia continued to prevent journalists from covering the situation of refugees held in camps on Australian territory or in neighbouring countries.

The growth of community radio and FM stations was a positive development for press freedom in Asia. These radio stations enabled millions of listeners in India, Indonesia and Thailand to keep informed and express their views freely.

Vincent Brossel
Head of Reporters Without Borders’ Asia desk

More details, country by country, at www.rsf.org
The dean of the Burmese press, Ludu Daw Amar recently said to Irrawaddy, a magazine published in Thailand: “We cannot write anything freely, there is no press freedom and the censorship bureau is very restrictive.” To avoid having her reports and columns changed beyond recognition, she has chosen to write about Burmese culture and society. But even that has not spared her from the censor. One of her articles about the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Burma was recently banned.

“ACCURATE BUT UNTIMELY DESCRIPTIONS”

Burma is one of the few countries in the world with pre-publication censorship, implemented by the Literary Works Scrutinising Committee. Any criticism of the junta and any subjects that irritate the generals (such as human rights, AIDS, drugs and corruption) are banned. At least seven magazines were temporarily closed in 2002 for publishing articles or even words deemed “incorrect.” According to the 1962 Printers and Publishers Registration Law, publications can be censored for “incorrect ideas... false descriptions... descriptions that are accurate but untimely... pornographic writing... writing that incites crime and cruelty... libel or calumny.” Offenders can be punished with up to seven years in prison or a fine of more than 5,000 euros.

Each Saturday the censorship committee, headed by Maj. Aye Tun, a former member of the Military Intelligence Service (MIS), decides what will and will not be published. Every quarter, the committee sends the interior minister and the head of MIS a report on media activity. The committee regularly asks editors and managing editors to submit their CVs, failing which the newspapers are sanctioned. In August 2003, the security services ordered all the privately-owned media to submit the CVs of all their editorial staff, suspecting pro-opposition journalists of writing articles under pseudonyms.

BLACKOUT ON SENSITIVE ISSUES

Censorship is a key component of the regime of terror imposed by the junta, which is able to decree a total blackout on certain issues. In February 2003, for example, the Literary Works Scrutinising Committee banned all reporting on Burma’s serious banking crisis. The editors of the main privately-owned newspapers were summoned to a meeting and threatened with reprisals if they made any reference to the financial crisis. This would prevent the crisis from being exacerbated and put a stop to rumours, officials said. “I wrote three stories on the subject and they were all rejected. It’s very frustrating,” a journalist based in Rangoon told Reporters Without Borders. In May 2003, the authorities also forced the news media to remain silent about the re-arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD), and the massacre of about 100 NLD activists by the regime’s thugs.

Censorship is also used to punish disobedient journalists. In March 2003, the Literary Works Scrutinising Committee banned all the publication of articles by the Burmese historian Than Tun because of an interview he gave for the Burmese-language service of the Washington-based Radio Free Asia dismissing the junta’s claim that the discovery of three white elephants in western Burma was a good omen for the country’s development. The Thailand-based magazine Irrawaddy suggested the ban was also linked to Than Tun’s articles in the monthly Kalya on the way Burma was governed in the 18th century, in which the censors thought they saw allusions to the current situation.

The few provincial newspapers must undergo a double check. After getting a green light from the censorship bureau in Rangoon, the editor must go through the local office. An editor from Mon state said it took an average of a month to get final approval after the initial submission to Rangoon. “The local censors even go so far as to check the calendars,” he said. Nonetheless, a few privately-owned magazines in Rangoon such as Sabaibyy (White Jasmin) and Thought succeed in publishing articles on politics, economy and culture that offered an alternative to the trite, saccharine propaganda of the press that supports the military junta.

For more, see www.rsf.org
How does censorship impact the way journalists work?

No journalists or editors want the publication of their newspapers to be delayed. So self-censorship is the norm. This system is deeply rooted in everyone's mind. Before we put one word to paper, our subconscious, knowing there is censorship, reins in our writing: the approach, the presentation, the choice of words and the shape of the sentences and paragraphs. Sometimes entire ideas are aborted.

What has your experience of it been?

I was shocked the day I realised that self-censorship was process of involuntary submission or conditioning. My first reaction to the bitter realisation that I resembled Pavlov's dog was one of denial. I had always found lots of excuses for taking refuge in the illusion of oppression. But the truth was too hard to escape. Then I felt anger, hate and disgust with myself. This transition from one paradigm to another meant a battle with oneself that was both intellectual and emotional at the same time, which meant fighting against one's ego, one's understanding, one's morality and one's conscience. Not all of Burma's journalists and newspaper editors have gone through this. But some have. They've discovered what I call the "grey zone," which covers everything which the censors don't consider to be "black" but which readers perceive as black, that's to say, as being very critical of the regime. It's in this grey zone that editors and reporters can survive with pride and happiness despite the regime's repression.

How does the censorship work?

A metaphor will suffice to explain how it works. A young woman walks by a man. She is so beautiful, the man cannot help exclaiming: "Oh, she's beautiful." Suddenly he receives a slap. Then a second one. He is surprised to find himself facing a strange woman, who is angry. He asks her: "Who are you? Why did you slap me?" "Why? You didn't understand?"

The man is puzzled. "You said she is beautiful, didn't you?" "Yes, I did. Isn't she beautiful?"

The woman slaps him again. "So you meant I'm ugly." In Burma, censorship is this angry woman. Censorship is arbitrary. One day, we did a report on Burmese teenagers. The government censorship doesn't like teenagers, who wear jeans and T-shirts, who like hard rock, fighting and contact with the outside world. So the censorship bureau cut out bits here and there in the report and ended up eliminating it altogether. The bureau then asked us to stop writing about foreign cultures and to take an interest in Burmese traditions.

"I felt anger, hate and disgust with myself"

Are the censors only interested in newspaper articles?

No, I remember even an advertisement was censored. A friend of mine took a course that prepared you for an English exam that opens the way to entry into American universities (the American SAT exam). He did an advertisement for American universities (the American SAT exam). He did an advertisement for the course in the newspaper: "SAT - the exam for entering American schools and universities." When the newspaper came out, we found just three letters left in the ad – SAT. The explanation we received was that universities are closed in Burma. When the censor thought a book was political, it received special treatment. In 1987, one of my friends wrote a biography of Gorbachev, the last Soviet leader of the cold war, and submitted the manuscript to the censorship bureau. They thought it was political and submitted the case – each manuscript and each publication is called a "case" – to the interior ministry. Since then Gorbachev has left office, two interior ministers have retired and my friend has died. But the manuscript is still at the censorship bureau.

Who is in charge of the censorship bureau?

At the time I was living in Burma, the director and his deputy were military officers, former commanders. Quite often, they were from the army intelligence services. In fact, the final decision came from the army's intelligence services. 

SPORTS JOURNALIST CONDEMNED TO DEATH

Zaw Thet Htwe, the editor of Burma's most popular sports weekly, First Eleven, was sentenced to death by a military court on 28 November 2003 on the trumped-up charge of "attempting to assassinate military junta leaders."

Military intelligence officers arrested him at the newspaper's editorial offices in July. They beat him, handcuffed him, and took him to an undisclosed military intelligence location where they tortured him. The military, who envied the newspaper's very profitable success, did not like his articles criticising the way Burmese soccer is run.

Shortly before his arrest, Zaw Thet Htwe published an article about an international donation for the promotion of football in Burma. First Eleven asked questions about the manner in which the money was spent.
LETTER TO KHAWAR

Marc Epstein and Jean-Paul Guilloteau of the French news weekly L’Express were arrested in Karachi on 16 December 2003 on their return from the border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan, where they had prepared a report on the Taliban groups there. They were given six-month prison sentences that were finally reduced to a fine. So they were able to leave Pakistan on 14 January 2004. But their fixer, Pakistani journalist Khawar Mehdi Rizvi, was still missing. He did not reappear until 25 January, after being tortured. The authorities accused him of helping Epstein and Guilloteau prepare a false report designed to harm Pakistan. He faces life imprisonment. Epstein wrote this imaginary letter to him at the end of February.

