

Dangerous Assignments

covering the global press freedom struggle

Spring | Summer 2006

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China's Hidden Unrest

Protests against land grabs and graft are roiling the countryside.

As Beijing crushes dissent, it silences the press ...



Critics or Traitors in Ethiopia?

Exploiting the Prophet Cartoons

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On the cover: The Chinese government shut down news coverage of demonstrations in the village of Taishi last September, but activists and journalists sought ways to document the unrest. Our cover image, showing police out in force, is taken from a documentary by Chinese professor Ai Xiaoming. The Chinese titling in the image states: "Public security organs can issue a warning or detain for less than 15 days."

Dangerous Assignments Spring|Summer 2006

AS IT HAPPENED

The top press freedom stories. 2

IN FOCUS By Alexis Arieff

A "rattled" Kenyan government burns newspapers. 3

FIRST PERSON By Bassam Sebti

An Iraqi reporter keeps a low profile. 4

CPJ REMEMBERS By Jihad Ballout

Atwar Bahjat reported for all Iraqis. 6

Q&A By Maya Taal

A U.S. press lawyer on secrets, sources, and wiretaps. 7

COMMENTARY By Alex Lupis

Putin props up a Belarusian dictator. 8

FEATURES

COVER STORY

The Unseen Rebellion By Kristin Jones

Across rural China, corruption and land seizures are prompting tens of thousands of protests. But the nation's greatest political crisis is nearly invisible as central authorities wage a media crackdown that harkens back to the aftermath of Tiananmen Square. . . . 10

Drawing Fire By Ivan Karakashian

Yemeni editor Mohammed al-Asaadi sought context in the debate over the Prophet Muhammad cartoons. Like others worldwide, he found intolerance. 16

The 10 Most Censored Countries Graphic by Justin Goldberg

Whose president is a "god"? What was banned because of Valentine ads? And where on earth have all the libraries been closed? 20

'Poison,' Politics, and the Press By Julia Crawford

Ethiopian journalists are accused of heinous crimes such as treason and genocide, but a toxic political climate is at the root of the charges. 22

Bad Blood in Turkey By Robert Mahoney

Journalist Hrant Dink means no insult when he urges Turks to examine their history, but nationalist lawyers are ready to take offense. 26

UPDATE By Abi Wright

Daniel Pearl's murder remains an open case. 29

MISSION JOURNAL By Joel Simon

Persuading Colombia's president to back the press. 32

DISPATCHES By Shawn W. Crispin

A reporter vanishes on an Indonesian island. 34

ON THE WEB By Sophie Beach

China goes online to defend censorship. 38

KICKER By Mick Stern 40

A look at recent red-letter cases from the CPJ files...

December



5 Pakistani reporter Hayatullah Khan disappears after being seized by armed assailants. The abduction comes days after his reporting contradicts official accounts of an explosion that killed a senior al-Qaeda commander.

21 Ethiopia indicts more than a dozen journalists on charges of treason after civil unrest prompts a massive crackdown on the independent press and the political opposition. (Story, page 22.)

January

3 CPJ reports that 47 journalists were killed in connection with their work in 2005. More than 100 journalists died on duty over the past two years, the deadliest such period in a decade.

17 A Chinese court sentences Zhu Wanxiang to 10 years in prison and Wu Zhengyou to six years after they sought to report on rural unrest in the southeast province of Zhejiang. (Related story, page 10.)

February

1 Guatemala's highest court strikes down laws that criminalize expressions deemed offensive to public officials. The country joins the growing ranks of Latin American nations that have eliminated *desacato*, or disrespect, laws.

6 Assailants storm the Mexican newspaper *El Mañana*, firing assault rifles and tossing a grenade. Reporter Jaime Orozco is injured in the assault, the latest in a series of drug-fueled

attacks in the border city of Nuevo Laredo.



9 Indonesia's Supreme Court overturns the criminal libel conviction of Bambang Harymurti, editor of *Tempo* magazine. In what is considered a landmark ruling, the court finds that civil libel laws should apply.

March

19-28 More than two dozen journalists are arrested in Belarus while covering postelection demonstrations. President Aleksandr Lukashenko, whose re-election was tainted by irregularities, cracks down on independent coverage. (Story, page 8.)



30 Jill Carroll, a freelance reporter working for *The Christian Science Monitor*, is freed in Baghdad after being held by kidnappers for nearly three months. Carroll is among 40 journalists who have been abducted in Iraq.

April

4 The BBC says Niger is blocking its coverage of malnutrition in the central region of Maradi. The government pulls accreditation from a BBC crew and bars officials from talking about the problem.



6 CBS cameraman Abdul Ameer Younis Hussein is freed a year after he was detained by U.S. forces in Iraq. An Iraqi court acquits him on

charges of collaborating with insurgents, citing a lack of evidence. Hussein was held without charge for 11 months.

May

3 Marking World Press Freedom Day, CPJ names the 10 Most Censored Countries. North Korea heads the dishonor roll. (Graphic, page 20.) ■

As They Said

"No one in China is jailed for expressing their views."

—Chu Maoming, Chinese Embassy spokesman, to CPJ. More than 30 Chinese journalists are in prison for their work, CPJ research shows.

"I have no doubt that Iran and Syria have gone out of their way to inflame sentiments and have used this for their own purposes. The world ought to call them on it."

—U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to reporters. Rice accused the two nations of exploiting controversy over published caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad. (Related story, page 16.)

"We'll make sure we don't hold someone for six or eight months."

—U.S. Maj. Gen. John Gardner to Reuters in announcing a new policy to promptly review detentions of journalists by U.S. troops in Iraq. At least seven journalists were jailed for prolonged periods without charge in 2005.



AP/Sayyid Azim



Reuters/Thomas Mukoya



AP/Sayyid Azim

NAIROBI, Kenya

Shortly after midnight on March 2, police commandos stormed Kenya's oldest newspaper and private television station, both owned by the Standard Group. The raids came two days after several *Standard* journalists were arrested for publishing "alarming" statements in a story about political machinations within President Mwai Kibaki's troubled ruling coalition.

Police disabled the printing press at *The Standard*, herded employees outside, and set fire to thousands of copies of the day's edition. The rival *Nation* newspaper reported that one hooded officer shouted to terrified *Standard* workers: "I can smoke you!

I can waste you!" Government forces also raided the offices of the Kenya Television Network (KTN), detaining staff and confiscating tapes and computer hard drives.

The raids were widely covered by local media and the extensive foreign press that uses Nairobi as a hub to cover eastern Africa. While Information Minister Mutahi Kagwe initially denied reports that the government had ordered the police action, National Security Minister John Michuki later said the raids were carried out to protect state security. "If you rattle a snake, you must be prepared to be bitten by it," he warned.

Standard CEO Tom Mshindi said that the raids were part of Kenyan authorities' "growing intolerance" of the media in general and *The Standard*—which had published a string of exposés on official corruption—in particular. The media outlets resumed normal activities later that day, but the raids made waves within the Kenyan media, among Africa's largest and most diverse, and the opposition. On March 7, thousands of Kenyans marched in Nairobi to demand Kibaki's resignation. "To hell with the snake government," one placard read. ■

—Alexis Arief

Heading into Danger

An Iraqi reporter must hide his profession even as he is compelled to follow its demands.

By Bassam Sebti

Sebti, 26, is a special correspondent for The Washington Post and one of a growing number of Iraqi reporters covering the conflict for Western news organizations.

BAGHDAD, Iraq

As I leave home each day, I peer right and left to be sure no one is tracking me. I follow the same routine when I return 12 hours later. Being a journalist for an Iraqi organization is dangerous enough, but working for a foreign news outlet puts you in double jeopardy. In the eyes of insurgents, I am a “spy,” an “infidel,” a profiteer exploiting the suffering of Iraqis.

No one in my neighborhood knows what I do. I’ve convinced them that I run my own business, an Internet café. If anyone discovers my profession, I am sure to be threatened and I fear being killed. Since 2004, three neighborhood men who worked as translators for U.S. firms have been shot dead.

I don’t drive a car to work because I don’t want to be identified going in and out of the compound where *The Washington Post* bureau is based. I hail taxis instead, examining each driver’s face in hopes that I can somehow discern whether he is a threat. By nature, Iraqi cab drivers like to chat, but is the driver exchanging pleasantries or collecting information that could endanger me? I keep silent so the driver

doesn’t know who I am or what I do. Paranoia has become my shield.

I worry about threatening letters or a bomb planted at my family’s doorstep. In 2004, a colleague had to flee Iraq after a bomb shattered windows and destroyed parts of his home. As a reaction, I’ve created my own security measures. When I am home, for example, my parents don’t answer any nighttime knocks on the door. Instead, I check who is there, in case it is someone with a gun.

I do give my name when conducting interviews—I feel it’s the ethical thing to do. My byline also appears on stories, although I ask my bosses not to use it on sensitive pieces that might put me in danger.

Car bombings are among the most dangerous assignments, yet I am drawn to them because it brings me closer to the people who are suffering. I wait at least a half hour before going to such scenes, though, because insurgents use double-bombing techniques to heighten the devastation. A car bomb will explode, draw a curious crowd to the scene, and then a second bomb will claim a new set of victims.

Stress is an unforgiving companion. Body parts scattered in the streets and children weeping over dead parents are common scenes in my daily life. Covering the news on the ground and then watching it on television have left these vivid pictures in my

Iraq Snapshot

Key statistics compiled by CPJ staff as of May 2006:

- Iraqis constitute **78 percent** of the journalists and support staffers killed for their work in Iraq.
- Overall, **60 percent** of journalists and support workers killed in Iraq were murdered.
- **Fifty-four percent** of journalists and support staffers who died were working for international news organizations.
- Baghdad province is the most dangerous, with **34** journalists and **15** media workers killed.
- Insurgent actions are behind **68 percent** of journalist and support worker deaths.

Data on Iraq is updated regularly at www.cpj.org.



The devastation left by the bombing of this Baghdad restaurant last November left Sebti struggling to control his emotions.

AP/Mohammed Hato

Bassam Sebti

mind, and they play like a videotape over and over.

Yet I’m determined not to allow my emotions to interfere with the job. I’ve succeeded in large part, but my will was tested last November while covering an explosion at a Baghdad restaurant. Rescue workers were carrying off the wounded as soldiers and police cordoned off the area, fearing another attack. I left the huge gathering of reporters, hid my notebook and camera, and, with my driver, persuaded police to let me inside. It was the first time I had seen a large number of dead people. They were in piles, one atop another. A child sobbed over the body of his father.

The moment I stepped into the car to return to the office, emotions washed over me and, for the first time, I let loose my tears. I imagined my father or a friend in that restaurant, lifeless and bloodied like those I saw inside. I haven’t slept well since, and nightmares accompanied me for months.

Becoming a reporter wasn’t my dream. I studied English literature in college, becoming drawn to journalism as the security situation worsened. I started as an interpreter in 2003, first for freelance reporter Jill Carroll (who would be kidnapped in January 2006 and held for nearly three months before being released unharmed) and then with *The Post*. As *The Post* came to trust my work, editors gave me increasing reporting responsibilities.

I was inspired by an Iraqi friend and *Post* reporter, Omar Fekeiki, who directed, advised, and taught me how to depend on myself and use my instincts. In 2003, Omar was about to be kidnapped by the Mehdi Army, a militia loyal to the Shiite leader Muqtada al-Sadr, but he escaped with a few punches in the stomach. A picture of that terrifying moment was captured by a photographer. I remember the image of Omar being surrounded by the militiamen and the look in his eyes. He has continued to

work, and I’ve been stirred by his dedication.

Western news organizations have come to rely a lot on Iraqi reporters—particularly in dangerous areas—because we speak the language and we know the culture. Despite the obstacles, the Western media cover most of the news, and reporters try their best to present a complete picture. As an Iraqi, I don’t see much good news around me.

A few months after I joined the press corps, after I told these stories every day over dinner, my parents begged me to quit. By then, it was too late. I am infected by this job. I believe that my country needs me and that journalism is a noble profession, a mirror in which people can see what is happening in their world. As Jackie Spinner, a friend and former Baghdad colleague, says in her book, *Tell Them I Didn’t Cry*, “We drive into hurricanes, not away from them.”

Here, the hurricanes are bombs. We go toward them, warily, determinedly. ■

Atwar Bahjat

In Iraq, a reporter and patriot is silenced.

By Jihad Ballout

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates

She was a daughter of Samarra, an Iraqi who lived for her country as much as for her profession. That's why we in Al-Arabiya's newsroom were not surprised when Atwar Bahjat insisted on covering the escalating violence in her hometown that fateful February day.

The bombing of the Shiite shrine Askariya, known as the Golden Mosque, had sparked sectarian battles, an assignment that would cause many experienced journalists to shudder. Not Bahjat, who believed that carrying out her professional duty was an act of nonpartisan patriotism.

Bahjat had already filed reports from Samarra and was conducting additional interviews that day, February 22, when two armed men approached and demanded: "Where is that Al-Arabiya presenter?" She kept her cool, believing, perhaps, that her patriotism and professionalism would save the day. The group around her had less faith, and either stood by or quietly dispersed as assailants seized her. The bullet-laced bodies of Bahjat, 30, and her freelance crew—cameraman Khaled Mahmoud al-Falahi, 39, and engineer

Jihad Ballout is communications director for the Dubai-based Al-Arabiya satellite channel and a former spokesman for Al-Jazeera.

Adnan Khairallah, 36—were found near Samarra the next day.

Bahjat represented everything that the merchants of war on all sides despise. A journalist who refused to take sides, she personified Iraqi nonsectarianism—having a Shiite mother from the sect's heartland in Karbala and a Sunni father from Samarra itself. She carried her belief not only in her heart but around her neck in the form of a gold pendant depicting the map of all of Iraq. She was wearing the pendant that day.

Covering wide-scale death and destruction in her country was not, perhaps, foremost on her mind when Bahjat decided that journalism was her life and passion. An avid writer of verse, Bahjat first joined the staff of a weekly publication covering social issues, and she contributed works of poetry to specialized publications. After the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, she joined the newly founded Iraqi Satellite Network as a reporter. Bahjat's professional aspirations would draw her to the more widely viewed regional satellite networks—first to Al-Jazeera, where we were also colleagues, and then, just weeks before her murder, to Al-Arabiya. At the satellite stations, she became the most recognized female war correspondent in the region.

Breaking in at Al-Jazeera, Bahjat had to make it the hard way. She persistently lobbied for field work, ulti-



Atwar Bahjat, in an image taken from video, wore a gold pendant depicting Iraq on the day she died.

mately prevailing in the face of much resistance from male colleagues. Some genuinely feared for her safety as a female correspondent in a predominantly male environment.

When we were both at Al-Jazeera, I recall Bahjat approaching me one day to express concern that she would not get to do much field work because authorities had banned the channel from reporting inside Iraq. I pointed out that it could be a blessing in disguise, given the worsening security situation in Baghdad.

Bahjat was too courteous to bicker, but she made it very obvious that her view was far different. When others might suggest limits on her work, she would flash a smile that was both infectious and enigmatic. She was adept at finding a way around obstacles.

Yet the traits that served her well—as a woman who personified all of Iraq, as a patriot who reported all sides—could not protect her from the purveyors of violence. In an interview aired on Al-Arabiya after Bahjat's murder, her sister Ithaar repeated over and over in a heartbreaking voice: "Why, why Atwar? I need someone to tell me why!" Her words reflect the anguish of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who fear a world injured to personal tragedy. ■

The Courtroom Press

Media lawyer Jeremy Feigelson discusses confidentiality, wiretaps, and talking to sources on park benches.

Interview by Maya Taal

Did special prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald's tactics in the CIA leak case set a precedent for jailing journalists? After all, Judith Miller of *The New York Times* went to jail and then testified.

The Judy Miller case didn't change the law very much, if at all. But it undoubtedly makes prosecutors everywhere a little bit cocky about their ability in the real world to get journalists to disclose their confidential sources. That's something that historically prosecutors have shied away from. After Fitzgerald's success in the Miller case, I don't think they'll be quite so shy.

For three decades, Justice Department guidelines said a journalist would be compelled to testify only in "exigent circumstances." Now, what's the future of those guidelines?

I think they have a terrific future—as guidelines. But guidelines by definition are not enforceable, and courts have said the DOJ guidelines are not enforceable. What the lack of protection under the guidelines really points to is the need for federal statutory

Feigelson, a partner in the New York law firm Debevoise & Plimpton, represents a number of news organizations, along with the Committee to Protect Journalists. Taal is CPJ's board liaison and executive assistant.



CPJ/Maya Taal

Prosecutors, says Jeremy Feigelson, are likely to be more assertive in seeking confidential sources.

protection for the confidentiality of reporters' sources.

Is there precedent to prosecute whistleblowers for leaking information?

Under federal law, people can go to jail for disclosing classified information, and in rare instances that does happen. There is even an argument, which some media critics have been trying to build, that a media outlet itself could be prosecuted under Section 798 of the Espionage Act. Most lawyers who have studied the issue would say with a lot of confidence that Section 798 would be unconstitutional if applied to a newspaper or a media outlet for publishing information that somebody in the government regards as confidential. That kind of publication happens all the time, and it's overwhelmingly in the public interest when it does.

Has the U.S. war on terrorism affected reporter's privilege?

The administration certainly is not shy

about invoking the war on terror and invoking very specific, highly emotional images of 9/11 in support of its argument for why the National Security Agency surveillance program is lawful and why the disclosure of the program is a threat to national security. Judges, like anybody else, are susceptible to arguments and images of that kind.

Are journalists being wiretapped under the NSA program?

I don't have any specific evidence, and I don't think anybody does, to suggest that journalists are being deliberately targeted under the program and I don't mean to suggest that they are. But if I were a journalist working in the Middle East or another epicenter of the war on terror, or a U.S. journalist who makes frequent calls to people or organizations in those places, or if I were a group like CPJ doing work that's fundamentally similar to the work of journalists in those regions, then it seems almost inevitable that I'm going to be having conversations of interest to the government.

How does the interpretation of e-mail as corporate property affect source confidentiality?

The 21st century reporter has to rely on tools like e-mail and cell phones. These create evidentiary trails that are within the custody and control of the companies that run the systems. So if those companies are subpoenaed, the individual reporter may not be able to exercise any control over the records. ... For reporters working on very sensitive stories, in the future you may see more meetings with sources on park benches and more notes written in notebooks.

Will these cases lead to a more established definition of confidentiality?

We always encourage a reporter to have a very specific understanding of confidentiality with the source up front. Unstated assumptions that an interview is confidential aren't very helpful when you're in front of a grand jury. ■



Vladimir Putin, left, confers with Aleksandr Lukashenko at a security meeting that brought leaders of former Soviet states to Moscow last year.

The Putin Effect

A Belarusian dictatorship survives because of Russian support. It's time for other leaders to object.

By Alex Lupis

Belarusian dictator Aleksandr Lukashenko, a former collective farm chairman who has ruled the country since 1994, presides over Europe's last dictatorship—a Soviet vestige that would likely collapse without the economic, political, and military support of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Putin sees Belarus as a critical part of Russia's sphere of influence among former Soviet republics,

Alex Lupis is CPJ's senior program coordinator for Europe and Central Asia.

but he cannot be a legitimate world leader while propping up this repressive regime.

Lukashenko's authoritarian government arrested opposition leaders, harassed nongovernmental organizations, and shuttered dozens of independent newspapers in the months before the March 19 presidential election. When Lukashenko took 83 percent of the vote, Putin sent a congratulatory message that the results "demonstrate the confidence of the electorate in your policies."

The Moscow-led Commonwealth of Independent States, a group of several former Soviet republics, chimed in to declare the vote free and fair. Others disagreed. The Vienna-based Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe called the vote "severely flawed," citing a pattern of government intimidation, the suppression of independent voices, and vote-counting irregularities.

When citizens gathered in Minsk's October Square to protest the election shortcomings, the government locked

up hundreds of them—along with more than two dozen foreign and domestic reporters who tried to cover the unrest. The European Union and the United States denounced the Belarusian actions. Only Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, defended Lukashenko, saying the protests were unauthorized and the government response appropriate.

The Committee to Protect Journalists visited Belarus in February to assess conditions for local journalists ahead of the election—and we found them to be deplorable. Some journalists critical of Lukashenko's government have disappeared or been murdered. Recent popular uprisings in neighboring Ukraine and Georgia prompted an all-out assault on the media to suppress domestic dissent and keep Belarusians isolated and uninformed about events at home and abroad. Independent radio and television stations have been eliminated, allowing state and private pro-governmental media to flood the country with anti-Western propaganda.

Most of the journalists I met with in Minsk were too fearful to speak on the record because of harassment by the secret police, as well as a criminal law Lukashenko signed in December that punishes criticism of the state with up to five years in prison.

The opposition *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Will) and several other struggling papers that dare to criticize Lukashenko are on the verge of extinction because printers, the post office, and the state newspaper distributor Belsoyuzpechat refuse to publish, mail, or sell the publications. These newspapers print their editions in neighboring Russia (when they can) and then smuggle them back into their own country.

At *Narodnaya Volya*, Managing Editor Svetlana Kalinkina showed me around a newsroom where every wall was filled to the ceiling with thousands of newspapers. Her staffers were scrambling to hand out copies to

volunteers who would try to distribute the paper while avoiding arrest.

At the same time, authorities have failed to properly investigate the cases of journalists who have disappeared or been killed. Svetlana Zavadskaya has yet to recover the body of her husband, Dmitry, a cameraman for ORT Russian television who vanished in July 2000. In July 2005, a police officer punched her, causing a concussion, when she tried to commemorate Dmitry's disappearance with several friends in a central square in Minsk.

When I met with the elderly parents of Veronika Cherkassova—a reporter for the opposition weekly *Solidarnost* who was stabbed to death in October 2004 while investigating illegal arms sales to Iraq—they were distracted from mourning the loss of

lessness and smuggling on the Polish-Belarusian border, along with Russia's use of Belarus as a transit route for weapons sales to Middle East states. The unstable Belarusian economy depends on Russia, both for imports of subsidized gas and as an export market for low-quality Belarusian manufactured goods. The Kremlin's ongoing military support is complemented by its dependable public rebuttals to any international criticism of Lukashenko.

But as Russia occupies the center of the international stage with the chairmanship of the Group of Eight industrialized countries, which it assumed in January, and the presidency of the Council of Europe, which it took on in May, Putin should not be allowed to keep an outdated dictator in power in Belarus. Editors like Kalinkina should

Belarus has become a geopolitical buffer between the European Union and Putin's authoritarian Russia.

their daughter. Police had arrested their teenage grandson and were pressuring him to "confess" to the murder. The boy was eventually freed without charge.

Time and again, Belarusian journalists told me that their isolated country has become a geopolitical buffer between the European Union and Putin's authoritarian Russia. The fallout from this election, they said, would have important implications for Europe.

"You [in the West] can close your eyes to the situation here, which means you will only wake up when it becomes unstable and it's too late to do something," Marina Sadovskaya, deputy editor of *Belorusy i Rynok* (Belarusians and the Market), told me over lunch in Minsk.

She pointed to the ongoing law-

be able to report the news without fear of reprisal. The families of Zavadsky and Cherkassova, journalists eliminated under highly suspicious circumstances, deserve justice.

The United States and the European Union are promoting democracy in Belarus by supporting opposition groups and fostering civil society initiatives, but these democratization policies will not work as long as Belarus has Russian support. When European leaders and U.S. President George W. Bush gather in July at the G8 summit in St. Petersburg, they should publicly call on Putin to stop dividing Europe and work with the international community to promote a stable, democratic Belarus with a strong independent press. ■

For updates on the Belarusian crackdown, visit www.cpj.org.

The Unseen Rebellion

Across rural China, tens of thousands of protests are waged against land seizures and corruption. Few people ever hear about them.

By Kristin Jones

BEIJING

The word from the village of Dongzhou was growing dire last December 6. Security officers were clashing with residents over the local government's seizure of land for a power plant. Official force, villagers said, was escalating.

"I called them every hour, and it kept getting worse. First it was tear gas, then there was shooting, then two dead, then more," said Ding Xiao, the 23-year-old Hong Kong-based reporter who broke news of the violent crackdown for U.S. broadcaster Radio Free Asia. The crack of gunfire could be heard in tapes of her phone calls to residents of the village near Shanwei, in southern China's Guangdong province. "They were asking for help. They said, 'Please call the central government to ask for help. We have called, but there was no response.'"

Following Ding's report, the crackdown got wide attention outside of China. But print and broadcast media on the

Kristin Jones is senior research associate for CPJ's Asia program.



AP/EyePress

Rural protests in China have sparked aggressive government responses. A resident of Dingzhou shows one of the weapons used against villagers in a violent crackdown there in June 2005. As civil unrest emerged in thousands of other villages, from Dongzhou to Taishi, local governments clamped down with increasing force.

mainland were instructed to carry only a belated official account defending the use of force against the protesters. The death toll is still unknown; the government reported that three were killed, but human rights organizations have said the actual number may be much higher. Dongzhou villagers have been under tight surveillance since December and have been warned to keep silent on threat of punishment.

This policy of enforced silence has come to define the central government's approach to widespread rural unrest, China's most salient domestic issue. Fearing that news of land disputes and other civil discontent could fuel a united threat to its authority, the Communist Party government has undertaken one of the biggest media crackdowns since the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen Square pro-democracy demonstrations.

"Mass incidents" is the term the Chinese government uses to describe demonstrations, riots, and group petitioning. In January 2006, the Ministry of Public Security announced that there were 87,000 such incidents in 2005, a 6.6 percent increase over the previous year. Protests over corruption, taxes, and environmental degradation caused by China's breakneck economic development contributed to the rise. But some of the most highly charged disputes have occurred over government seizure of farmland for construction of the factories, power plants, shopping malls, roads, and apartment complexes that are fueling China's boom.

In a speech published by state media in January, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao warned that local officials' requisition of land without adequate compensation or arrangements for the livelihood of farmers was threatening social stability. "We absolutely cannot commit an historic error over land problems," Wen said. But while putting the blame on local governments, central authorities have robbed rural residents of a way of holding officials accountable.

"News of mass incidents cannot be reported," Li Datong said simply. The former chief editor of *Bing Dian*, a pioneering supplement to the Beijing-based *China Youth Daily*, Li has effectively been out of a job since February when he and Deputy Editor Lu Yuegang were removed from their posts following criticism by the Central Propaganda Department's News Commentary Group, a group of retired officials that issues regular pronouncements intended to guide China's system of self-censorship.

Li said that he, like other editors of national publications, was told by his employers not to publish anything about the December crackdown at Dongzhou. Some journalists in Guangdong province told CPJ that they received specific do-not-report orders on the land dispute long before it escalated into violence.

Censorship in China does not involve prepublication monitoring of the news, and most journalists never hear directly from the Central Propaganda Department. Instead, the system relies on the heads of each news outlet to interpret instructions and comments from local and central propaganda authorities, to spike stories that might generate criticism, or to turn news articles into "internal reports" that reach only an elite audience of high-level officials and others who have received security clearance.

Until recently, some in-depth reporting on land grabs, corruption, and other local issues could be done, ironically enough, by journalists from outside the local area. These reporters, if they moved fast enough, could file at least a few, relatively uncensored reports before local propaganda officials would be able to alert central authorities to shut down nationwide coverage.

Central authorities banned this reporting practice—known as *yidi baodao*, or cross-territorial reporting—last year. Reporters told CPJ that the ban, while applied unevenly, has had a profound impact. The decree has compelled editors to rein in some of their strongest investigative reporters, and has empowered local officials to harass, intimidate, and block access to journalists who were once beyond the censor's grasp.



AP/Ng Han Guan

A banner in Dongzhou declares: "Strike at law breakers. Maintain social stability." Security forces fired on demonstrators last December, killing an unknown number.

One journalist told CPJ that after traveling to the site of a land dispute that had erupted into violence, she argued at length with local propaganda authorities who refused her access to government officials and instructed her not to report the matter. Unfazed, she continued her reporting, sneaking through fields and past police roadblocks to interview witnesses. She filed the story only to be told by her editor that the recent ban on *yidi baodao* meant her work could not be published.

"I was so angry, I didn't sleep for two days," said the journalist, who spoke to CPJ on condition of anonymity because she feared reprisals. She recalls pleading with her boss, "Do you know how difficult it was for me to report this?"