You are charged with sedition and face life imprisonment. This is appalling.

Where are you Khawar Mehdi Rizvi? I don’t stop talking to you. Especially in my sleep. The last time I saw you, you were sitting in an armchair in the lobby of the Avari Towers hotel in Karachi, in southern Pakistan. It was at about 8:45 p.m. on 16 December 2003. You were talking animatedly with another man, probably one of your friends. Less than an hour later, seven strange men entered our room on the 8th floor and took my colleague, photographer Jean-Paul Guilloteau, and me away. You were not with us at that moment. You were arrested but I don’t know when or where.

We knew a visit from the Pakistani police was imminent. We had already been detained once, two days earlier, on the road to Karachi. We were coming from Balochistan province, in the west. Over there, in the border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan, we had met a Taliban group that is active there. You were our guide and interpreter – what is called a “fixer” in our trade. You did not like the job very much, did you Khawar? But when one is a young Pakistani journalist, intelligent and resourceful, with a head full of ideas, accompanying foreign journalists is one of the best ways to quickly earn a few dollars while sticking to one’s trade. In autumn 2001, after the 11 September attacks, you were a fixer for dozens of journalists for several months. That allowed you to buy a great video camera at the FNAC store on Rue de Rennes in Paris at the start of the follow-

ing year. One you could use to become a TV journalist yourself. Wasn’t your documentary about Pathan women distributed by Arte?

More recently, after helping to open a hospital for poor children in Peshawar, you tried to forge ties among journalists in the tribal zones near the Afghan border. You brought them to Islamabad for an hour later, seven strange men entered our room on the 8th floor and took my colleague, photographer Jean-Paul Guilloteau, and me away. You were not with us at that moment. You were arrested but I don’t know when or where.

We knew a visit from the Pakistani police was imminent. We had already been detained once, two days earlier, on the road to Karachi. We were coming from Balochistan province, in the west. Over there, in the border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan, we had met a Taliban group that is active there. You were our guide and interpreter – what is called a “fixer” in our trade. You did not like the job very much, did you Khawar? But when one is a young Pakistani journalist, intelligent and resourceful, with a head full of ideas, accompanying foreign journalists is one of the best ways to quickly earn a few dollars while sticking to one’s trade. In autumn 2001, after the 11 September attacks, you were a fixer for dozens of journalists for several months. That allowed you to buy a great video camera at the FNAC store on Rue de Rennes in Paris at the start of the follow-

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talked about together, a few hours before we were detained. I hope you will like it.

I am doing my best to get you out of there. Along with fellow journalists and friends from Reporters Without Borders, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other groups, we have created a website, www.freekhawar.org, which has a petition calling for your release. We have been taking other initiatives as well, more discreet ones.

I often think back to the reporting we did together. In Kabul, under the Taliban. Along the Kunar valley in northern Afghanistan when the Northern Alliance troops took power. I did not know you that well then. But we were the same age and we had a quite a similar approach to reporting: we both put a lot of trust in chance. But chance is something that can be organised.

I adopted you, Khawar. I do not feel any guilt for what happened to you. You are an experienced and very mature journalist, who knew full well what region we were going to and for what purpose. There are things I regret, nonetheless. The key element of the charges the Pakistani authorities have brought against you is the video footage which I shot myself, on my own initiative and with my own camera. If it had not been for this footage, which was meant for the L'Express website, you would undoubtedly be a free man today.

That is why this story has placed an all-absorbing responsibility on my shoulders.

I must do absolutely everything possible to get you out of there as soon as possible. This has become an inescapable duty for me.

Marc Epstein

For more, see www.rsf.org

Pakistan 2003

4 journalists imprisoned
10 arrested
17 physically attacked
Control of the news media continues to be a government obsession. News management of the SARS crisis was very revealing. On several occasions during the epidemic, journalists were sanctioned by the publicity department (the former propaganda department) for investigating government lies and inadequacies. All reports about the epidemic were at first banned for several months, then the media found themselves recruited overnight into a campaign of propaganda and national mobilisation to fight the scourge.

A France 2 TV crew was detained for shooting footage of chickens being vaccinated during the bird flu epidemic

As there was some criticism of the government’s handling of the crisis in the media, some observers thought the press was showing signs of independence. But a Beijing-based foreign correspondent put it into perspective: “In just a few weeks, we have gone from silence to propaganda, via self-criticism – but nothing that resembles real press freedom.” Further evidence for this came in January 2003, when Cheng Yizhong, the editor of the daily Nanfang Dushi Bao (Southern Metropolis News), was detained for reporting a new SARS case in the south.

MANY PHYSICAL ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS

Young journalists tested the limits of censorship and self-censorship more than ever before in 2003. But the party is getting old. The most senior members of the editorial staff of the weekly Nanfang Zhoumo, the spearhead of investigative journalism for the past few years, were again removed by the government because of articles considered too independent. Unable to express itself in the traditional media, the pro-democracy opposition turned increasingly to the Internet to voice its views. But there were frequent crackdowns. About 50 cyber-dissidents are currently in prison for calling for democracy or condemning government abuses.

The press is being modernised and is very dynamic. Journalists are taking more and more risks when they write about social issues. As a result, they are increasingly the target of physical attacks. A newspaper reported in October 2003 that
more than 100 Chinese journalists had been the victims of violence since the start of the year by security guards, policemen or criminals irked by their enquiries.

The authorities control TV broadcasting by means of Chinese Central Television (CCTV), which operates 12 different channels. Its news programmes focus above all on national politics, the activities of the leaders and ideological campaigns. CCTV provided live coverage of the start of the Iraq war by sending dozens of correspondents to the Gulf region. This was unprecedented for Chinese television. However, the editorialising was limited to parroting the Chinese government’s position, which was opposed to the war.

**FOREIGN JOURNALISTS STILL STRICTLY CONTROLLED**

Although the government has promised to let foreign journalists work freely during the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008, foreign correspondents based in China or visiting the country are still subject to very strict control. The Chinese Communist Party denies foreign reporters the right to freely investigate dissidents, clandestine religious movements, corruption, HIV/AIDS, workers’ strikes, the North Korean refugees, natural catastrophes or the Tibetan and Uighur separatists. A South Korean photographer, Jae-Hyun Seok, was sentenced to two years in prison for covering the plight of North Koreans fleeing their country. More recently a France 2 TV crew was detained for shooting footage of chickens being vaccinated during the bird flu epidemic. They had not been given permission.

*For more, see www.rsf.org*

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**IN THE CLAWS OF THE POLICE**

Is it a subversive act to film geese and chickens being vaccinated in China’s “animal farm?” The Chinese authorities think so.

Because of the agriculture ministry’s repeated refusal to give us permission to film in the regions affected by bird flu, we simply set off for the countryside outside Beijing on 4 February 2004.

Just 50 km from the capital, you are in another world. We were welcomed by a peasant who owns 12 chickens and five geese. He had learned only the day before of the existence of bird flu in China. He did not have a TV, radio or newspapers. It was a passing vet who warned him of the danger and came to vaccinate his poultry. We filmed without any problem. The down-to-earth, good-natured atmosphere prompted us to ask the vet if we could accompany him on his rounds. He thought he should inform his superiors, with the result that within a few minutes the local party secretary, the head of the village and of course the police arrived. The police accused us of filming without permission and without being accompanied. “But he was just vaccinating chickens,” we said. The police were unmoved. That was the end of our shoot.

In reality, bird flu is a highly political phenomenon in China. A bit like flooding. A proverb says: “He who controls the rivers, also controls the country.” So, you can imagine what they are like when they don’t have things under control.