Technology in the hands of ordinary Chinese citizens makes suppressing news of protests more difficult. Protesters use cell phones, text messages, and digital video cameras to document events and to alert the media, which they often see as a means to communicate with central authorities. They also make news outlets a regular stop on trips to the capital to petition the central government to address grievances about local officials. But Chinese journalists told CPJ that the Internet is by far the greatest source of such information. Though the postings are quickly removed and are rarely prominently placed on blogs and the threads of Web bulletin boards, reports of land disputes and other protests can be found online for those willing to search.

Technology prevented one rural crackdown from remaining a secret. Before dawn on June 11, 2005, hundreds of men armed with pipes, hook knives, and guns descended on a makeshift encampment set up by residents of Dingzhou, in northern China's Hebei Province, to prevent construction of a power plant. Six farmers were killed in the attack, and dozens more were seriously injured. The killed and injured had been protesting the government's low compensation for land requisitioned for the project.

A farmer with a digital video camera captured three minutes of the attack before he was spotted, his camera smashed, and his arm broken. Villagers told a *Beijing News* reporter that friends of the injured farmer carried him 2 kilometers (1 mile) to safety and managed to save his videotape. It later appeared on the Web site of *The Washington Post*, showing a dark, medieval-looking assault by men in hard hats, ravaging the encampment with brutal force and chasing villagers across the dirt field.

The *Beijing News* reporter who broke the news succeeded in publishing a series of un-bylined accounts in his newspaper before the Central Propaganda Department shut down all coverage a few days later. His reports detailed the attack and the government's response. Even more enlightening were the field notes the reporter posted anonymously online, detailing what he went through to report the story. His notes made the rounds among journalists in China, and were translated into English by Hong Kong-based blogger Roland Soong for his site *EastSouthWestNorth*.

In the notes, the journalist describes his efforts to convince the villagers to repeat their story, though other reporters had come and gone without publishing a word. He describes sneaking into a nearby hospital where several victims were being treated for serious injuries—and where plainclothes police harassed and interrogated him.

"At around midnight," he wrote, according to Soong's translation, "the articles and the photos had reached Beijing. I was happy. At that moment, I realized that my clothes were soaking wet in sweat." He continued: "My friend asked me why I took so much trouble and risk. 'How much money did



A family grieves in the streets of Dongzhou after security officers killed a relative while cracking down on local demonstrations.

I earn?' I did not know how to respond. I could only tell her from my heart that I really was not thinking about how much money I would make. I only want to report this incident and let people know that such a thing happened there."

Even the limited attention paid to Dingzhou spurred central authorities to take action. Four men were sentenced to death for their role in the Dingzhou attack, and the local party secretary and two contractors received life sentences for ordering the raid.

A handful of journalists, including blogger Li Xinde, have made online reporting their full-time work. Li moves around the country with laptop in hand, writing exposés of

local corruption. Officials' threats of legal action have plagued him, but Li does not consider himself a dissident and believes that he has the protection of Chinese law.

"I'm honest, so I have nothing to fear," he told CPJ a few hours after disembarking from an early morning train in Beijing, en route to another story in another town. "The



Land seized for this new power plant in Dongzhou sparked village discontent and a violent backlash.

constitution protects me." Still, the central government has sought to limit his influence. Li's blog is often blocked, forcing him to change Web addresses frequently. Postings on sensitive subjects disappear shortly after they're written, so Li must depend on an audience highly motivated to read banned news.

Foreign reporters are also subject to state harassment while covering rural protests. Several of these journalists told CPJ that police interrogations and brief detentions are common, and that potential sources are warned not to talk to the media. A number of foreign reporters were roughed up while covering unrest in the southern village of Taishi last fall. And, most disturbing to many foreign journalists, their Chinese translators, assistants, and fixers are harassed and interrogated by state security agents.

Some see the imprisonment in 2004 of *New York Times* researcher Zhao Yan as a warning to the foreign press corps—and their local staffs—that they, too, should heed the lines of censorship set by the Chinese government.

With the traditional press tightly controlled, the job of reporting on rural protests and mass disturbances has been taken up increasingly by members of China's emergent civil society—activists, lawyers, and intellectuals who believe strongly that the information deserves a place in the public debate, and who work outside the censorship machine.

"Farmers want to use the media, but the media can't report their issues. Often, with the help of scholars and lawyers, the news comes out in overseas Web sites," said Beijing-based legal scholar Li Baiguang, who has traveled the country educating farmers on their rights to pursue legal redress.

This kind of samizdat press relies heavily on the Internet, a point not lost on the central government, which issued a fresh set of Web restrictions in September 2005. Added to the list of banned content—which already included news and commentary that harmed state security or made reference to banned religious sects such as the Falun Gong—were material that "illegally incites" gatherings or demonstrations, and material distributed in the name of "illegal civil organizations." The additions were a clear attempt to clamp down on the use of technology to organize and report on rural discontent.

The government's harder line was evident in fall 2005, when it cracked down on activists' efforts to aid and document a campaign by residents of Taishi—a dusty village at the ragged edges of Guangzhou, one of China's richest cities—to oust their top elected official, Chen Jinsheng.

Villagers had initiated a peaceful signature campaign to recall Chen, whom they accused of misconduct in the sale

A Camera as Witness

When documentary filmmaker Ai Xiaoming read online accounts of the recall campaign in Taishi, she packed up her video camera and headed to the village. Ai, who is also a gender studies professor at Zhongshan University, intended to document the role of women in village politics for use in her classes.

She found residents very willing to talk. “When there was an event, the villagers would call me and ask me to be there,” Ai said. “They thought my camera could be their testimony.”

Ai was there on September 7 to capture the extraordinary scene of Taishi villagers, many of them elderly and illiterate, gathering to put signatures or thumbprints on a petition to hold a recall election. The mood turned dark, though, in the days that followed. In an essay published in *Bing Dian*—just hours before government censors shut down coverage of the recall—Ai detailed a litany of arrests, beatings, threats, and acts of intimidation that impeded the campaign. She also captured the fear that settled on the village.

“At the entrance of the village,” she wrote, “there are only scattered signs of people and the lights are dim. A villager says, ‘I am afraid of the arrests, I can’t talk to you. Anyone who talks to you reporters will

be arrested next time. This time you see me, but maybe next time you won’t.”

Ai’s own video ends with a frightening scene of a young man running up to the car taking her out of the village. The screen blinks and skips to the sight of broken glass; the windows of the car have been smashed in on its passengers. Ai, who was unhurt, sent her video to central authorities, as well as to state-run China Central Television. (Still images from the documentary appear below and on the cover of this edition of *Dangerous Assignments*.)

Her video, which has appeared on overseas Web sites, exemplifies the growing effort by China’s emerging civil society to document rural unrest outside the government’s censorship system.

Yet Ai has paid a price. The Web site of her Sex/Gender Education Forum has been blocked, and Ai believes she has been blacklisted from public life—barred from appearing in the Chinese media or participating in public events. ■

—Kristin Jones



Ai Xiaoming fears she has been blacklisted for documenting the unrest in Taishi.

CPI/Kristin Jones



In this image taken from video, reporters try to cover a recall campaign in the village of Taishi. Police were out in force, and soon reporters were moved out. This image is taken from a documentary by Ai Xiaoming.

Ai Xiaoming

of land to developers. Afraid that local officials would attempt to remove evidence of corruption, residents took shifts to guard the village budget office. In August, police raided the village for the first time and beat some of the residents, including an elderly woman named Feng Zhen. Villagers organized a hunger strike in protest and, by September 7, they were putting their signatures on a petition to hold a recall election.

Print and broadcast media in the southern city made a strong initial effort to cover the recall. *Southern Metropolis News* chronicled the campaign in a series of articles, including a two-page spread topped by a striking photograph of Feng speaking into a bullhorn. The piece appeared on September 12—the same day that hundreds of riot police used water cannons to disperse the squatters at the budget office, arrested villagers, and confiscated documents. Much of the ensuing coverage was heavily edited for ideological correctness. By mid-September, editors in Guangzhou had received orders from propaganda officials that Taishi coverage was over; henceforth only official reports would be published.

Online reports had also provided timely, if emotionally charged, information about the village campaign. Beijing-based activist Yang Maodong, under the pen name Guo Feixiong, was among several legal scholars posting regular dispatches and essays on Internet bulletin board systems such as the popular *Yannan*.

It was this set of activists and scholars, along with the villagers themselves, who eventually bore the brunt of the government crackdown at Taishi. On September 13, Guo disappeared. Villagers reported seeing him in a detention center, huddled under a blanket. Local authorities accused him of “sending news overseas” and “gathering crowds to disturb social order.” They force-fed him when he refused to eat. Two weeks later, authorities shut down *Yannan* after removing all content related to Taishi. It was clear by that time that local officials had the support of the central government. Police and young men on motorcycles roamed the village, harassing and assaulting any activist, lawyer, or journalist who turned up.

In October, newspapers in southern China carried an official version of the incidents at Taishi that blamed the

recall attempt on a misunderstanding caused by a few troublemakers. “Faced with the facts,” this account read, “most villagers realized that the original reasons for the recall no longer existed and therefore told the village recall committee that they wished to withdraw the motion.”

Some Guangzhou-based journalists who covered events at Taishi remain under government surveillance, and an editor at *Southern Metropolis News* was sacked. The activist Guo was released from jail in December but now lives under the watch of state security agents who track his moves and his communications. He has been beaten several times by police and hired thugs, prompting dissident lawyer Gao Zhisheng to organize a hunger strike in protest. Dozens of activists involved in the hunger strike have disappeared.



AP

Police blockade a street in Taishi on September 12, 2005. Later that day, police used a water cannon to break up a demonstration, and central authorities began to shut down news coverage.

The Taishi demonstrations were among the mere handful of “mass incidents” to reach the public eye last year, and some journalists believe that the crackdown on coverage there signaled a turning point in the government’s attitude. To the extent that there was some latitude for the media before Taishi, it was gone by the time the People’s Armed Police shot villagers in Dongzhou last December.

And this could have a devastating effect across China’s countryside. Li, the former *Bing Dian* editor, said the deadly force unleashed by officials in Dongzhou would have been far less likely had the press been allowed to work freely. “If there had been public attention,” he said, “it would not have happened the way it did.” ■



Drawing Fire

A Yemeni editor's decision to reprint cartoons of Muhammad sparks government reprisals. Other cases abound.

By Ivan Karakashian

When *Yemen Observer* Editor Mohammed al-Asaadi gathered his editors February 1 for their regular meeting to pick the top story for the next edition, the choice seemed clear. Thousands of Palestinians were demonstrating in Gaza, a retail boycott of Danish goods was gaining momentum, and Saudi Arabia and Syria had just withdrawn their ambassadors to Denmark. The issue that sparked the discontent—a Danish newspaper's publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad—had become the talk of the world.

Ivan Karakashian is research associate for CPJ's Middle East and North Africa program.

The English-language weekly decided to reprint three of the drawings, in black and white and reduced size, with large X's overlaid on each, as part of multiple-page coverage of the controversy. The editors wanted to denounce the cartoons, explain to the mainly foreign readership of the *Yemen Observer* why they elicited outrage among Muslims, and to show readers exactly what was under protest. The decision to reprint a small selection was unanimous among the editors, some of whom objected only to obscuring the drawings with X's. Al-Asaadi, described by colleagues as a devout Muslim, insisted on the markings to make clear the paper's view that they were inappropriate.

The February 3 issue included a front-page news story,

Left: Mohammed al-Asaadi spent 12 days in this Sana'a jail after his newspaper published edited versions of three controversial caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad.

along with commentary and sidebars on three inside pages. The *Observer's* main editorial decried the drawings as an insult to Islam. The obscured cartoons ran on page 11, next to a photo of people boycotting Danish goods.

The issue was distributed widely, and for three days there was no adverse reaction. Then al-Asaadi received a phone call informing him that the Ministry of Information had suspended his paper's license to publish. "A friend of mine called from Rome and told me Reuters reported that our license was suspended," al-Asaadi said in an interview with the Committee to Protect Journalists. "I had no idea because the Ministry of Information did not tell me the paper was closed."

But closed it was, he soon learned, as it remained for three months. The prosecutor for press and publications in Sana'a summoned al-Asaadi and Faris Abdullah Sanabani, the paper's publisher and a media advisor to President Ali Abdullah Saleh, for questioning on February 11. Sanabani was relieved of responsibility, but al-Asaadi was detained for printing materials deemed offensive to the Prophet. The prosecutor told al-Asaadi's lawyer that the journalist was being held for his own protection.

Al-Asaadi spent the next 12 days in a poorly ventilated basement cell, along with a dozen or so other detainees. At night he found it difficult to breathe amid clouds of cigarette smoke. Having never spent a day in prison before, the experience shocked him; he kept a daily journal as a means of coping.

The attorney general later charged al-Asaadi with insulting the Prophet under both the penal code and the press law and released him on bail. At least 14 private lawyers recruited by Sheik Abdul-Majid Zindani, chairman of Islah Shura Council, filed complaints against al-Asaadi and called, at least indirectly, for his execution. Yemeni law permits private individuals to take a criminal case to court if they believe their civil rights have been infringed. Al-Asaadi faces severe jail time and a possible death sentence for his editorial decision.

The controversy began last September when the Danish daily *Jyllands-Posten* published 12 caricatures of Muhammad, one of them depicting the Prophet wearing a bomb-shaped turban with a lit fuse. The publication caused anger in the Muslim world, where many consider depictions of Muhammad to be blasphemous. The cartoons gained greater attention after they were reprinted in the January 10 edition of *Magazinet*, a small Christian evangelical weekly based in Norway, and then republished by publications across Europe and the World Wide Web. By February, protests, some of them violent, were reported in several cities.

Throughout the Muslim world, a number of publications printed versions of one or more of the cartoons for various reasons: to denounce them, to mobilize protests against them, or to appeal against the violence they spurred. Many of the publications were targeted as a result, becoming easy prey for governments seeking a pretext to retaliate against the press, curry favor with Islamists, and deflect public attention from domestic problems.

Worldwide, the Committee to Protect Journalists found that at least nine publications were closed or suspended and



Protesters in Gaza City burn a poster of Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen during a January 31 demonstration against the caricatures.

10 journalists were criminally charged. Punitive actions, including censorship orders and harassment, were reported in 13 countries, CPJ found.

In Syria, merely commenting on the cartoons drew government retaliation. Adel Mahfouz was charged by the Damascus prosecutor's office after writing an article on the news Web site *Rezgar* advocating peaceful dialogue as a means of protesting the cartoons. Mahfouz was charged with insulting public religious sentiment under the penal code. If convicted, he faces up to three years imprisonment.

The Syrian government was eager to exploit the debate for internal political gain, said Bernard Haykel, associate professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies at New York University.

"It is a minority Alawite regime that needs to burnish its Islamic credentials and therefore would have used the occasion of the caricatures to do just that," Haykel said. The case, he said, also distracted attention from major challenges facing Bashar al-Assad's regime, notably its withdrawal from Lebanon and alleged links to the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri.

Yet nowhere was retaliation as severe as in Yemen, where the government sought to make censorship a popular cause. Muhammad Shaher Hussein, the deputy information

minister, said his agency wanted to ease public tensions when it suspended the *Observer* and two other publications—the private weekly *Al-Hurriya Ahliya*, and the Arabic-language *Al-Rai Al-Aam*—for reprinting the cartoons. The suspensions appeared to contravene Yemen’s own press law, which states that only a court has jurisdiction to suspend or revoke a publication’s license. Prime Minister Abdelqader Bajammal finally lifted the bans on May 2.

“They can get away with breaking their own law because they appear to be responding to public demand,” said Sheila Carapico, a professor of political science and international studies at the University of Richmond. The Danish caricatures are “something on which the public and government can pretty much agree,” Carapico said. “It’s a distant enemy, an amorphous enemy, it’s not something they can really do anything about—and so it has all the advantages of symbolic politics that are really policy neutral.”

Yemeni authorities filed criminal charges against three other journalists: Abdulkarim Sabra, managing editor and publisher of *Al-Hurriya*; Yehiya al-Abad, a journalist for *Al-Hurriya*; and Kamal al-Aalafi, editor-in-chief of the Arabic-language *Al-Rai Al-Aam*. They were charged with violating

Article 103 of the Press and Publications Law of 1990, which prohibits “printing, publishing, circulating, or broadcasting ... anything which prejudices the Islamic faith and its lofty principles or belittles religions or humanitarian creeds.” They also face penal code charges.

“The government sees us becoming more independent and increasingly writing about sensitive issues against the government’s interests,” al-Asaadi said. His newspaper, while often sympathetic to the president, has also reported on alleged corruption in the Yemeni foreign service. “The message to the Yemeni press,” al-Asaadi said, “is that the government can mimic these circumstances and carry out the same sort of measures when the press does something they don’t like.”

But the press itself played into the hands of governments through sensational and superficial coverage, al-Asaadi and other journalists told CPJ. “We are responsible for what’s happening to us. We played a role,” said al-Asaadi, who cited his own case as an example. “During my initial arrest, the Yemeni press didn’t provide further information or try to clarify the context, reporting simply that I had published the cartoons.”

During al-Asaadi’s first hearing in the General South-



Defense lawyers Khaled al-Anesi and Mohammed Naji Allaw, standing left to right at the podiums, want to present the drawings in the context that the *Observer* published them.

Worldwide, Arrests and Shutdowns

Here is a rundown of reprisals worldwide in the cartoon controversy. Except where noted, the actions came in response to publishing versions of one or more of the cartoons.

- Countries where reprisals were reported: **13**
- Journalists criminally charged: **10**
- Newspapers suspended or closed: **9**
- Assault, harassment cases: **3**
- Censorship orders: **2**

Algeria: Two editors criminally charged.

Belarus: One newspaper suspended.

Denmark: *Jyllands-Posten* threatened with bomb attack.

India: One editor criminally charged.

Jordan: Two editors criminally charged.

Lebanon: Journalists assaulted during demonstration against cartoons.

Malaysia: Two newspapers suspended.

Morocco: Government organizes demonstrations against newspaper.

Russia: Two newspapers closed.

Saudi Arabia: Newspaper suspended.

South Africa: Censorship orders issued against two newspapers.

Syria: Writer criminally charged for commentary.

Yemen: Three newspapers suspended. Four journalists criminally charged.

For details on these cases, visit www.cpj.org.

West Court in Sana’a on March 8, prosecution lawyers seemed to call for al-Asaadi’s execution by recounting a story in which Muhammad praised a companion for killing a woman who had insulted him.

The prosecution team stated further demands in a second hearing on March 22. “When the *Yemen Observer* published the pictures they were aware of the anger caused by them,” according to a statement read in court by the prosecution. “We demand the punishment of its editor-in-chief, the permanent closure of the paper, and for Mohammed al-Asaadi to be banned from writing for newspapers forever.” The prosecution team also seeks financial compensation—for itself—because of the psychological trauma the *Yemen Observer* allegedly caused, according to the statement.

Mohammed Naji Allaw, a lawyer with the National Organization for Defending Rights and Freedoms, is helping

defend al-Asaadi. “The intention of the *Yemen Observer* was to criticize the Danish press,” Allaw told CPJ. “He did not intend to insult the Prophet; he did not intend to republish the cartoons in their support. ... Al-Asaadi was defending the Prophet, and he should be found innocent.”

Context is at the root of the case: The defense wants the cartoons to be judged as part of the *Observer*’s full coverage, including the accompanying text and the placement of the drawings. The attorney general and prosecution team have argued that al-Asaadi should be judged on the published drawings alone.

Beyond the legal battles, al-Asaadi fears for his life because of the nature of the charges. Lengthy intervals between court dates increase the risk, as accusations linger without resolution. Some members of Parliament chimed in to demand severe punishment, apparently believing that the *Observer* printed all of the drawings in their original form.

“When we clarified to members of Parliament they withdrew their position and cooperated with us. Religious scholars sympathized with us after we explained our position,” al-Asaadi said. “But there was a campaign of provocation in the beginning, forcing one to worry about his life.”

Likewise, al-Asaadi worries about the 35 employees at the *Yemen Observer*. “I actually feel depressed and kind of frustrated from the situation,” al-Asaadi told CPJ. “The suspension of the paper, no work, fears of any silly behavior from fanatics, the uncertain end of the ordeal—it has had a negative impact on my family.”

Sanabani, the publisher, said the *Observer* maintained an Internet presence throughout the suspension, but it lost considerable money during the three months that the print version was banned. The *Observer*, a nine-year-old publication, sold 8,000 copies before the suspension, primarily to foreign diplomats, business people, and officials with non-governmental organizations.

“The Ministry of Information could have judged us without revoking the license; they could have allowed the paper to continue under a new editor-in-chief, and the case could have gone before the courts,” al-Asaadi said. “But the decision to stop and withdraw the license served as proof to the public that we had in fact committed a crime.”

Al-Asaadi believes the judge will not order his execution or even imprisonment once attorneys present his defense. Still, the ordeal has left him broken. “I chose this profession out of passion and belief to contribute in bringing about a change for the best of this society,” al-Asaadi said. “After years of dedication, I am facing death threats in all corners of the streets for nothing but practicing my job and calling for understanding. I have to explain to every individual that I am innocent.” ■

For updates on the al-Asaadi case and others related to the caricatures, visit www.cpj.org.

North Korea leads the dishonor roll of the world's most censored countries, a new CPJ analysis shows. These nations share several traits. They disregard citizens' safety by withholding information, as in **Burma**, where the government stifled coverage of the 2004 tsunami. Leaders have zero tolerance for criticism: In **Belarus**, two dozen reporters were jailed for covering election protests in 2006. News media are nearly all owned or controlled by governments—no independent news outlet, for example, operates in **Libya**. And state-controlled media promote a cult of personality, as witnessed in **Equatorial Guinea**, where the president is called "the country's God."

The full report is now online at www.cpj.org/censored.

10 BELARUS

Authorities bar the post office from distributing publications, seize press runs, and impose prison terms for criticizing the president.



President Aleksandr Lukashenko

8 UZBEKISTAN

The regime cracked down on foreign media in 2005, forcing three news outlets to close bureaus. Reporters were harassed and arrested.



President Islam Karimov

1 NORTH KOREA

Radio and television receivers are locked to government-specified frequencies. News is supplied by the official Korean Central News Agency.



Chairman Kim Jong Il

TURKMENISTAN 3

The president approves front-page newspaper content. Editors are state-appointed. Newscasters pledge their allegiance during every broadcast.



President Saparmurat Niyazov

9 SYRIA

Publications must get licenses from the prime minister. Coverage is so bland that even a top official called it "unreadable."



President Bashar al-Assad

7 CUBA

News media are supervised by the Department of Revolutionary Orientation. Independent reporters are regularly harassed and arrested.



President Fidel Castro

5 LIBYA

The state owns all print and broadcast media, and it blocks undesirable political Web sites. Criticism is not permitted.



Colonel Muammar Qaddafi

6 ERITREA

The only country in sub-Saharan Africa without a private news outlet, Eritrea intensively monitors foreign reporters. Only elite have Internet.



President Isaias Afewerki

2 BURMA

The military junta owns all daily newspapers and television channels. Citizens can be arrested for listening to the BBC in public.



Chairman Than Shwe

CENSORSHIP BY THE NUMBERS:

- 0: Independent journalists in North Korea.
- 2: Months that *Burmese* magazine *Han Thit* was banned for running a Valentine ad promoting "negative" values.
- 2005: Year the *Turkmen* government closed public libraries and banned foreign publications.
- 1: Broadcast media not owned by the *Equatorial Guinean* government. RTV-Asonga is owned by the president's son.
- 0: Private news outlets in *Libya*.
- 2001: Year *Eritrea* shut down all private news outlets and imprisoned 11 journalists.
- 24: Journalists imprisoned in *Cuba*.
- 12: Reporters for foreign media who were forced to flee after a violent 2005 crackdown in *Uzbekistan*.
- 2: Independent *Syrian* newspapers closed since 2003.
- 5: *Belarusian* newspapers printed outside the country and smuggled back in.

4 EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Private newspapers rarely publish due to political pressure. State radio warns citizens that they'll be crushed if they criticize the regime.



President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo

To determine the worst offenders, CPJ judged press freedom conditions in dozens of countries according to 17 criteria. Criteria included: absence of independent media; existence of censorship regulations; state-sponsored violence against journalists; jamming of foreign news broadcasts; restrictions on Internet access; limits on journalists' mobility; interference in production and distribution of publications; and existence of laws forbidding criticism. Countries on the list met at least nine of 17 criteria.

For full coverage, visit WWW.CPJ.ORG/CENSORED

THE WORLD'S 10 MOST CENSORED COUNTRIES

'Poison,' Politics, and the Press



An Ethiopian officer prevents a photographer from taking pictures of a police sweep following protests in Addis Ababa last year.

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia

A scarf tied around her head and her five-month pregnancy just showing under a robe, Serkalem Fassil appeared shy and scared as she talked about life in Kality Prison. Her English is not good, she explained, but yes, the baby is OK. And yes, she added softly, it's very hard in Kality. Fassil, 26, who worked on three Amharic-language weeklies, is among at least 14 journalists held in this crowded, sweltering prison alongside dozens of political opposition leaders. They are being tried jointly for genocide and treason, charges that could bring life imprisonment or the death penalty.

Julia Crawford is CPJ's Africa program coordinator.

In Ethiopia's toxic political climate, Zenawi's government sweeps up journalists and shuts down newspapers.

By **Julia Crawford**

The journalists are the most notable example of a government crackdown on the press that began in November when postelection street protests drew a show of official force, violence flared, and more than 40 died. The government issued "wanted lists" of opposition party leaders, editors, and writers; journalists who weren't arrested went into hiding. Direct government orders and indirect pressure were blamed for the closing of more than half of the newspapers that once published in the capital. Self-censorship is rife among those still publishing.

The government alleges that the editors and reporters were part of an opposition conspiracy to overthrow the "constitutional order." The genocide charges rest on assertions that the journalists' work harmed members of the ruling coalition, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, and the Tigrayans who form its dominant ethnic group.

Many of the shuttered publications did advance the views of the opposition, featuring numerous interviews with party leaders and editorials critical of the government's handling of the May 2005 parliamentary election, according to interviews and a review of published material.

But the government has disclosed no evidence linking published material to acts of violence, nor has it offered any substantiation that the journalists were motivated by anything other than what they saw as their work responsibilities, the Committee to Protect Journalists has found. No

evidence has been presented that treason or genocide were planned or occurred, CPJ found.

The charges have enormous emotional resonance in Ethiopia, which fought a bitter war with neighboring Eritrea, and where ethnicity is part of the political landscape. The defendants were not allowed to post bail because of the severity of the charges, enabling the government to effectively silence these critics during their court case. By most accounts, the trial, which began in February, could last many months or even years.

The imprisoned journalists—several of whom were interviewed by CPJ with the government's permission—said they were doing their jobs in criticizing the administration of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. "We're not against this government," Fassil Yenealem, the jailed publisher of *Addis Zena*, told CPJ. "It is through this government that we began to write. But when the government sees people starting to demand more democracy, freedom of expression, and development, they think it's the fault of the press."

Government officials stress that there was no private press until the current administration toppled Mengistu Haile Mariam's notorious Derg regime in 1991. In an interview with CPJ, Zenawi said his government has tried to build democratic institutions, including a free press, even though much of the private media "is in effect a party organ of the opposition."

Until recently, Western donors regarded Zenawi as a reform-minded leader who had put his troubled country on a path that could be emulated by others in Africa. With a population of more than 70 million, Ethiopia is one of Africa's most populous nations. It is also the seat of the African Union and of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. The United States regards Zenawi as an important partner in its fight against terrorism, and British Prime Minister Tony Blair gave Zenawi a seat on his advisory Commission for Africa.