The police accused us of filming without permission and without being accompanied

Off to the police station. Telephone, identity checks. Two policemen fill out a form for us, including the answers.
- Did you have permission to do this report? No!
- Do you admit to filming chickens? Yes.
- Do you admit to carrying out a clandestine report?
We tried to negotiate the terminology. I did not think filming poultry in the countryside around Beijing was a clandestine activity. But time was passing. They had not confiscated the video cassettes. There was still a chance of at least putting together a basic report. I signed.

The interrogation began again with new arrivals: foreign ministry representatives within the police force. Courteous but firm. We were finally released. We had lost two hours because of the chickens, but we had managed to open some doors. The next day, we were given permission to film poultry checks at the entrance to Beijing and a laboratory where research was being conducted into bird flu vaccine. China finally resorted to the news policy adopted during the SARS crisis – giving the foreign press something to see to avoid their looking elsewhere.

*Philipppe Rochot
France 2 correspondent in Beijing*

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**CHINA 2003**

23 journalists imprisoned
At least 15 arrested
At least 100 physically attacked
The Middle East was the region of the world with least press freedom in 2003. It had few independent media and journalists in several countries strictly censored themselves. The Iraq war and the continuing Israeli-Palestinian conflict also gravely endangered the media’s freedom and safety.

15 JOURNALISTS KILLED

Fifteen journalists and two media assistants were killed in the region in 2003. The Israeli army seriously hampered the work of foreign and Palestinian media covering events in the Palestinian Occupied Territories and did little to ensure their safety. Two cameramen were killed but the army only grudgingly admitted blame and did not punish those responsible.

During the war in Iraq, the outgoing regime’s propaganda and its restrictions on the media were severe. The US army was also very aggressive towards journalists, five of whom were killed by US soldiers during and after the fighting. But US officials made no proper investigation of these deaths.

HARSH REGIMES STIFLE THE MEDIA

The Islamic Republic of Iran remained the region’s biggest jail for journalists, with more than 40 imprisoned during the year, dozens of media censored, trials held mostly in secret and without defence lawyers and very poor conditions of detention. The plight of the country’s media worsened during the year. Canadian-Iranian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi died in Teheran’s Evin prison on 10 July after being tortured, but the subsequent trial of those allegedly responsible was delayed and promised to be worthless since her family’s lawyers were not allowed to see the case file. The press supporting the regime’s reformist wing displayed great vigour but Iranian journalists remained under constant pressure from the justice, intelligence and culture and Islamic guidance ministries, as well as the national security council.

The Arab press remained stifled by repressive and reactionary governments. In Syria, there was no independent privately-owned media. In Saudi Arabia, hard hit by terrorism in 2003, radio and TV remained a state monopoly and the written press was largely controlled by the royal family. But a few media outlets reported growing calls by civil society for political reforms.

The powerful Saudi regime and its harsh censorship served as a repressive example for others, including the governments of Egypt and Lebanon. The outspokenness of the Qatar-based pan-Arab satellite TV station Al-Jazeera was such a headache for the Saudi authorities that in February they sponsored the founding of a rival station, Al-Arabiya.

In Jordan, Yemen and the territories of the Palestinian Authority, privately-owned media were never safe from threats and censorship and journalists there face imprisonment for defamation or for insulting the authorities or Islam. In some countries, such as Iraq, armed groups or terrorists, as well as political movements, also made strong threats against media that spoke out. Journalists in the Gulf kingdoms (Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain and

The fight against terrorism is used by authoritarian regimes to justify censorship
Qatar) were still obliged to strictly censor themselves despite encouraging liberal gestures by governments. In Lebanon, long the only island of media freedom in the Arab world, legal abuses became more disturbing. A state of emergency has been in force in Egypt since 1981, allowing the government a degree of control over the media that it tried to increase during the Iraq war.

The fight against terrorism was also used by some regimes as an excuse for censorship. Several countries, including Jordan and Morocco, passed very tough security laws that were a threat to journalists and the media.

**TORN BETWEEN REFORMS AND OLD HABITS**

The wind of change blew strongest in Sudan and North Africa in 2003 thanks to presidential or royal decrees encouraging press freedom. Sudanese President Omar al-Beshir proclaimed the lifting of censorship and transferred monitoring of the media from the state security services to the National Press Council. In Morocco, the nine members of the national broadcasting council (set up in August 2002) were appointed in November to help prepare the end of the state broadcasting monopoly and open it up to private ownership.

In Tunisia, President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali announced on 7 November (the 16th anniversary of his taking power) that he considered press freedom very important, that the state radio and TV monopoly would end and that a privately-owned radio station was opening that day.

But the wind of change did not sweep away old habits. The Sudanese state security police continued to oversee the media and have newspapers suspended despite the president’s promises. In Morocco and Tunisia, privatisation did not guarantee independence and the opening-up of broadcasting there was likely to include continued government influence. Five of the nine members of Morocco’s broadcasting council, which was set up without any consultation with the media or parliament, were appointed by the government, which was thus ensured of control.

In Tunisia, where public and publicly-owned media remained entirely under government influence, the head of the first privately-owned radio station was a former information ministry official close to the president's family.

Press freedom suffered sharp setbacks in Morocco and Algeria. Two Moroccan journalists were imprisoned and three others given prison sentences which they were appealing. In Algeria, relations became tense between President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and the privately-owned press, which exposed corruption involving the president, his associates and local potentates. Constant arrests and summonses and legal and tax harassment were used to attack newspapers that criticised the president and his aides. One journalist was given a two-year jail sentence for libel.

The authorities in Mauritania also suspended newspapers and imprisoned a journalist. In Libya, the media remained under the thumb of Col. Muammar Gaddafi.

Séverine Cazes and Agnès Devictor
Heads of Reporters Without Borders’ Middle East and North Africa desk
More details, country by country, at www.rsf.org
An explosion shook every floor of the Palestine Hotel at 11:59 on the morning of 8 April 2003. A US tank was firing from the nearby Al-Jumhuriya Bridge, in the city centre. It was Day 21 of the war and Baghdad was falling.

Panic and screams of pain echoed in the hotel corridors. A cameraman lay face-down on a blood-soaked carpet in a devastated room 1503. One floor below lay another journalist, his burned camera beside him. They were given first aid but there were no doctors, no medicine and no stretchers. They were wrapped in sheets and taken down in a lift that stopped at every floor. Protsyuk died on the way to hospital. Couso, who lost a lot of blood, died on the operating table. Another journalist, Samia Nakhoul, had a shrapnel wound in her head. Photographer Faleh Kheiber was burned on his face and arms. British TV technician Paul Pasquale was hit too.

Who had fired? An American tank crew. It was filmed. But why did they fire?

**“LEGITIMATE SELF-DEFENCE,” A CAST-IRON EXCUSE**

Protsyuk and Couso weren’t famous. You couldn’t see them on prime-time TV. We saw the footage they produced without knowing it was theirs. They died. Four months later, a US military investigation was “completed” in a bid to hastily return them to anonymity.

They should’ve been forgotten. Everything was set up for that. Baghdad fell and the bronze statue of its chief was toppled. The country was in meltdown, with an event every minute, life had to go on, there were thousands of other victims, American tanks in the streets… It’s war, don’t you understand?

All it needed was a little lie and a big dose of dishonesty. Well what? OK, “legitimate self-defence,” a cast-iron excuse, clear and simple, legally and morally, because it was “legitimate,” like it says. So you have dead journalists, armed with cameras or binoculars, threatening soldiers sitting in their tanks.

Who had fired? An American tank crew. It was filmed. But why did they fire?

**Nobody in the US military hierarchy had seen fit to tell the troops the Palestine Hotel was full of journalists**

So that’s the First Version, the one that’ll make the headlines, fill the screens and soothe consciences, just for a day or two, and then it’ll all be forgotten in the tumult of war. They were just two cameramen, a Ukrainian and a Spaniard, and how do you spell their names anyway? With an “i” or with two “o’s”? They were standing just in the right place, cameras at the ready, to take pictures that would travel round the world. Not big-shot journalists at all. Can you imagine if they’d been reporters for some big US newspaper or TV network? It would’ve caused an outcry and the president himself would’ve been shedding a tear live on TV before Congress.