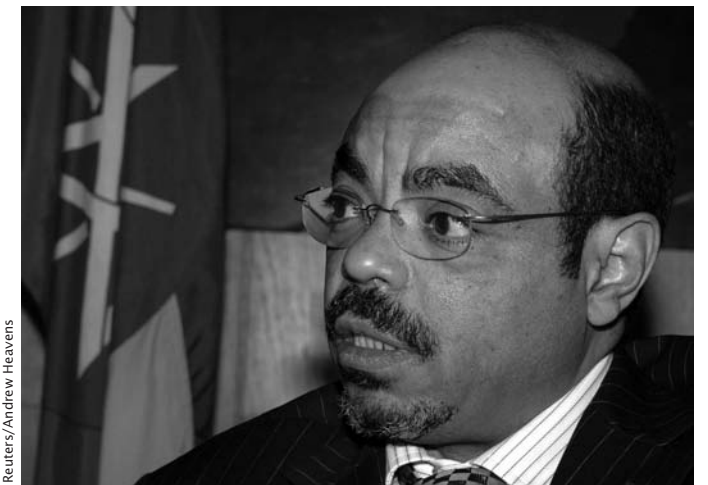
But if Zenawi's democratic credentials compared favorably to those of his predecessors, his government has never had a good press freedom record. Ethiopia was Africa's leading jailer of journalists throughout much of the 1990s, and it drove scores of reporters and editors into exile. The government has a long record of arresting journalists under a restrictive press law, which imposes criminal sanctions for defamation and the publication of news that authorities deem "false." Editors routinely have multiple press law charges pending against them.

Until recently, the number of journalists imprisoned had dropped as the government backed away under international pressure from its traditionally confrontational stance toward the press. In the run-up to the May election, there was even a new scent of freedom as opposition parties were allowed unprecedented access to state media, including the state monopoly broadcast sector. The num-

ber of private, Amharic-language weeklies—most of them highly critical of the government—mushroomed and their sales soared.

Voting was largely peaceful, but unrest began to build after the opposition cited irregularities, including vote-rigging allegations and the government's delay in announcing results.

The first wave of protests in June brought a government show of force, with clashes leading to the deaths of at least 40 people. Unrest boiled again in early November after the leading opposition group, the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), frustrated by its inability to challenge the vote, refused to take part in the new parliament. Stone-throwing crowds were met with gun-firing security forces, and another 40 or more people, mostly civilians, were



Prime Minister Meles Zenawi says his government wants to encourage press freedom, but journalists went too far.

killed. The government then launched a full-scale crackdown, detaining thousands of people, including opposition leaders and journalists.

Along with issuing its "wanted lists," the government raided newsrooms, blocked newspapers from publishing, and expelled two foreign reporters, including a long-serving Associated Press correspondent. About a dozen exiled Ethiopian journalists were charged in absentia with treason. The U.S. government-funded Voice of America and Germany's Deutsche Welle, which broadcast radio programs into Ethiopia in local languages, were targeted by smear campaigns in state media, endangering their local correspondents.

"This is the worst under Zenawi," said journalist Befekadu Moreda, who has plenty of perspective, having been jailed nine times over 12 years. "They are going on the path of China—without the economic prosperity." With at least two journalists imprisoned on press law violations and 14 held for treason, Ethiopia is now the third-leading jailer of journalists in the world after China and Cuba.

Moreda survived the November crackdown but his paper, the Amharic-language weekly *Tomar*, did not. Printers refused to publish it, Moreda said. On this day in March, he also described frequent government harassment and intimidation. “For the last four months I cannot move freely, the security forces follow me,” he recounted. “The first harassment is smooth; they ask you politely to work with them. Then they accuse you of being a member of the opposition, and they use force.”

Shortly after meeting with CPJ, Moreda fled the country. It was just in time to escape a jail sentence suddenly imposed under the press law for an opinion piece he published five years ago.

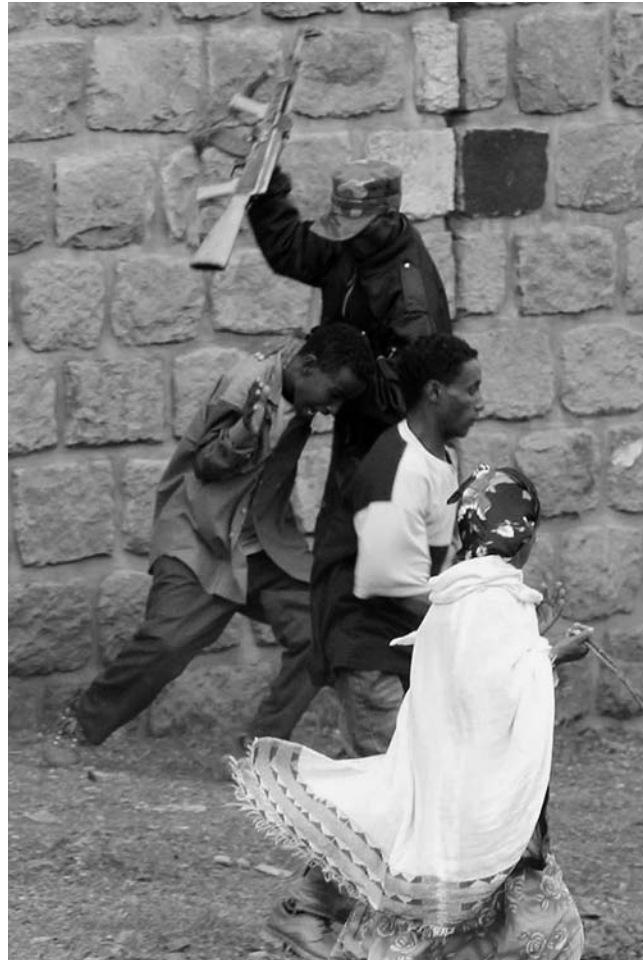
Fewer than 10 private newspapers, most of them weekly, are now publishing in Addis Ababa, compared with more than 20 before the November crackdown. Eight newspapers were shut as a result of criminal indictments and the jailing of their top journalists. Several others have been blocked from publishing because the government pressured their printers, local journalists told CPJ. The government denies applying such pressure.

A CPJ delegation—including the Johannesburg-based journalist and CPJ board member Charlayne Hunter-Gault, and Charles Onyango-Obbo of Kenya’s Nation Media Group—heard about ongoing harassment in a series of March interviews with journalists, lawyers, and diplomats. Fear and suspicion were evident. Local journalists were reluctant to meet the CPJ delegation in public places; several spoke only on condition that their names be withheld; telephone interviews were avoided because fear of wiretapping was widespread. Political tension was heightened by a series of small explosions in the capital. Although the government blamed the blasts on the opposition and on neighboring Eritrea, no one claimed responsibility for them.

Local journalists said they were especially chilled by the government’s unprecedented decision to charge their colleagues under the criminal code with crimes carrying possible death sentences. As repressive as the press law is, local journalists said, it carries a maximum jail sentence of three years and defendants are permitted to post bail.

The government appeared to open yet another offensive in February, when police detained hundreds of people in what they called an antiterrorism sweep. Among those arrested was media lawyer Berhanu Mogese, who had offered pro bono services to imprisoned journalists. A colleague, Teshome Gabre-Mariam Bokan, told CPJ that Mogese was arrested the day after he met with visiting European Union envoy Louis Michel.

Authorities appeared to step up enforcement of the press law as well, imposing prison terms and fines in cases that date back several years or stem from technical infractions. Journalists Leykun Engeda and Abraham Gebrekidan are serving sentences of 15 months and one year respec-



A police officer strikes an Addis Ababa University student with the butt of his assault rifle during June election protests.

AP/Boris Heger

tively for publishing “false news” in articles from 1999 and 2002, according to CPJ sources. Iyob Demeke, former editor-in-chief of the defunct Amharic-language weekly *Tarik*, was fined in February for failing to print the name of the newspaper’s deputy editor on its masthead in one edition. He spent six days in jail before enough money was raised to pay the fine.

Zenawi acknowledged that relations between the government and private press have long been confrontational, but he said the treason allegations were different. “They went beyond their normal bias and went for the jugular,” he told CPJ. “They became part and parcel of the day-to-day preparation for the insurrection after the elections.”

The defendants in the treason trial are charged with “outrage against the constitution and the constitutional order.” The indictment, or “charge sheet,” accuses the journalists of working with the opposition CUD, declaring the elections fraudulent, calling for violence, and “disseminating false accusations to create public distrust of officials and transmitting messages that cause conflict among peoples.” The journalists also face the charges of “impairment

of the defensive power of the state” by sowing divisions in the armed forces.

Genocide is the final charge against the journalists. Home to dozens of ethnic groups, notably Amharas, Tigrayans, Oromos, and Somalis, Ethiopia has indeed seen ethnic tensions flare into violence. Tigrayans form the base of the ruling EPRDF, while the opposition CUD draws substantial support from the Amharas. The CUD platform called for constitutional reforms to effectively abolish Ethiopia’s “ethnic federalism,” under which state boundaries are drawn along ethnic lines.

Fighting Words?

Here are English translations of excerpts from two editorials cited by the Ethiopian government as evidence against journalists being tried for treason:

Ethiop, August 17, 2005:

“The constitution clearly states that a human being cannot lose his or her life except in one way. Article 15 reads: ‘Every person has the right to life. No one shall lose his life except under penalty for a capital offense.’ Was a legal provision ever invoked before those 40 innocent young kids were massacred in public? If the rulers violate their own constitution, and if the opposition then violates the constitution in order to save the country from a crime, who should be the one responsible for a crime? ...

“There cannot be free elections until the electoral board, which is a stooge of the EPRDF (ruling party), is dismantled. Justice cannot be found in the courts that are governed by EPRDF cadres and are filled with those who have enriched themselves with embezzlement. Getting rid of these elements through a national coalition government would indeed bring about lasting peace and stability.”

Addis Zena, September 19, 2005:

“The people of Ethiopia have clearly been robbed of their voices. A party or a government that conspired to rob the voice of its own people should never be given legitimacy. Even if it wants to stay in power, the people would only chant, ‘Thief! Thief!’ and would not let it happen. And because the electoral board has been the main organizer and accomplice of such robbery, it should be denounced and should lose its credibility. ...

“Opposition parties must provide wise leadership in recovering the voice of the people from the party that has stolen it in order to stay in power.”

The government’s genocide charges, however, are vague and unsubstantiated. The prosecution cites the beating of one Tigrayan individual, an arson attack against another, “acts causing fear and harm to the mental health of members of the ethnic group,” and “indirect and direct acts causing harm to members and supporters of the EPRDF by excluding them from social interactions.”

The charge sheet cites no evidence linking journalists to these incidents, which do not themselves appear to constitute genocide. The United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines genocide as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group.”

As evidence against the journalists, the government has cited more than 20 editorials and more than a dozen press interviews with CUD leaders. At CPJ’s request, Chief Prosecutor Shemelis Kemal provided a sampling of 12 of the pieces in the original Amharic. CPJ analyzed English translations of the pieces. While the editorials are antigovernment, some harshly so, none calls for violence and none makes reference to ethnic aggression. CPJ found no evidence to support the prosecution’s contention that the pieces were intended to provoke acts of violence or genocide.

Amare Aregawi, editor of *The Reporter*, one of the few private newspapers that have published without interruption, said much of the postelection newspaper coverage was shoddy and exploited public tensions. But, he said, “There is no evidence that I would call treason myself.” Aregawi said government authorities typically refuse to speak to the private press. When Zenawi spoke with invited domestic reporters this year, the prime minister noted that it was the first such meeting in 14 years.

That breakdown is symptomatic of the deeper political divide. “The press is a reflection of politics,” Aregawi said. “There’s no tolerance. It’s ‘you are either with us or against us,’ and that is reflected in the media.” Zenawi, who acknowledged a “poison” in his government’s relationship with the press, said much the same. “We are aware that the poison is not merely between the press and the ruling party,” the prime minister said. “It’s a reflection of the overall tension between some in the opposition and the ruling party.”

Most of the jailed journalists said that they would not offer a defense because they believe the charges are baseless and the proceedings politicized. Sitting in Kality Prison, the jailed publisher Fasil Yenealem was asked if he had a message for the prime minister. “The journalists should be released,” he said. “Banning the press means banning democracy. The prime minister has done some very good things in the last 14 years. The media are not against the government but against injustice.” ■

For continuing coverage of Ethiopia, visit www.cpj.org.



Nationalists have shown up in force at court proceedings of journalists charged with insulting the Turkish identity. In February, protesters chant outside a courthouse where five prominent journalists went on trial.

AP/Osman Orsal

Bad Blood in Turkey

Nationalist lawyers take aim as an Armenian-Turkish editor treads on sensitive topics.

By Robert Mahoney

ISTANBUL, Turkey

Even when he is trying to be conciliatory, Hrant Dink gets in trouble. The managing editor of the only Armenian newspaper in Turkey was convicted in a criminal court last year for “insulting Turkishness.” Ironically, the article in the weekly *Agos* for which he was convicted was an appeal to diaspora Armenians to let go of their anger against Turks for the mass killing of Armenians during World War I.

“This is a political decision because I wrote about the Armenian genocide and they detest that, so they found a way to accuse me of insulting Turks,” Dink told the Com-

mittee to Protect Journalists at the newspaper’s cramped offices in the bustling Osmanbey neighborhood.

Dink, 51, was relaxed this February day, speaking in measured tones throughout the interview. Only hours earlier a court in southeastern Turkey had thrown out a separate case against him for criticizing lines in the Turkish national anthem and the national oath as discriminatory against non-ethnic Turks.

But his voice and face hardened at the mention of his conviction last October and the six-month, suspended jail term he received. “I was convicted of racism. That is not what I was saying,” Dink said.

Robert Mahoney is senior editor for the Committee to Protect Journalists.

Dink, a Turkish citizen who has been at the helm of *Agos* for all of the bilingual Armenian-Turkish newspaper’s 10-year existence, has appealed the verdict in Turkey and is ready to take the case all the way to the European Court of Human Rights to clear his name.

“If in this case I am not acquitted I will not live in this country anymore,” he said. Dink was convicted under Article 301 of the penal code, which forbids denigrating Turkish identity and state institutions. The verdict came the same month that Turkey opened formal negotiations to join the European Union, whose officials criticize Article 301 as incompatible with EU norms on freedom of expression. Yet several other journalists have been charged under Article 301 in recent months, all at the urging of influential nationalist lawyers.

“The state of press freedom in Turkey today depends on a battle between those forces who believe in the European Union and want to change the law and practices ... and conservatives, the military, and the bureaucracy, who fear losing their privileges if there is a change in the status quo,” said human rights activist Sanar Yurdatapan, head of the Istanbul-based Initiative for Freedom of Expression.