Never mind that the excuse of “shooting from the Palestine Hotel” is an insult to their deaths and to all the journalists who were in the hotel and said nothing of the sort was happening. Let’s just tell a lie and forget about it, OK? Anyway, the Pentagon warned them Baghdad was at war and that war was dangerous.

And who were they anyway? Just adventurers who shouldn’t’ve been there, who should’ve gone to the safety of Amman, whose editors could’ve used nice safe pictures like those sent by the US networks. But they chose to stay in Baghdad. Stubborn guys! And when the protests continued, the First Version became the Official Version, an official lie mouthed by the most senior US officials.

**THE SOLDIERS DID NOT KNOW WHAT THEY WERE FIRING AT**

Then last summer, a US army report presented a more sophisticated version. No
more “direct fire” but the threat of an Iraqi artillery spotter, an “enemy hunter/killer team” armed with binoculars. So the army admitted lying? Yes, but the important thing was that the shelling was still “legitimate,” wasn’t it? The case was then neatly and definitively filed away. Except that the lie remains.

Analysing the detailed movements of the soldiers who pressed the trigger and gave the order to fire the 120 mm. cannon, and pretending to defend the honour of the rank-and-file, is an attempt to hide the key fact that sergeant X and captain Y didn’t know what they were firing at. Because nobody in the military hierarchy had seen fit to tell the troops. So the “honourable captain” line was played up to hide criminal negligence by the command of an infantry division.

But of course it’s more complicated than that. You have to explain that the two lowly soldiers killed the journalists but weren’t the real killers, that you have to go higher up the ladder, to the general with the job of being in charge of his troops, of giving them orders, of being responsible for what they do. A general backed by the Pentagon, which so strongly advised “non-embedded” journalists to go away and watch TV pictures of the war, not insist on taking them. The Pentagon that was backed up by the White House spokesman who stressed that journalists should always obey military orders. For everyone’s safety, of course, especially of the journalists and their families. For example, the families mourning Protsyuk and Couso, who died because they were ignored.

The chaos of the war is over now. But it hasn’t swept away the memory of these two men or the questions raised by their death. It hasn’t made them fade into the background. Investigating their murder hasn’t established the whole truth, far from it. It’s demolished some big lies and replaced insulting affirmations with questions. It demands the resumption of the official enquiry. It demands the prosecution of those responsible – all of them. Drawing lessons from a mistake that was bound to happen. Telling those who died about our sorrow and boundless respect for them. And fighting to see they aren’t forgotten.

Jean-Paul Mari

The full report is at www.rsf.org
Iraq

AN AIR OF FREEDOM

A year after the fall of President Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship, the revival of the country’s media is under way. But promises of democracy in the distant future, post-war problems and obstruction by the US army and the transitional Governing Council make the future of press freedom uncertain.

In the days and weeks after the capture of Baghdad on 9 April 2003, satellite receiver dishes sprouted all over the city’s rooftops. Under the old regime, they were banned. Owners could be fined and, if caught a second time, imprisoned. Iraqis, deafened by the regime’s stepped-up propaganda since the Iran-Iraq war, now look to the outside world and have enthusiastically taken to Arab and Western satellite TV stations.

They can also access the Internet and dozens of cybercafés have opened in Baghdad, with virtually no websites blocked and users shielded from prying eyes. Previously, agents of the ruling Baath Party or the intelligence ministry (the Mukhabarat) looked over their shoulders to ensure they did not connect to personal e-mail sites like Hotmail and Yahoo, which were banned.

A MIXTURE OF INDEPENDENCE AND SELF-CENSORSHIP

A diverse and prolific press quickly replaced the four daily papers controlled with an iron hand by President Hussein’s oldest son Uday and which had pumped out the official line for more than 30 years. The new media reflects the large number of new political parties and the country’s tradition of a vigorous written press and included 100 or so religious, sports, political and women’s papers and magazines, including tabloids.

The post-war broadcasting scene is less diverse. The country’s US rulers set up the Iraqi Media Network (IMN), which includes a nationwide TV channel, some radio stations and a daily paper, Al-Sabah. The TV station Al-Iraqiyah has a virtual terrestrial broadcasting monopoly, has changed names several times and has credibility problems, as Iraqis often see it as a mouthpiece of the Americans.

Iraqi journalists have a new freedom but they still strictly censor themselves due to the climate of lawlessness and threats from authoritarian-minded political parties.

At the end of 2003, the country was still living under warlike conditions and was still dangerous for both local and foreign journalists. Almost daily sabotage and bomb attacks on soldiers of the US-led Coalition troops made some roads and areas of the country very dangerous. US soldiers were often hostile towards journalists, dozens of whom were arrested, physically attacked or prevented from working throughout the year.

The Iraqi media openly criticises the US, but many journalists refuse to talk about a “free press” in a country under foreign military occupation. They object to US administrator Paul Bremer’s June 2003 order providing for prison terms of up to a year for journalists found to be inciting violence against Coalition forces or preaching ethnic or religious hatred. Faced with such vaguely-defined offences, Iraqi journalists are careful what they say about the political situation and sometimes refuse to byline their articles.

FIRST AUTHORITARIAN REFLEXES

When it took office, the Governing Council, composed of Iraqi figures, declared support for press freedom, but it has not abolished or amended the old regime’s repressive media laws. In its first two months, the Council showed signs of taking the media in hand, proposing that Iraqi journalists voluntarily sign a strict “code of conduct.” The pan-Arab satellite TV stations Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya were accused of inciting “terrorism” and their operations several times suspended.

IRAQ 2003

12 journalists killed
2 missing
17 wounded
1 kidnapped
6 imprisoned
40 arrested
15 physically attacked

A lively press has emerged

Iraqis are flocking to buy satellite dishes
Zahra Kazemi was arrested on 23 June 2003 as she was taking pictures of prisoners’ families outside the Evin prison in northern Teheran. She was beaten by her jailers, fell into a coma and was taken on 27 June to the city’s Baghiatollah Hospital, where she died, reportedly on 10 July, of a brain haemorrhage caused by a broken skull. The authorities tried to cover up the cause of her death, but Vice-President Ali Abtahi admitted on 16 July she had been beaten.

Kazemi, 54, was hastily buried on 22 July in the southern city of Shiraz, despite demands by the Canadian government and her son Stephan that her body be brought back to Canada. Her mother, who lives in Iran, had made the same request but admitted on 30 July she had been forced by the authorities to agree to burial in Iran.

Vice-President Abtahi then talked openly of a “murder” and on 11 August the spokesman for the country’s judiciary, Gholam Hossein Elham, admitted she had died after being hit on the head. But he said this was not the fault of the authorities but of individuals.

A row then erupted between hardliners backing the country’s Supreme Guide, Ali Khamenei, and reformers behind President Mohammad Khatami, with each side accusing the other of being responsible. Teheran criminal prosecutor Judge Javad Esmaeli announced on 22 September that no state institutions were to blame for Kazemi’s death and arrested an intelligence ministry agent, Mohammad Reza Aghdam, who was accused of her “semi-intentional” murder, implying that he hit Kazemi without intending to kill her.

His trial, set for 7 October, was postponed until 4 November and then indefinitely. Lawyer Shirin Ebadi, the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize winner, agreed to represent the Kazemi family. Since then, no progress has been made. The family’s lawyers have not been able to consult the case-file to prepare for the court proceedings. The lack of interest by the authorities in establishing the truth makes it ever more necessary to set up an independent and impartial enquiry involving international experts.

For more, see www.rsf.org
Ali Lmrabet, the editor of two satirical newspapers, *Demain Magazine* and its Arabic-language sister *Doumane*, was given a four-year prison sentence in May 2003. This was reduced to three years on appeal. He was finally freed on 7 January 2004 after two long hunger strikes that seriously affected his health, but not his curiosity and his sense of humor.