Dink’s prosecution followed a series of articles in early 2004 dealing with the collective memory of the Armenian massacres of 1915-17 under the decaying Ottoman Empire. Ottoman military forces, allied with Germany, killed thousands of Armenians and deported others, accusing them of sympathizing with invading Russian forces. Armenians call the killings the first genocide of the 20th century, a term Turkey rejects.

Dink suggested ways for Armenians, particularly those in the diaspora, to move on, saying that continuing rage against Turks was a poison in Armenian blood. He urged them to rid themselves of the poison and “turn to the new blood of independent Armenia.” Turkish nationalists seized on the reference to poisoned blood associated with Turks and found a prosecutor to bring the case.

They even found a way of prosecuting him for commenting on the proceedings.

In October, Dink called the Article 301 charges politically motivated, and the statement was picked up by the Turkish press. This prompted the Turkish Union of Lawyers, a nationalist group led by lawyer Kemal Kerincsiz, to initiate another criminal case under Article 288 of the penal code for attempting to influence the outcome of judicial proceedings. “It is weird,” Dink said, “because this statement of mine was published and transmitted by many newspapers and TV channels in the mainstream media. A case was not opened against them.”

Dink’s appeal received an important boost in February when the chief prosecutor’s office of the Supreme Court of Appeals said the October verdict was based on “faulty assessments” and called for it to be overturned. Although the opinion was not binding, analysts doubt the court would ignore the chief prosecutor’s recommendation. Dink would not comment on the prosecutor’s statement while the appeal was still pending.

Dink said he had always been in the sights of Turkish nationalists, but the past year saw an escalation in their efforts. “The prosecutions are not a surprise for me. They want to teach me a lesson because I am Armenian. They try to keep me quiet.”

Asked who “they” are, Dink replies unhesitatingly, “the deep state in Turkey”.

This is not the moderate, Islamist-based government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan but secular nationalist forces supported by sections of the army, security forces, and parts of the justice and interior ministries,



CPJ/Robert Mahoney

Hrant Dink is unafraid of challenging Turkish history, whether it is the mass killing of Armenians or the ethnicity of Ataturk’s adopted daughter.

according to Turkish political commentators. The nationalists, political heirs of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey, still exert considerable influence. They oppose the government’s application for EU membership, fearing a loss of Turkish sovereignty.

Nationalist lawyer Kerincsiz told CPJ that the Turkish Union of Lawyers is not targeting Dink, but does intend to pursue anyone who “assaults the values of the Turkish people.” The chief prosecutor’s recommendation that Dink’s conviction be overturned, he said, “has made the Turkish people more sensitive toward the issue because the current government is blowing the horn of the EU.”

In particular, the nationalists have pursued journalists who write critically on five major areas: Ataturk, the Armenian killings, separatist Kurds, the security forces, and the Turkish presence in northern Cyprus.

Dink managed to tread on two of these landmine issues in 2004 when *Agos* reported that Ataturk's adopted daughter Sabiha Gokcen was Armenian by birth. Gokcen, who died in 2001 at age 88, was a modern Turkish feminist icon. She won international fame as the country's first woman combat pilot. Official histories say that Ataturk adopted her in 1925 after meeting her during a visit to Bursa in western Turkey. *Agos* published claims by an Armenian, Hripsime Sebilciyan Gazalyan, who said that she was Gokcen's aunt. She said Ataturk had taken her niece from an orphanage in the south-eastern town of Sanliurfa where the child had been sent after losing her parents in the Armenian massacre.

The story incensed the deep state. Protesters jammed the entrance to *Agos* offices and newspapers reported that Dink had received anonymous death threats. "I have written

about the 1915-17 killings, but that got less reaction than the piece on Ataturk's daughter," Dink noted. "Sabiha Gokcen was a hero, a myth for Turkish women. By publishing that she was an Armenian, that myth was shattered."

Stories on Ataturk, the Armenian killings, separatist Kurds, security forces, and Cyprus are considered volatile.

For an iconoclast, Dink is remarkably mild-mannered. "I appear often on Turkish television talk shows. I try to be cool-headed and get my message across," he said. The television appearances are part of a strategy to reach beyond the estimated 60,000 Armenians left in Turkey to ordinary Turks. *Agos* has a circulation of just 6,000.

Dink defends his constant revising of history. "I challenge the accepted version of history because I do not write about things in black and white. People here are used to black and white; that's why they are astonished that there are other shades, too."

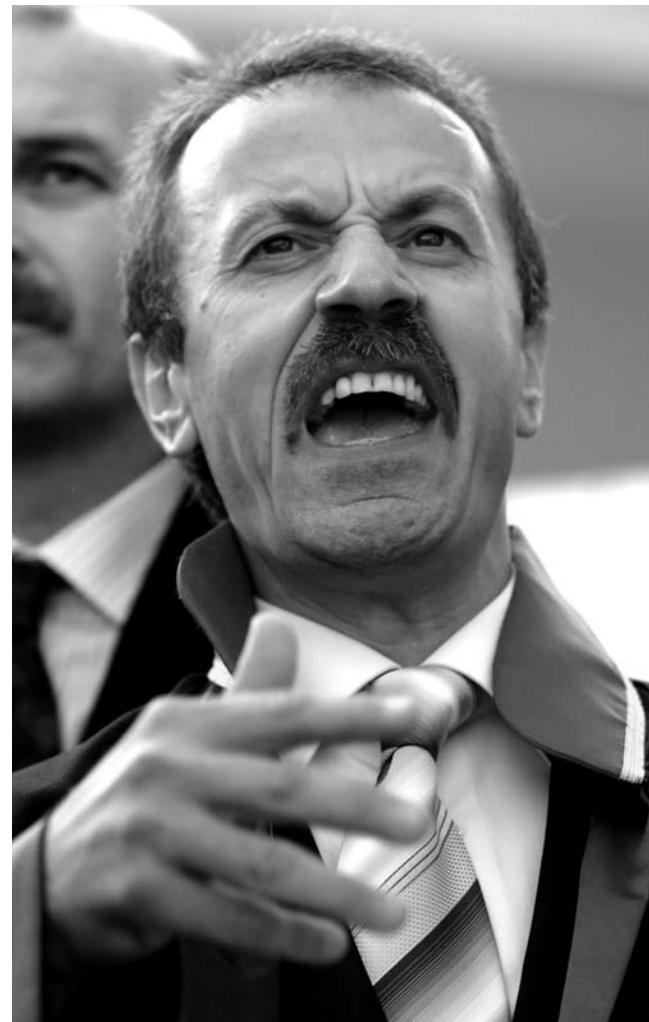
He hopes his questioning will pave the way for peace between the two peoples. "If I write about the [Armenian] genocide it angers the Turkish generals. I want to write and ask how we can change this historical conflict into peace. They don't know how to solve the Armenian problem."

The flurry of cases brought by Kerincsiz and his fellow lawyers against journalists has brought the Turkish justice system into the world spotlight. After a chorus of international protests in December, prosecutors dropped a case under Article 301 against Turkey's famed novelist Orhan Pamuk in January. He had spoken of the Armenian killings in a Swiss magazine interview. The opening of a freedom of expression case against five prominent journalists in February, also linked to the Armenian question, prompted another wave of foreign and domestic protest. Four of those cases were later dropped.

Dink does not think the tide has yet turned in favor of critical writers—"the situation in Turkey is tense"—but he believes they will prevail. "I believe in democracy and press freedom. I am determined to pursue the struggle."

That means he will continue to shine a light into the dark corners of Turkish history, albeit cautiously. "These cases have not stopped me or intimidated me. I am not practicing self-censorship. That said, I am careful in my writing not to insult anybody." ■

For more on this issue, read CPJ's special report, "Nationalism and the Press," at www.cpj.org.



Kemal Kerincsiz says his Turkish Union of Lawyers intends to pursue anyone who "assaults the values of the Turkish people."

An Open Case

Four years after Daniel Pearl was brutally murdered in Pakistan, questions and concerns remain.

By Abi Wright

On the evening of January 11, 2002, *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl walked into a hotel near the Pakistani capital, Islamabad, and was introduced to a man who called himself Bashir. Pearl thought he was meeting a potential source who could help him get access to a radical Islamic cleric for a story on terrorism. In fact, that night Pearl met a British-born Pakistani militant with a track record of kidnapping Westerners. His real name was Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh. Instead of helping Pearl land a scoop, the meeting with Saeed set events in motion that led to his entrapment, kidnapping, and murder, U.S. officials say, at the hands of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the suspected mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks on the United States.

Four years on, significant progress has been made in bringing Pearl's killers to justice. "We believe that most, but not all, of the key figures in Danny's kidnapping and murder have either been killed or are in jail," said *Wall Street Journal* Deputy Managing Editor John Bussey. But questions linger about who ordered the murder and what precisely happened. Saeed, the mastermind of the kidnapping, is on death row but is delaying his appeals amid allegations that he is

Abi Wright is CPJ's communications director and former Asia program coordinator.



Daniel Pearl in a photograph taken by his captors.

protected by Pakistan's powerful Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI). He has also violated Pakistani prison rules for death row inmates by making contact with the outside world from his prison cell. It seems uncertain he will ever be executed, according to the Pearl family, who are frustrated by the slowness of the investigation and want Saeed's sentence carried out.

Pearl traveled to Pakistan at a par-

ticularly tense time, according to Bruce Hoffman, a terrorism expert at the Rand Corp. in Washington. With the fall of the Taliban regime in neighboring Afghanistan in December 2001, militants were pushed out. "When they lost their geographical center of gravity in Afghanistan, they went to Pakistan, which was something of a haven because they had longstanding relations with existing (militant Islamist) groups."

On January 23, 2002, after exchanging e-mails with Saeed for nine days, Pearl was lured to a restaurant in the southern port city of Karachi. He got into a car he thought would take him to interview a reclusive Islamic leader. Instead, he was kidnapped and held for a week before being killed. A video camera recorded the grisly act. The search for Pearl continued for several weeks until a copy of the video surfaced on February 21, 2002.

Pearl had been researching a radical Islamic leader, Sheikh Mubarak Ali Gilani, who had been linked to the so-called “shoe bomber” Richard Reid. Reid tried to blow up an American Airlines flight from Paris to Miami in December 2001. To find his way to Gilani, Pearl did what reporters do every day—he reached out to new contacts and made himself accessible. That also made him a target, Hoffman said. “It is a question of opportunism and access. A reporter has to chase a story, making him or her more vulnerable.”

Journalists investigating militant groups and their connections to terrorist activities were not welcome, according to Pearl’s widow, Mariane, who traveled with him to Karachi and who wrote about her experience in her 2003 book, *A Mighty Heart*. A pattern of overlapping Islamic militant groups with ties to al-Qaeda emerges from the arrests in the Pearl case. Three separate groups carried out the crime: the organizers of the kidnapping who lured Pearl; those who detained him; and those who carried out the execution.

Saeed turned himself in to police on February 12, 2002, but he told a court in Karachi that he had first surrendered to the ISI one week earlier in Lahore. What took place during his time with the ISI is not known, but Saeed’s association with the powerful intelligence agency appears to be protecting him, Pearl’s family said. “He is kind of untouchable,” Mariane Pearl told CPJ.

Saeed was a member of the militant Islamic group Jaish-e-Mohammed



Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, top, leaves the provincial high court in Karachi, Pakistan, under tight security in 2002. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, inset, is in U.S. custody at an undisclosed location.

whose goal is to unite Indian-administered Kashmir with Pakistan. He told police that he plotted to seize Pearl because he wanted to strike at the United States and embarrass Pakistani President Gen. Pervez Musharraf on the eve of his visit to Washington, *The Journal* reported.

Other arrests in the case include Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, al-Qaeda’s third-ranking operative, who was snared in March 2003 near Islamabad.

U.S. officials say that he carried out Pearl’s execution. He is being held in U.S. custody at an undisclosed location. To extract information from Mohammed, CIA interrogators used a technique called “water-boarding,” where the suspect is held under water to the point of nearly drowning, *The New York Times* reported.

Fazal Karim, a militant belonging to Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, a Sunni Muslim group with ties to the Taliban, provided

more information. He confessed to his involvement in May 2002 when he was arrested in connection with a bomb attack on Karachi’s Sheraton Hotel. He says he witnessed Pearl’s execution by three Arabic-speaking men who showed up without warning. Hashim Qadeer, a member of the Kashmiri separatist group Harkat ul-Mujahideen, who first introduced Pearl to Saeed, was detained in July 2005.

At least two others connected with Pearl’s murder remain at large: Saud Memon, who owned the property where Pearl was held and killed; and at least one man who was present when Pearl was murdered, according to *The Journal*.

Despite the arrests, appeals have brought the case to a near standstill. A court convicted Saeed and three others of the kidnapping and, in July 2002, sentenced Saeed to death by hanging. “He was sentenced to death very quickly, but it was also obvious that it was a political trial. He knew that he was protected. He even said at the time ‘The people who put me here will die before I do,’” Mariane Pearl said.

From behind bars, Saeed continues to make public statements. He gave an interview to Britain’s *Sunday Telegraph* in which he pledged allegiance to Taliban leader Mullah Omar and said, “I’m trying to prepare myself to be of real service to the ‘ummah’ (Muslim nation) if I get another chance.”

The three others convicted in the kidnapping—Fahad Naseem, Salman Saqib, and Sheikh Mohammed Adeel—received 25-year jail sentences. All are appealing and the process has been subject to delaying strategies by lawyers. In July 2004, *The Journal* reported on one tactic: “Mr. Saeed’s lawyer, Abdul Waheed Katpar, requested adjournments at least twice last year on the grounds that his client’s father had borrowed the case file on Mr. Saeed and hadn’t yet returned it.”

The appeals have been delayed more than 30 times and show no signs

of moving forward, Pearl’s father Judea Pearl told CPJ. “Obviously the court allows them to play the game of delay for some reason. It is obviously also conducted from the top in the sense that the regime is not interested in executing the sentence.” Mariane Pearl sees the hand of the intelligence services behind it. “Pakistan itself cannot carry out the sentence. That tells you about the power of the ISI,” she said.