"In the name of His Majesty the King, the court sentences you to four years in prison and orders that you be immediately incarcerated in Salé local prison. *Demain magazine* and *Doumane* are banned." The presiding judge of the Rabat lower court, Judge Alaoui, was white-faced when he passed sentence on 21 May 2003. It was probably the most important trial of his career. Indeed, it was the first time in 33 years that the Moroccan regime had sent a journalist to prison for a press offence. And it was only the second time in 13 years that it had applied article 400 of the criminal code, which allows the immediate arrest of a defendant who has entered the courtroom as a free person.

The earlier case was that of unionist Noubir Amaoui, the powerful secretary-general of the Democratic Labour Confederation (CDT), with which King Hassan II's government had a score to settle. The socialist left condemned the use of the case, once in power, they just tinkered with it, reducing the prison sentence for those who crossed the line from 20 to five years.

**THE “TOP” WANTED ME AT THE “BOTTOM”**

On 21 May, three police cars escorted me to Salé prison near Rabat. The most famous jail in the kingdom of a thousand contrasts. Even during the worst years of repression, political prisoners were usually placed in the wing reserved for foreigners. But this time the “people at the top,” that is to say, the people in the palace, decided to put a stop to this tradition. I was put in a wing where only non-political prisoners are held. The “top” wanted me down at the “bottom.” There is everything in this “bottom,” this dark mirror of Moroccan society. Lots of common criminals. Murderers, rapists, drug traffickers and every other kind of hoodlum.

And a bit further away, to one side, the white-collar criminals, whose cells are painted prettily in bright colours. They are also accorded the privilege of choosing their cell-mates, generally people from the “same world,” that is to say, the world of fraud and financial crime. These gentlemen-jailbirds are generous to the guards. Baksheesh. When they cross paths with the nice jailers, the latter stop dead and greet them with a broad smile that says: “Give me your money.” And of course they comply.

From time to time, when I could, I went down into the courtyard. That is where I learned that many of the Islamists rounded up throughout Morocco after the 16 May terrorist bombings in Casablanca are being held in two wings of the prison which the inmates now call Guantanamo. With only one exception, all of the doors and...
windows of “Guantanamo” are walled up and links with the rest of the prison have been cut. It is the DST, the sinister political police, that calls the shots in this Moroccan “Guantanamo.” DST agents mingle with the prison guards and wear their uniforms, but somehow everyone knows who they are. Their job is to monitor the Islamists, who are considered “extremely dangerous.” On paper, “Guantanamo” is under the justice ministry’s authority. In practice, this section of the prison is a concentration camp being run by the political police.

IN THE SAME BOAT AS A PRINCE

I was surprised to learn in this jungle that I was in the same boat as a prince. Yes, a real Alawi prince, a direct descendent of Hassan I, one of the great sultans of the former Sherifian empire who died at the end of the 19th century. I remembered how, during my doctoral researches, I came across an extraordinary document: the story of a secret delegation of Moroccan dignitaries who were sent to Spain by this reformist sultan to recruit 5,000 freemasons to modernise Morocco. The mission failed. As for this present-day prince, who is a cousin of King Mohammed VI and whose name is Moulay Abdeslam, I have been unable to discover the reasons for his being imprisoned in the same Bastille as myself.

I could have learned a lot more things in this jail of a thousand and one nights if, on 7 January 2004, after seven and a half months of captivity, I had not been set free along with 32 other political prisoners. The recently deceased Spanish writer Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, who spent three years in one of Franco’s jails, once wrote that prison is a treasure-house of learning and information. He was right. But I also learned why people prefer to learn and get their information outside of prison. Especially if it is a Moroccan prison.

Ali Lmrabet

For more, see www.rsf.org

1 Article 41: Any offence to His Majesty the King, the Princes and the Princesses Royal by one of the means envisaged in article 31 is punishable by imprisonment for three to five years and a fine of 10,000 to 100,000 dirhams. The same penalty applies when the publication of a newspaper or other written document undermines Islam, the monarchy or territorial integrity.

MOROCCO 2003

5 journalists imprisoned
4 arrested
1 physically attacked
EUROPE AND THE FORMER SOVIET BLOC COUNTRIES
FORMER SOVIET COUNTRIES: A RETURN TO THE OLD WAYS?

Press freedom in European Union (EU) countries remained satisfactory in 2003, with fewer physical attacks on journalists and fewer violations of the right to protect sources. But conditions for those working in former Soviet Bloc countries worsened further, with physical attacks, imprisonment, censorship, state monopolies of printing facilities and lack of diversity in the broadcast media.

At the heart of the EU, Italy continued to go against the grain. Prime minister Silvio Berlusconi had still not resolved the conflict of interests between his post and his ownership of a media empire. The government tried to push through laws to protect his private interests, further endangering news diversity.

The threat of the terrorist ETA in Spain continued to weigh on journalists who criticised the organisation. But the fight against terrorism also undermined press freedom, and the Basque-language newspaper Euskaldunon Egunkaria, whose editors were suspected of collaborating with the ETA, was closed as a “preventive measure.”

In France, investigative journalism and the right not to reveal sources was threatened by the proposed “Perben law,” whose most repressive clauses were eventually dropped.

SOME PRECARIOUS GAINS

Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia, all due to join the EU on 1 May 2004, respected press freedom. But in most of them, laws punishing defamation and perceived insults frequently hampered journalists in their work and gave undue protection to the authorities.

Events in Romania, which hopes to join the EU in 2007, were disturbing however. Four journalists investigating corruption among local officials of the ruling party were badly beaten. The authorities, keen to present themselves in a good light in the run-up to parliamentary and presidential elections in late 2004, stepped up legal harassment of journalists, who increasingly opted for self-censorship.

Working conditions remained very difficult for journalists in Turkey despite some legislative improvements to boost the country’s chances of EU membership. Pro-Kurdish journalists and those who criticised the government or the role of the armed forces in political life continued to be extensively harassed. In late October, a pro-Kurdish journalist was jailed for a year for “insulting” parliament.

Press freedom sharply declined in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (which is only recognised by Turkey), where the authorities cracked down on journalists who criticised the government of President Rauf Denktash. Five journalists were facing between 10 and 40 years in prison for “insulting the army.”

Advances in press freedom remained fragile in Balkan countries. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia continued to make progress, but major restrictions were imposed in Serbia-Montenegro, especially during the state of emergency after the assassination of prime minister Zoran Djindjic. Bad relations between the media and politicians led to a rise in unjustified prosecutions of journalists in Macedonia.

LEGAL HARASSMENT, AN EFFECTIVE WEAPON

No journalist in the region was murdered in 2003 because of their work, but some killings were still being investigated at the end of the year.
Seven journalists died in very mysterious circumstances in Ukraine, Russia and Kyrgyzstan. In Ukraine, the killers of Georgy Gongadze and Igor Alexandrov were still unpunished and in Belarus, no effort had been made to find those really responsible for the disappearance of Dmitri Zavadski. Journalists investigating political or financial corruption continued to be very frequent targets of physical attacks, including nearly 100 in Azerbaijan, mostly during the presidential election.

Reporting on elections and campaigns in Armenia, Georgia and Russia led to many attacks on press freedom. Russian authorities used the excuse of combating “election propaganda” to restrict coverage of parliamentary elections under a law suspending media that infringed the electoral law more than twice.

Legal harassment remains an effective weapon to prevent independent and opposition media from acting as a counterbalance to government power. The authorities in Ukraine continued to harass their strongest media critics using tax laws. A dozen newspapers were suspended and punished in Belarus.

In most former Soviet republics, trials for libel and insults, punishable by prison terms, were used to silence critical journalists. In Belarus and Russia, four journalists were sentenced to imprisonment or hard labour for defaming government officials. Five journalists were in prison in Uzbekistan, where censorship remained in force despite its official abolition in 2002. The authorities tried to discredit a journalist and human rights activist in Uzbekistan and another in Kazakhstan by jailing them for alleged sex crimes. Both were sentenced after sham trials.

In some ex-Soviet republics, there is little or no media freedom. Censorship was total in Turkmenistan, the most repressive of them. The regime controlled all written and broadcast media and also did everything it could to block news from the outside world by banning foreign newspapers and blocking access to Internet websites. Reporting independently of the authorities was virtually impossible in Chechnya, where there has been a war since 1999. A correspondent for Agence France-Presse, one of the few foreign media operating in the country, was kidnapped in July.

Soria Blatmann, head of Reporters Without Borders’ Europe desk, and Caroline Giraud (former Soviet Bloc countries)

More details, country by country: www.rsf.org
Silvio Berlusconi owns Mondadori, one of the country’s main press and publishing groups, and Mediaset, which runs three TV stations. As prime minister, he is also in a position to strongly influence the state-owned TV station RAI.

Originally a construction magnate, he started building his media empire in 1973 through the holding company Fininvest. His fortune was put at nearly 5.5 million euros by the US magazine Forbes in 2003. Television is by far the favourite medium of Italians, so when he went into politics in 1993, his business activities became an issue. While the left was in power, it was unable or unwilling to solve the problem.

Berlusconi became prime minister again in 2001 after promising during the election campaign to settle the matter in his first 100 days in office. But the bill he came up with to do this was a trick. It says running a profit-making business is incompatible with being prime minister, but that there is no conflict of interest if the owner simply hands the running of it over to a third person. So Berlusconi has transferred formal management of his businesses to his family and associates and any conflict of interest has therefore officially disappeared.

**EXTENSIVE INTERFERENCE**

Television, rather than the written press, is the focus of the conflict of interest. Since it was founded, RAI has been strongly politicised because of the tradition of “lottizzazione,” which allows each major political grouping to control a RAI channel. This arrangement was originally meant to guarantee diversity in public broadcasting but now makes RAI directly dependent on politicians and its journalists and managers higher politicised. Members of its board are appointed by the presidents of the chamber of deputies and the senate and the director-general is named jointly by the board chairman and the economy minister.

So the overlap of politics and the public TV corporation predates Berlusconi, but his powerful influence over RAI as head of a broad coalition government and his ownership of three other stations that compete with it have serious implications for RAI’s independence.

Berlusconi shows little concern about his dual role and does not spare journalists. In 2002, he lashed out at two veteran RAI reporters, accusing them of “criminally” misusing the station. Their very
Opposition parties were crushed in the 7 December 2003 federal parliamentary elections by President Vladimir Putin’s Edinaya Rossiya party, which came first, followed by the Communists and two nationalist parties.

During the election campaign, the authorities used the state-owned media for their own ends and abused their power so as to silence media that criticised government candidates. The state-owned TV stations RTR and ORT openly backed such candidates and the government, as part of its drive to merge the national broadcast media, took control of the public opinion firm VTsIOM four months before the election.

The Council of the Federation (upper house of parliament) also amended the electoral law to prevent free media coverage of the elections by defining forbidden “election propaganda” so broadly that journalists censored themselves for fear their media outlets would be shut down. A few days before the election campaign officially began, the amendments were declared unconstitutional.

In some parts of the country, local bosses intimidated opposition and independent media while federal authorities turned a blind eye. The media situation worsened in war-torn Chechnya in the early autumn when interior ministry troops seized control of the main radio and TV station, as well as eight newspapers in Grozny, a few weeks before the election of the pro-Russian administrator Akhmat Kadyrov as president of the region.

Apart from the election problems, 18 journalists, most of them investigating corruption or organised crime, were physically attacked in 2003. Twelve others were arrested, a quarter of them writing about environmental matters, yet another sign that glasnost (openness) is not a concern of Putin’s government.
REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS

Ali Astamirov, the correspondent in Chechnya and Ingushetia for the French news agency Agence France-Presse (AFP), was kidnapped by armed men on 4 July 2003 in the village of Altievo, three kms from Nazran, the main town of Ingushetia, in the presence of other journalists.

A BEACON IN THE NEWS BLACKOUT

Few journalists cover the war in Chechnya these days outside the bounds set by the Russian authorities and the official convoys they organise. The Russians do all they can to discourage independent reporting and the danger of being kidnapped is still very high. So getting reliable news is ever more difficult.

Tamara K. has been keeping a factual record of the war since 1994. Each day, she films or photographs the crimes committed by the Russian army.

Since 1994, you’ve been gathering news about the war and the abuses committed. Has your job got easier or harder?

It’s more and more difficult because the Russian army has tightened its control and surveillance. The number of killings and the methods used haven’t changed though. Kidnapping, murder, rape, torture and other violence is growing all the time.

Where do you get the information?

After the war began in 1994, and amid a total news blackout, the civilian population was always willing to tell us about the daily horrors of kidnappings and the humiliation of constant searches. People had a respect for journalists. This gave us all the strength and will to continue in the face of tremendous risks. But now Chechens have lost all confidence in justice and any hope the war and genocide will end some day. This change of attitude has made it increasingly harder for journalists to collect evidence of what’s going on. You mustn’t forget that people risk their lives when they talk to us.

What do you do with the news you gather? Why is the work of the media so important?

Like all my colleagues, I share it with human rights groups in Chechnya and abroad. We all collect and put out news in the hope of ending the slaughter.

Interview by Reporters Without Borders

ALI ASTAMIROV

A JOURNALIST SILENCED

A 34-year-old Chechen with two children, had been with AFP for a year after working for a privately-owned radio station in Grozny and, between 1998 and October 1999, when fighting began in Chechnya, for the local branch of the then-independent Russian TV station NTV.

In the months before he was seized, he had received anonymous threats and had moved house for safety reasons. Neither those in charge of the case in Moscow nor the prosecutor’s office in Nazran have made any significant progress in their investigations. His family, who believed he was still alive three weeks after his disappearance, are now no longer sure. At any rate, one of the few journalists reporting on the war and its constant abuses has been silenced.

Reporters Without Borders has worked to ensure Astamirov is not forgotten, by lobbying Russian officials and French diplomats, publishing a call by 10 journalists (former kidnap victims themselves) to Russian President Vladimir Putin to make greater efforts to find him and asking Russian and foreign radio stations to broadcast an appeal to the kidnappers from his brother.
Physical attacks on journalists increased alarmingly throughout the country in 2003. At least 11 of the targets were reporters investigating corrupt regional officials or who had criticised local politicians. Two journalists died in very mysterious circumstances, but there is no evidence why they had been murdered.

The killers of political journalist Georgy Gongadze, editor of the online newspaper www.pravda.com.ua, who vanished at the age of 31 on 16 September 2000 and whose headless and mutilated body was found two months later, are still at large. The murder became a political matter when tapes were revealed of conversations allegedly made in President Kuchma’s office and seeming to implicate top government officials.

The investigation, plagued for years by serious errors and inefficiency, finally produced results in autumn 2003 with the arrest of former interior ministry intelligence chief Oleksy Pukach, the first senior government official to be arrested in the case. But a week later, prosecutor-general Sviatoslav Piskun, who had said in September the enquiry was entering its final phase, was sacked by Kuchma.

The murder of Igor Alexandrov, head of the TV station TOR, in Slaviansk (Donetsk region), who was beaten to death on 7 July 2001, also remained unpunished.

The media was again extensively harassed in 2003 and local tax authorities stepped up inspections of the accounts of media critical of the government. As the October 2004 presidential election approached, the parliamentary commission for freedom of expression and information called on the government to halt such inspections between 1 January and 30 October. Since most of the media, especially TV, radio and news agencies, are controlled by associates of President Kuchma or the country’s oligarchy, the election campaign is expected to be a dangerous time for the most outspoken journalists.