The delays have a domino effect on other parts of the prosecution. Four other men detained in the case cannot be formally arrested or charged until the first four cases are resolved because the men would be tried with the same evidence, according to former special prosecutor M.Z. Haq, who tried Saeed. If the first four sentences are overturned, it would have direct implications on the other four men’s cases, he noted.

Yet by local standards, Haq said, Saeed’s case is unusual in its delays. “This is an extraordinary and exceptional case because normally, with a death sentence case, the verdict is carried out within six to nine months,” Haq said.

“The process isn’t efficient,” said Bussey, who went to Karachi in 2002 when Pearl was kidnapped and who follows the ongoing cases. “When we regularly ask officials in Islamabad and Karachi why the appeal hasn’t been heard and the sentence finalized and executed, we’re told that the Pakistani judicial process requires patience.”

For Pearl’s family, patience is running thin. “We are looking for closure,” Judea Pearl said. “We don’t know what happened that last few days and we have not received this information. We have been after (the U.S. State Department and the FBI) for four years to hear one scenario that will match all the clues, and we haven’t received it yet.”

Reports in the British and Indian press that Saeed continues to receive visitors and communicate with follow-

ers from jail disturb the Pearls. Normally, those sentenced to death are allowed only short visits with family members and are not permitted to speak to the press, Haq said. “It hurts that he is still operating from prison,” Pearl’s mother, Ruth, said.

Saeed has been linked to other crimes since he was arrested. After two assassination attempts on Musharraf, prison authorities moved Saeed from Hyderabad to Adiala prison near Islamabad in January 2004. He was questioned there about his connection to the man behind the plots, Amjad Hussain Farooqi, a militant with links to al-Qaeda. Farooqi, who also played a role in orchestrating Pearl’s kidnapping, died in a shoot-out with Pakistani security forces in September 2005.

More pressure is needed to resolve the case, Mariane Pearl said. “There is a lack of will to pressure Pakistani authorities by the U.S. government and by *The Wall Street Journal*,” she said. Bussey responded that his newspaper hired a lawyer in Karachi to advise it on the case and has contacted all relevant parties. “*The Journal* has urged a swift resolution of the prosecution of this case with President Musharraf, with other Pakistani government officials in Islamabad and those visiting the U.S., and with the Bush administration,” he said.

Three years ago, in June 2003, Musharraf told reporters that the Pearl case was “history.” Pearl’s parents responded in a letter to the editor of *The Journal* on July 8, 2003. They said their son’s case would remain an open wound until two conditions were met: “All those involved in the planning and execution of the murder are brought to justice and justice is served, and a monument to Daniel Pearl is erected in Karachi, reaffirming the ideals for which he stood: truth, humanity and dialogue.” Those steps remain. ■

Information on the Daniel Pearl Foundation is available at www.danielpearl.com.



President Alvaro Uribe had little time for handshakes with Carlos Lauría, CPJ's Americas program coordinator, but he issued an important statement supporting the press.

Scott Dalton for CPJ

Coaxing Uribe

In Colombia, months of reporting and lobbying produce a crucial declaration.

By Joel Simon

BOGOTÁ, Colombia

President Alvaro Uribe didn't look up from the documents he was reading as we were ushered into a stark conference room in his campaign headquarters. After extending his hand for a perfunctory handshake, the president yanked it away, barely giving a photographer time to shoot a few frames.

As Americas Program Coordinator Carlos Lauría and I began to present some brief remarks about ongoing threats against the Colombian press, the president interrupted: "I only have a few minutes." Well, we asked, would he issue a statement in support of his country's beleaguered journalists? No, he said, stiffening.

Our meeting, it seemed, was off to a rocky start.

Joel Simon is deputy director of CPJ.

The appointment had been months in the making for the staff at the Committee to Protect Journalists. In October, CPJ issued a report describing pervasive self-censorship in the Colombian media. Written by Bogotá journalist Chip Mitchell, based on extensive interviews with three dozen reporters in several strife-ridden provinces, "Untold Stories" found that journalists routinely muzzle themselves because they fear physical retribution from leftist guerrillas and right-wing paramilitary forces. Harassment by government troops and officials further impedes their work.

Journalists said they felt vulnerable and isolated because of a lack of support from the central government. Uribe and Vice President Francisco Santos have frequently complained about the press and have lashed out at

critics in the media. Local officials, including military commanders, have accused critical journalists of having ties with the guerrillas. And while the number of Colombian journalists murdered has declined since Uribe took office four years ago, violence is still common and threats are rarely investigated.

I wanted to make sure the Uribe government was aware of the concerns raised in the report so I arranged to meet with Santos when I visited Bogotá last October. Because of Santos' personal experience—he had been a top editor at the country's leading daily, *El Tiempo*, and, in 1990, had been kidnapped by the Medellín drug cartel—I expected a sympathetic hearing. Instead, stung by our criticism, Santos was outraged. He sat on a couch in his office reading the report line by line and erupting each

time he found an offending passage. Santos called the report unfair, charging that the government's efforts to protect journalists were not accurately presented.

I told Santos that we stood behind the findings and that we had interviewed numerous provincial journalists who believe that the Uribe government has been indifferent, even hostile to their plight. I proposed a meeting with the president to discuss our differences and, perhaps, address the risks facing journalists.

Santos, while agreeing to reach out to the president, launched a blistering public attack against our self-censorship report in a speech just days later. Calling it "noxious for the Colombian press," he urged journalists to denounce the CPJ report. None did.

Instead, our report and follow-up articles drew international attention over the next several months. From our office in New York, we wrote letters, sent e-mails, and made phone calls to the president's staff in hopes of setting a date for a meeting. In late January, we got a positive response.

Lauría and I arrived in Bogotá on Sunday, March 12, to prepare for a meeting in two days. Political parties loyal to the president had just won a lopsided victory in Congressional elections, setting the stage for Uribe's bid for a second term in the May 28 presidential election.

On Monday morning, we awoke to an e-mail from the president's office. Our meeting had been canceled; Uribe was traveling to Bolivia for trade talks instead. Stunned, we called the president's office and insisted, without immediate success, that the meeting be rescheduled. Hanging up, we sought out all the allies we could think of—presidential staffers, members of the vice president's office, influential journalists—to help us lobby for a new date. One journalist, a television news director, said a meeting with Uribe would be very important. The president's popularity was

such, he said, that a statement would be treated "like the word of God."

Wednesday morning, March 15, we were finally told, the president had an opening. To accommodate Uribe's schedule, we agreed to meet him at his campaign headquarters. Santos joined us.

Our goal was to persuade Uribe to publicly acknowledge the existence of widespread self-censorship, express his concern about the issue, and condemn local government officials who interfere with the work of the press. Twenty-eight Colombian journalists



CPJ described pervasive self-censorship in Colombia in the fall cover story of *Dangerous Assignments*.

have been killed for their work over the past decade and, while only one murder was reported last year, journalists continue to be threatened. In the first two months of 2006 alone, CPJ documented four cases in which journalists fled their homes because of death threats. Important news stories were going uncovered.

But Uribe was not in an accommodating mood, and he seemed adamant that he would not agree to the sort of public statement that we had drafted. After all, he argued, he had already spoken out in support of the press.

Then, as we pressed further, the

conversation turned. If unwilling to sign off on our specific proposal, Uribe was eager to defend his press freedom record. As we took notes, he gave what amounted to a short speech in which he talked eloquently about the need for a critical press. He recognized the vital role of provincial journalists and said that journalists have the right to interview "terrorists"—his term for Colombia's guerrillas and paramilitaries—even if the government doesn't approve.

I pointed out that, given his personal commitment to press freedom, it would be logical to assume that any local official who interfered with the press was violating government policy.

"It's worse," Uribe said. "They are committing a crime against democracy."

The president, scraping his chair from beneath him, was done. He excused himself and left the room with little in the way of pleasantries. But we had gotten what we sought: an emphatic statement supporting the provincial press, acknowledging its need to cover all sides of the conflict, and condemning local officials who interfered. The statement, we hope, will set the tone for what will be a long and arduous effort to combat threats and self-censorship in Colombia. Santos, who lingered to chat, promised to conduct a series of meetings bringing together journalists and authorities to discuss the dangers of reporting in conflict areas.

By afternoon, Uribe's comments had been distributed widely by CPJ and the president's office. "We will not be content," the president said, "until we can say that there is not one journalist threatened or murdered." For our part, CPJ will continue to assist the many Colombian journalists under threat, fighting publicly for their right to report and working privately to ensure their safety.

And we will hold the president to his word. ■

To read "Untold Stories," visit www.cpj.org.

A Disappearance in Nias

A reporter vanishes on an Indonesian island, pointing to the dangers facing the provincial press.

By Shawn W. Crispin

TELUK DALAM, Indonesia

The August day that Elyuddin Telaumbanua left on a reporting trip to southern Nias Island, the journalist handed his wife, Elisa, a photo of a convicted criminal. “If I do not return, find this man,” he said before heading south on his motorcycle. Nine months later, Telaumbanua has not returned home.

The man in the picture was Hakman Manao, younger brother of Hadirat Manao, an influential political figure in southern Nias. Telaumbanua, 51, had a reputation for gutsy report-

ing on the tropical island’s rough-and-tumble political scene in the Medan-based *Berita Sore* daily newspaper. He had won praise from his editors for scoops on the region’s tumultuous local election campaign, including an investigation that contributed to the disqualification of Hadirat Manao from gubernatorial elections.

A witness says police did not take his report seriously, making him buy carbon paper so they could record his complaint.

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Hadirat Manao had called Telaumbanua several times in mid-August

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2005, urging him to travel south to cover the campaign there, Elisa Sederhana Harahap said. Her husband, she said, had cultivated close relations with the politician, who often afforded Telaumbanua valuable inside information, usually about political rivals. “They had a love-hate relationship,” she said.

Telaumbanua was pursuing several stories at the time, among them an investigation into Hakman Manao’s past criminal activities, including armed robbery, according to his *Berita Sore* editors. He was also looking into the mysterious murder of one of Hadirat Manao’s former bodyguards, a man known as Bajo. Just before his abduction, Telaumbanua had left Bajo’s

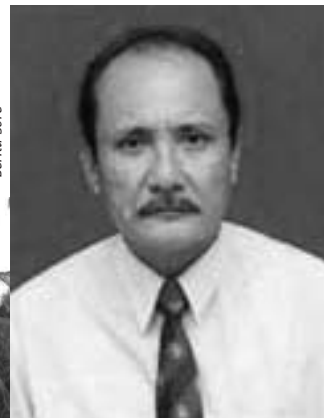
funeral in the village of Bawaganewo.

Telaumbanua had not been well received at the funeral, which was held at the home of Bajo’s brother, Jodi Talonovi. The brother had angrily denounced Telaumbanua with the use of an obscenity, according to a witness, a friend of the journalist named Ukrawan.

No more than 10 minutes after Telaumbanua and Ukrawan left the ceremony together, six motorcycle-riding assailants suddenly pulled alongside the journalist’s motorcycle and forced it to stop on an oceanfront road at around 5 p.m. The attackers, some of whom had attended the funeral, savagely attacked Telaumbanua, using pointed objects that caused him to bleed profusely from the nose and mouth, Ukrawan told the Committee to Protect Journalists.

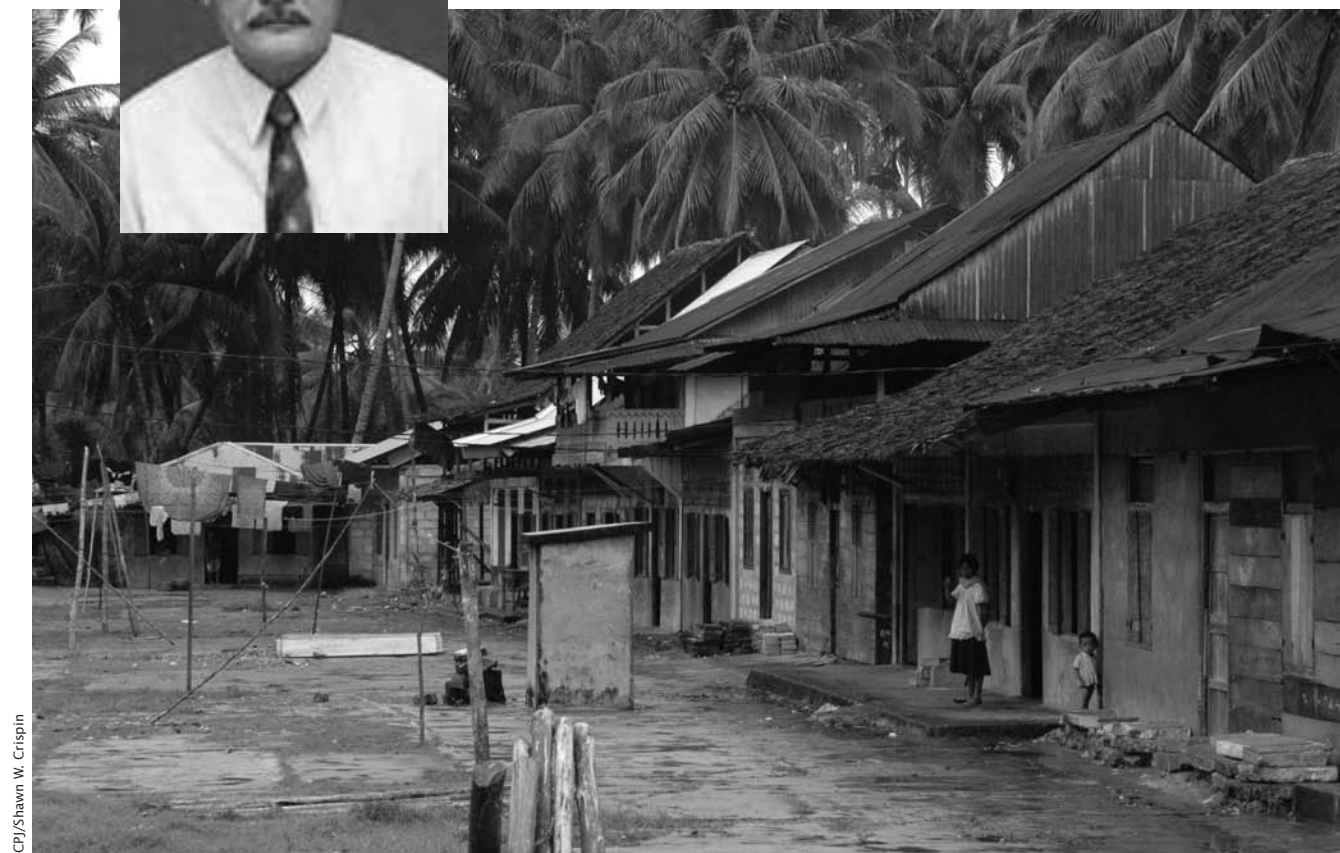
Ukrawan, who like many Indonesians uses only one name, said he was also beaten but not seriously injured. He told CPJ that the assailants positioned a semi-conscious Telaumbanua on one of their motorcycles and rode away.