For more, see www.rsf.org
PREDATORS OF PRESS FREEDOM

There are instigators and powerful people behind press freedom violations whose responsibility is not always apparent. Whether presidents, ministers, chiefs of staff, religious leaders or the heads of armed groups, these predators of press freedom have the power to censor, imprison, kidnap, torture and, in the worst cases, murder journalists. To better expose them, Reporters Without Borders has produced these portraits.

ARMED GROUPS

Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Kashmir, Pakistan, Philippines

Armed Islamic militants

In Pakistan, Kashmir and Philippines, Islamist “Jihadists” groups attack local and foreign journalists who investigate their activities. In certain areas of Algeria, the threats have continued since the wave of murders of the 1990s. In Afghanistan, the Taliban called for westerners, especially journalists, to be killed. In Bangladesh, the most radical Islamists target journalists who write about violence and abuses against Hindus.

Colombia Carlos Castaño

PARAMILITARY LEADER

Of the five journalists killed in Colombia in 2003, three were probably targeted by the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC), a paramilitary group led by Carlos Castaño, for accusing local officials of corruption. This is all the more alarming as the paramilitaries have entered a peace process with the authorities and have negotiated total impunity in return for demobilising. The truce, in place since December 2002, has not resulted in any let-up in their threats or physical attacks against the press.

Colombia Nicolas Rodríguez Bautista and Manuel Marulanda

GUERRILLA CHIEFS

Seven journalists were kidnapped in Colombia in 2003 by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), a Marxist guerrilla group led by Carlos Castaño. The appearance of a blacklist in March prompted the departure of 13 journalists from Arauca department, leaving the region without correspondents. Such methods were shared with the Guevarist guerrillas of the National Liberation Army (ELN), led by Nicolas Rodríguez Bautista, who kidnapped two British journalists in January. In all, these two groups have kidnapped or detained more than 80 journalists since 1997.

Nepal Comrade Prachanda

MAOIST LEADER

Pushpan Kamal Dahal, more commonly known as Comrade Prachanda, runs the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) with an iron hand and has led it in a “popular war” against the monarchy and feudalism since 1995. Hunted by the army, the Maoist guerrillas have killed at least three journalists. In 2003, they cut the throat of a correspondent who worked for the state press agency. Peasant farmers living in the areas under their control are forbidden to listen to privately-owned radio stations.

Spain ETA

TERRORIST ORGANISATION

The armed Basque separatist organisation ETA resumed its terror campaign, making many threats against journalists who did not share its position on the Iraq war as well as the situation in the Basque country. The Basque TV station Euskal Irratia Telebista (EITB) was its leading target in 2003. Many journalists were forced to seek police protection or hire private bodyguards and news organisations stepped up security at the entrances to their premises.

REDITARY RULERS

Equatorial Guinea

Teodoro Obiang Nguema

PRESIDENT

Re-elected president with 97.1 per cent of the votes in December 2002, Teodoro Obiang Nguema has ruled Africa’s only Spanish-speaking country with an iron hand since 1979. After buying or imprisoning his leading opponents in 2002, he tightened his grip on a press already weakened by declining sales. The state media are under his heel. The state radio said in July 2003 that he was “the god of Equatorial Guinea” and could “decide to kill without having to give anyone an account and without going to hell.”

Nepal

Gyanendra Shah Dev

KING

Gyanendra has governed the country with the support of just his own party since 4 October 2002, after dissolving parliament. Unable to restore stability, he gave his army full powers to crush the Maoist “terrorists.” The security forces arrested, detained in undisclosed locations, tortured or threatened about 100 journalists in 2003. More journalists have been arrested in the past three years in Nepal than in any other country in the world.
Saudi Arabia **Abdullah ibn al-Saud**

CROWN PRINCE

Prince Abdullah has been in charge since King Fahd's stroke in 1995. He and the rest of the royal family have been under heavy US pressure to reform their political institutions since the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. At the same time they face growing domestic dissent. Journalists sometimes dare to cross the lines established by the **Saudi Press Agency**, a direct offshoot of the interior ministry. But censorship and self-censorship remain the norm.

Swaziland **Mswati III**

**KING**

Mswati III has been absolute ruler of Swaziland since 1986. Political parties are banned and the king appoints government ministers, parliamentarians and judges. He controls the news media, too. Self-censorship is the norm and many subjects are off limits. Any criticism of the monarchy is banned and questions at press conferences are chosen in advance by the king’s advisers. The state press only carries news reports that have been checked and approved by the information ministry.

Syria **Bashar el-Assad**

**PRESIDENT**

Bashar el-Assad announced a liberalization of the regime when he succeeded his father in July 2000 but no “Damascus spring” ever arrived. The war in neighbouring Iraq in 2003 showed that the authorities continued to keep complete control of the news. The authorities kept foreign journalists under surveillance and censored the Internet. Two Internet users were imprisoned. Privately-owned TV stations are banned, and the privately-owned radio stations are only allowed to broadcast music or entertainment programmes.

**SHAM DEMOCRATS**

Bangladesh **Altaf Hossain Chowdhury**

**HOME MINISTER**

The police officers who tortured Reporters Without Borders correspondent Saleem Samad in 2003, following his arrest, were acting on the orders of home minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury. He also jailed a **Reuters** reporter accused of misquoting him. Since Chowdhury became home minister in October 2001, at least 500 journalists have been attacked or threatened, 20 have been arrested, four have been murdered and some 30 news media or press clubs have been attacked.

Ethiopie **Meles Zenawi**

**PRIME MINISTER**

Meles Zenawi took power in 1991 after 20 years of armed struggle in the ranks of the Tigrean guerrilla movement. He cannot stand the verbal excesses of the very critical local press. Several dozen journalists are currently subject to judicial proceedings and are awaiting trial. Any one of them could receive a prison sentence at any moment and find themselves in one of the country's many detention centres.

Russia **Vladimir Putin**

**PRESIDENT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

Since taking office in 2000, Vladimir Putin has whit- tled away many of the freedoms won after the fall of the Soviet Union. This former KGB officer has recovered control of the main national broadcast media and made it impossible to freely cover the war in Chechnya. He has not called to order provincial authorities who censor the opposition press, while journalists who denounce official corruption are subjected to violence with impunity.

Rwanda **Paul Kagame**

**PRESIDENT**

With his position confirmed by August 2003 elections which he won with 95 per cent of the votes, Gen. Kagame now has a free hand to run the country as he wishes. Despite promises that privately-owned radio stations would be permitted, there is still no press freedom. The main print media just relay official information and the few newspapers with an independent editorial line pay dearly in terms of temporary closures, seizure of issues, threats and other forms of harassment. Two journalists have been detained without good reason for more than seven years and several others are in exile.

Singapore **Goh Chok Tong**

**PRIME MINISTER**

Prime minister since 1990, Goh Chok Tong is also the leader of the People’s Action Party, which counts on the unfailing support of both state and privately-owned news media groups. The regime lets the pop- ulation have access to foreign media, but the local press rarely carries independent reporting on the country’s situation. The information minister said in 2003 that censorship was necessary to protect the public from violence and moral depravity. A number of inde- pendent websites try to inform the public freely at the risk of being prose- cuted.

Tunisia **Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali**

**PRESIDENT**

Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali tried to evoke some respect for press freedom by releasing the young cyber-dissident Zouhair Yahyaoui in November 2003 and announcing the creation of a privately-owned radio network on the 16th anniversary of his installation. But in practice, both the state and privately owned print media, as well as radio, TV and Internet, continued to follow his orders. Journalists who try to work in a more independent fashion are con- stantly harassed. Two are in prison.
Predators of press freedom

BELARUS

Alexander Lukashenko 
PRESIDENT
An autocrat on the Soviet model, President Lukashenko does his best to stifle any challenge to his power. Specialists in bureaucratic harassment, the authorities have prevent many newspapers from appearing and have gone so far as to close down organisations that support news media. Three journalists have served sentences of hard labour for “insulting the president” and Impunity prevails in the case of journalist Dmitri Zavadski, who disappeared in 2000.

Eritrea

Issaias Afeworki 
PRESIDENT
Africa’s biggest prison for journalists and the continent’s only country with no privately-owned news media, Eritrea holds the saddest records. Issaias Afeworki, who has been president since independence in 1993, bears most of the responsibility for this. He has remained totally indifferent to the appeals of the international community. At least 14 journalists are being held in undisclosed locations. Branded as “traitors” by the authorities, they could be condemned to death.

KAZAKHSTAN

Nursultan Nazarbayev 
PRESIDENT
Most of the privately-owned news media are controlled by Nursultan Nazarbayev’s clan, including his daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva. The few opposition newspapers and Internet sites that published articles about the president’s alleged involvement in embezzlement have been prosecuted, closed or otherwise neutralised. One of the regime’s most outspoken critics, journalist and human rights activist Sergei Duvanov, was sentenced to three and a half years in prison in January 2003.

UKRAINE

Leonid Kuchma 
PRESIDENT
President Leonid Kuchma and his associates continued to control the most influential media in the run-up to the 2004 presidential election. The election campaign was expected to be risky for the more independent journalists, who are subjected to many forms of harassment. The investigation into the 2000 murder of journalist Georgiy Gongadze, an outspoken critic of the Kuchma regime, was still paralysed, with questions about the involvement of the country’s most senior officials left unanswered.

UZBEKISTAN

Islam Karimov 
PRESIDENT
Officially censorship was abolished in Uzbekistan in 2002. In practice it is still applied, especially to the state TV broadcaster, which portrays a world with little resemblance to Uzbekistan’s political and economic reality. Journalists must not mention corruption, drug trafficking or Islam or in any way criticise President Karimov’s policies. Five of them are in prison, including journalist and press freedom activist Ruslan Sharipov, who is serving a four-year sentence.

IRAN

Ali Khamenei 
GUIDE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC
Locked in a power struggle with reformist President Mohammad Khatami, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the “Guide of the Islamic Republic,” has the advantage of political muscle and control of the judicial system. By trying to cover this power struggle, the press has become its victim. Journalists live with the permanent threat of being imprisoned and tried without good reason. Photojournalist Zahra Kazemi was murdered in prison in July 2003. A total of 43 journalists were jailed in 2003, making Iran the Middle East’s biggest prison for journalists.

LAOS

Khamtay Siphandone 
PRESIDENT
Khamtay Siphandone keeps very close control of the news media. The official news agency, Khomuan Pathet Laos (KPL), gets its orders from the party, and is the only one allowed to express a view on sensitive subjects. The party newspaper describes itself as a “revolutionary publication produced by the people and for the people.” In 2003, two European freelance journalists, Thierry Falise and Vincent Reynaud, were arrested and sentenced to 15 years in prison for reporting about the Hmong minority. They were then released.

PAKISTAN

Pervez Musharraf 
PRESIDENT
Gen. Musharraf uses the military’s directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to watch, intimidate, manipulate or arrest both Pakistani and foreign journalists who annoy him. He defended the secret detention and torture of Khawar Mehdi, who investigated Taliban groups on the Afghan border with two journalists from the French weekly L’Express, who were themselves arrested and then released. An investigative journalist was fired from his newspaper in June 2003 as a result of pressure by the president, who accused him of tarnishing the country’s image. Another journalist was condemned to death after criticising the activities of an anti-narcotics government agency controlled by Gen. Musharraf.

TURKEY

Hilmi Ozkok 
ARMED FORCES CHIEF OF STAFF
In his capacity as armed forces chief of staff, Gen. Hilmi Ozkok is a member of the National Security Council, a body that gives the military a permanent say in Turkey’s political affairs and its news media. Despite the adoption of sweeping legislative reforms with a view to joining the European Union, journalists who criticise government policy or the army’s influence are still subject to judicial harassment. Four are currently in prison because of the views they have expressed in the course of their work.
China Hu Jintao
PRESIDENT
When Hu Jintao was establishing himself at the head of the Communist Party and the state in early 2003, the propaganda department banned journalists from talking about China’s SARS epidemic. In general, the authorities ban any mention of sensitive topics such as workers’ strikes, dissidents, the Falung Gong or separatist movements. Hu has done nothing to ease the harsh measures used against cyber-dissidents and Internet users. At least 53 are currently detained by the public security department.

North Korea Kim Jong II
GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE KOREAN WORKERS’ PARTY
Egocentric and out of control, Kim Jong II rules his ailing nation using just the title of chairman of the national defence commission. The sole role he accords the press is to “disseminate the policy of the single party and eminent comrade Kim Jong II for achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat.” North Koreans may only own radio and TV sets that are locked on to official stations and have seals that are checked every three months. Foreign journalists are banned and very little information gets out about the 200,000 people held in concentration camps.

Turkmenistan Separmurad Niyazov
PRESIDENT
No press freedom is allowed in Turkmenistan, where the media are a propaganda tool used by President-for-Life Separmurad Niyazov. The newspapers carry a photo of the “Father of the Turkmen” on the front page. The TV channels show his picture on the side of the screen. He determines their editorial line. Many have been imprisoned in very harsh conditions for daring to criticise him. Journalists must choose between self-censorship or exile.

Vietnam Nong Duc Manh
PARTY FIRST SECRETARY
According to two directives from the Communist Party political bureau, headed by Nong Duc Manh, dissident journalists are “criminal spies” and the foreign media are guilty of promoting “violence in order to deny the socialist ideal.” Manh stepped up repression against critical journalists, who risk heavy prison sentences for “libel”, “subversion” or “spreading false news.” Nguyen Dinh Huy, now in his 70s, has been in prison since November 1993 and is serving a 15-year sentence. Seven cyber-dissidents are also being held.

Cuba Fidel Castro
PRESIDENT OF THE STATE COUNCIL AND COUNCIL OF MINISTERS
Some 30 journalists are enduring very harsh prison conditions since a crackdown launched on 18 March 2003. Prison terms of up to 27 years, solitary confinement in filthy cells, lack of water or medicine, beatings by guards, denial of visiting rights – the Castro regime stops at nothing in its efforts to discourage the independent press. Cuba is the world’s biggest prison for journalists. Independent journalists who are not in prison are subject to constant harassment.

Libya Muammar Gaddafi
HEAD OF STATE AND GUIDE OF THE REVOLUTION
Col. Gaddafi keeps a steely grip on all the news media, which are totally subordinated to the regime. Although he has succeeded in reintegrating Libya into the concert of nations, he has made no concession to press freedom and tolerates no press independence. There is still no word of Abdullah Ali al-Sanussi al-Darrat, who has reportedly been in prison for more than 30 years.

Maldives Maumoon Abdul Gayoom
PRESIDENT
Re-elected in October 2003 with 90.28 per cent of the votes, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has little patience with press criticism. Three people who ran an electronic news letter are still in prison. The government withdrew the licences of a score of publications in 2003. The information minister is the president’s brother-in-law. The daily Aafathis is owned by his son-in-law. The governmental radio and television grant only the most limited space to opposition voices. Access to more than 30 websites based abroad is blocked.

Togo Gnassingbé Eyadema
PRESIDENT
The longest-serving ruler in sub-Saharan Africa, Gen. Gnassingbé Eyadema has been president of Togo since 1967. He knows the press well and mistrusts it. When journalists are overly critical of him, he summons them to Lomé II, his residence in the capital, for a personal lecture on how unseemly it is to target the state’s highest official. Two journalists were badly beaten while in detention in 2003.

Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe
PRESIDENT
In office for nearly a quarter-century, Robert Mugabe has decided to silence all opposition voices in Zimbabwe for good, even if it means sometimes taking some liberties with the law. After getting rid of the foreign press, he targeted The Daily News, the only independent daily, in 2003. Despite court rulings ordering its reopening, the government did not give an inch. Everything possible was done to ensure that the newspaper, declared in illegal in September, did not reappear.
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