After the attack, Ukrawan said, he hitched a ride to the Teluk Dalam police station and tried to explain to the authorities what had happened. He said police did not take his report seriously and made him purchase a piece of carbon paper so that they could record his complaint. Police went to the crime scene only after considerable prodding—and nearly six hours after the ambush. The six



Berita Sore

Left: Elyuddin Telaumbanua disappeared last August. Below: Just before he vanished, Telaumbanua went to a funeral in the village of Bawaganewo.



CPJ/Shawn W. Crispin

suspects Ukrawan identified were later interrogated and briefly held, but all were released due to what police said was a lack of evidence.

Without a body or additional witnesses, local police said they do not have the basis to conduct a fuller investigation. “We have been to the mountain, to the sea, but we still can’t find the victim,” said Rangkuty, head of the crime division at the Teluk Dalam police station, located about 8 miles (13 kilometers) from the abduction scene. “Our investigation personnel are very limited and we are very tired of this case,” he added between puffs on a clove cigarette.

Ebenezer Hia, the Telaumbanua family’s pro bono lawyer, has interviewed another man who claims to be a witness, a 23-year-old named Iwan who also provided his account in an

interview with CPJ. Iwan said that he saw the assailants take Telaumbanua about 2 miles (3 kilometers) back to Talonovi’s home. Iwan, a photographer who said he was an acquaintance of Talonovi, said the men held Telaumbanua for several hours, assaulted him, and then dumped his still-breathing body into the ocean.

Iwan has not given his account to police, and, though he said he did not take part in any criminal actions, his description of watching an attack over several hours raises questions about his own role. Iwan said he and his family were later threatened because of what he saw, prompting him to move to northern Nias. Hia, too, fled his home in southern Nias after getting anonymous death threats by telephone.

Hakman Manao has publicly denied any knowledge or involvement

in the journalist’s disappearance. Hadirat Manao, the head of a people’s council in southern Nias, and Talonovi could not be located for comment for this story. Until March, Hadirat Manao was serving a prison sentence for disrupting elections last year.

Police told CPJ that there is no credible evidence to support allegations against either Manao brother. Talonovi was questioned, they said, but he was not held due to lack of evidence.

Senior Justice Department officials told CPJ that they have concerns about the local investigation. K. Sianipar, the top justice official in the northern Nias capital of Gunung Sitoli, said that handwritten reports on the case from Teluk Dalam police were illegible and riddled with spelling errors and references to individuals



CPI/Shawn W. Crispin

Left: Ukrawan, who says he witnessed an attack on Telaumbanua, describes a local police force uninterested in the case.

Below: Elisa Sederhana Harahap says her husband hinted that he might not return home from a reporting trip.



CPI/Shawn W. Crispin

by initials rather than full names. Sianipar sent the reports back for revision, but they had not been returned several months later. “We don’t understand why they are moving so slow,” he said, flipping through the handwritten report.

National investigators, who were called in last October, offered a 5 million rupiah (US\$550) reward to anyone willing to provide information about the case. After three weeks on the ground, though, investigators found no one willing to take the offer. Hia said that the lack of an effective witness protection program means that testifying in the case would be a “death sentence” for local villagers. Ukrawan, a good friend of the missing reporter, has expressed concerns about his safety, but numerous requests for police protection were turned down.

Telaumbanua’s disappearance and the tepid response by police underscore the danger journalists face in Indonesia’s often lawless and violent hinterlands. “Receiving threats is part of life for Nias journalists,” said Ratakan Maduwu, a reporter with the

local *Media Farta* newspaper. “People are always calling, telling me to watch out or beware.” Added Yasokhi Nduru, a local journalist who carries a knife in a pistol-shaped holder: “We all carry weapons to protect ourselves.”

Under former President Suharto’s heavy-handed rule, Indonesia’s media were tightly muzzled for more than three decades. The more democratic-minded government of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has rolled back many press restrictions, enabling journalists in the capital, Jakarta, and in other cities to work with unprecedented freedom. In remote provincial areas, however, the decentralization policies aimed at promoting greater local democracy have unintentionally led to a breakdown in law, order, and the judicial system, Indonesian journalists said.

The glaring lack of protection for provincial-based journalists is a global phenomenon, one that is particularly acute across Asia’s emerging democracies. In the Philippines, for example, 22 provincial journalists have been murdered since 2000. Pervasive local



CPI/Mick Stern

corruption and weak national law enforcement have been factors in many of the Philippine killings.

Few governments in the region have devoted attention, let alone resources, to mitigating the risks, making it very difficult for provincial journalists to safely gather and present news relevant to their local readerships. That’s particularly true across Indonesia’s sprawling archipelago, throughout which most provincial

reporters have little to no legal protection against the prominent local figures they try to check and balance through their reporting.

Dedy Ardiansyan, head of the Alliance of Independent Journalists in Medan (AJI-Medan), said the security situation for Indonesia’s provincial journalists has steadily deteriorated. “It’s the definite downside to Indonesian democracy,” Dedy said. “Under Suharto, only the military intimidated journalists. Now there are many enemies of the press, including politicians, police, and the mafia. We often must fend for ourselves.”

According to AJI-Medan research, Indonesian police have threatened or harassed journalists operating in northern Sumatra in 28 documented cases since 2002. Indonesian courts have declined to hear any of the complaints, signaling the judiciary’s reluctance to protect the press freedom guarantees in the national constitution. Journalists are less willing to speak out about threats from criminal elements, so accurate statistics on them are difficult to gather, Dedy said.

But Dedy noted that at least two journalists have been murdered in the region since the 1980s without arrests or convictions.

Many fear that Telaumbanua will eventually be added to that list of victims. With a population of about 500,000, Nias Island is perhaps one of Indonesia’s most lawless and primitive territories. Rival tribes last went to war here in 1998, when scores of civilians were killed in spear-fought battles. In March 2005, a massive earthquake flattened the island, damaging 80 percent of its structures.

Decentralization measures, meanwhile, have unintentionally created a security vacuum as local elites often violently compete to assume the powers once held by departed Jakarta-appointed officials. In 2005, southern Nias’ first-ever gubernatorial elections required four different rounds of voting before election officials were confident enough to declare a winner in mid-December. Violence, including arson attacks on ballot boxes and Molotov cocktails thrown into voting

areas, badly marred the island’s first true experiment with representative democracy. For months, international aid agencies restricted staff travel to the south, and as many as 10 people were believed to have been killed in election-related violence.

Telaumbanua, a Nias native, was a product of his environment. A former military official and later a construction contractor, Telaumbanua turned to journalism only later in life, beginning in the 1990s. His daughter, Desi, confirmed the details of a *Tempo* magazine story that said Telaumbanua was imprisoned for six months between 1999 and 2000 on allegations that he was involved in the rape and murder of a young woman. He was released, she said, due to lack of evidence. Neither police nor others have cited that case as a possible motive in the disappearance.

Berita Sore editors said Telaumbanua had done well as a reporter. He had cultivated close contacts with some of southern Nias’ most influential elites, including Hadirat Manao. But he did not refrain from crossing a well-cultivated source: Telaumbanua was first to break the news that Hadirat Manao had falsified his academic records, which later contributed to Manao’s disqualification from the governor race.

Even with the international attention Telaumbanua’s disappearance has generated, his wife and daughter fear that the case will never be solved and no one will be brought to justice. Without her husband’s income, Elisa Sederhana Harahap sells a few vegetables in front of her house to try to make ends meet. That’s not enough to pay the mortgage, she said, and the local bank is threatening to foreclose on the family house.

“We don’t care about the money; we don’t care about the house,” she said, looking down at her husband’s idled typewriter. “We just want to know what happened.” ■

See CPJ’s missing journalist list at www.cpj.org.

Sea Change?

After China shuts a Web site, the government engages in an online debate.

By Sophie Beach

In March, a popular literary and news Web site called *Aegean Sea* was ordered closed by authorities in eastern China's Zhejiang Province. The closure of a Web site in China is hardly news these days. Since President Hu Jintao assumed power in 2003, his administration has launched a crackdown on an increasingly outspoken media and online community.

But what transpired in the aftermath of *Aegean Sea's* closure shows that the battle for control of China's Internet may be shifting. Soon after the closure a debate raged online between the Web site's supporters and provincial authorities who, in an unprecedented move, posted a lengthy

hearings in March, members of Congress lambasted the companies for sharing user information with authorities that led to the arrest of journalist Shi Tao (Yahoo), the censoring of a China-based search engine (Google), and the closing of a blog on orders from the government (Microsoft). International press freedom advocates, including CPJ, have called on the companies to cease compliance with government demands that violate basic human rights.

For Internet users in China, censored Web searches, closure of politically unacceptable Web sites, and the threat of arrest are conditions they have endured since the Internet first

cated people in China's cities. When the sites they rely on for information, discussion, and socializing are shut down, Internet users are increasingly taking it upon themselves to challenge the orders.

On March 9, 2006, the Zhejiang Province News Office and Zhejiang Information Management Office closed *Aegean Sea*. Because the site hosted online bulletin boards, forums, blogs, and discussions of news and literature, it had become a lively community for writers and others. The site, which authorities said contained "illegal content," posted writing by authors banned in China, including economist He Qinglian, Beijing-based writer Liu Xiaobo, and Taiwanese writer Lung Ying-tai. It also published several essays and articles about the shuttering of the popular *Freezing Point* weekly magazine.

Almost immediately after the closure, an anonymous writer posted an online call for support from Chinese around the world. A few days later, former contributors to the site formed an "Aegean Sea Rights Defense Support Group," which sought support from the "rights defense" (*weiquan*) movement of lawyers, scholars, and writers who are using Chinese and international law to challenge human rights violations. Meanwhile, dozens of the site's supporters posted commentaries condemning the closure,

arrived. Following the passage of "Rules on the Administration of Internet News Information Services" in September 2005, authorities have stepped up censorship of sites that post news—and the number of such sites has declined as a result.

But Chinese Internet users are no longer just accepting this censorship as part of their fate. With 111 million people online, the Internet has become a daily necessity for personal and professional use for young, edu-

many of which appeared on *Boxun*, a U.S.-based Chinese-language news site that often posts commentaries by pro-democracy advocates.

On March 15, another posting on *Boxun* caught the attention of *Aegean Sea* supporters. A lengthy unsigned statement, clearly written by a Zhejiang provincial official, accused the site of failing to register with authorities before posting news content, as required under the "Rules on the Administration of Internet News Information Services." The letter further declared: "On March 9, it was learned that 'Aegean Sea' Web site had been closed according to law by the relevant Zhejiang province authorities. Online, we can see that a small number of people are hyping the situation, spreading false rumors and misleading some people who don't understand the truth.

"To manage the Internet according to law and to close illegal Web sites is a customary international method. In terms of legislation, Germany promulgated an 'Information and Telecommunications Services Law,' Australia promulgated an 'Internet Censorship Law,' and the United States passed a 'Communications Decency Act,' and 'Children's Internet Protection Act' and other laws. When the relevant authorities penalized the *Aegean Sea* Web site and stopped the illegal behavior, it should not be criticized but should be supported."

Such public official comment on the closure of a Web site was unprecedented. Notorious for their lack of transparency, propaganda officials in China commonly give verbal orders of censorship to avoid any paper trail. When Web sites are closed down, there is no means of recourse for the editors and no institutionalized process to appeal.

Yet in the past year, as Chinese Internet users and the international community have become more outspoken, government authorities have taken the rare step of offering a public defense of Internet control. In February, an official who supervises Internet

affairs for the information office of the State Council declared, "If you study the main international practices in this regard you will find that China is basically in compliance with the international norm." The following month, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao addressed the issue at a press conference, saying that China's "Internet management" was "consistent with the established international practice."

citizens some degree of anonymity and the support of close-knit online communities. "As long as you take care not to overstep certain political boundaries—whose location is never entirely clear—you have a great deal of freedom to express yourself in all kinds of ways, and to do all kinds of business," said Rebecca MacKinnon, a fellow at Harvard University's Berkman Center for Society and the Internet



An Internet cafe in Beijing is filled with rows of computers and users. With 111 million of its citizens online, China's government faces resistance in censoring the Internet.

To many in China and elsewhere, this argument rings hollow. Soon after the Zhejiang official's posting appeared, supporters of *Aegean Sea* posted angry responses, including an essay by "New Observer" that said: "You so admire the laws of Germany, Australia, America, and France, but have you looked into their democratic systems? These are the world's most representative free democratic countries. You are so eager to strike up a comparison, but are you really confident enough to do so?"

Such a bold and direct challenge to authority can be a dangerous move in a country where political dissidents are harassed, threatened, or thrown in jail. But the Internet has given Chinese

who studies the Internet in China. "You just have to take care that whatever your activities are, you don't accidentally anger or threaten somebody who has a lot of power."

Clearly *Aegean Sea* overstepped a boundary, and the editors do not expect the site to be reopened. Asked why the site was closed, Editor Lin Hui told Taiwan's Central Broadcasting System: "They are afraid, afraid of expression and of the spirit that expression represents. ... But the most important thing is not that the site was closed. Most important is that citizens awaken to realize their own rights—innate human rights, the right to free expression, and the right to publish." ■

Authorities have taken the rare step of offering a public defense of Internet control.

reply to critics on an overseas news site, which itself is on the government's list of banned sites.

Web censorship in China has been in the international spotlight following revelations in the press about complicity by U.S. Internet giants. At

Sophie Beach is the executive editor of China Digital Times, a news Web site covering China's social and political transition and its emerging role in the world.

NORTH KOREA



"It's either the Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday paper."