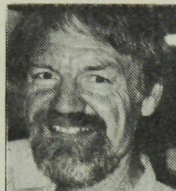


Attacks on the press

A record 173 journalists were held in prison at the end of 1994 and 72 journalists were killed in the line of duty — eight more than the previous year. Pacific cases have been cited in monitoring of news media abuses.



By DAVID ROBIE

WEDNESDAY, May 3, was World Press Freedom Day — the day when major international journalism and human rights organisations mark the dangers and pressures facing editors and reporters around the globe. Two major year books cover the state of the media, censorship and harassment. One is produced by the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, the other by the French-based Reporters Sans Frontières group. Both are non-partisan, non-profit organisations founded to monitor abuses of the press and to promote press freedom. According to the CPJ, a record 173 journalists were held in prison at the end of last year and 72 journalists were killed in the line of duty — eight more than the previous year.

Cases in the Pacific

While the Pacific has come off unscathed in CPJ's recently published *Attacks on the Press in 1994* — no entries contrasting with several in recent years — the RSF report covers several incidents. Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Western Samoa were singled out by the 1994 RSF report *Freedom of the Press Throughout the World*, also recently published.

On Fiji, the report noted a ban on journalists covering parliamentary debate. It discussed a new set of 'rules of journalism' which curbed reports of speeches liable to heighten ethnic tension between indigenous Fijians, who control government, and Indo-Fijians. On PNG, the RSF report noted the press in that country was 'one of the most dynamic in the region' but cited 'censorship' over Bougainville. It discussed the Internal Security Act and the implications for journalists wishing to report on Bougainville. However, the controversial ban on the National Broadcasting Commission reporting of a summit of Islands

DAVID ROBIE

Region premiers — clearly a case of censorship — was missed out by both the RSF and CPJ reports. I understand that RSF, at least, is including it in their new 1995 report currently being prepared. RSF's report cited the pressures on Tongan newspaper editor and pro-democracy parliamentarian 'Akilisi Pohiva and the harsh new defamation legislation in Western Samoa.

Also likely to feature in the 1995 RSF report are the government gags on Papua New Guinea's popular Radio Kalang talkback host Roger Hau'ofa and the state-run Radio Vanuatu over reports of protests against the French nuclear tests in the South Pacific. Protests by international press freedom organisations drew defensive statements blaming the news media for 'misrepresenting' the gags. One of PNG Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan's aides gagged Hau'ofa's planned talkback broadcast with the outspoken former Chief Ombudsman, Sir Charles Maino, and the ex-Governor of the Central Bank of Papua New Guinea, Sir Mekere Morauta. Ironically, the gag was imposed by media adviser Franzalbert Joku, founding editor of one of the South Pacific's most respected investigative newspapers — *The Times of Papua New Guinea* which recently closed — while more than 100 of the region's leading journalists were meeting in Port Moresby for the Pacific Islands News Association convention. RSF condemned the Radio Kalang gag, saying the decision was a 'hindrance' to press freedom.

'Radio Kalang is accused of attempting to orchestrate opposition against the government and Parliament,' it said. However, it added the people of Papua New Guinea had the right to be informed about the provincial government reforms and it called for the immediate lifting of the ban. Prime Minister Chan said he backed Joku's decision while the adviser himself denied there had ever been a ban: 'What we did was simple — we asked Kalang to deny access to the use of its facilities for anti-government and Parliament propaganda.'

The 300-page *Attacks on the Press* details more than 700 confirmed cases of press freedom violations in 77 countries. It also includes special reports such as censorship in Israel, the challenges facing local media in Hongkong, the unreported war against press freedom in Tajikistan, the torments of being targeted by Islamic fundamentalists in Algeria, and the assassinations of immigrant journalists in the United States.

Islamic fundamentalist 'death penalty'

The most dangerous country for journalists was Algeria, where militant Islamic fundamentalists assassinated 19 reporters and editors. All but one of the victims were Algerian nationals; most were reporters for French-language newspapers, magazines and wire services. The Armed Islamic Group, which claimed responsibility for many of these killings, has now declared that it is imposing the 'death penalty' on all radio and television journalists. Since May 1993, 33

REPORTERS SANS FRONTIERES

Secrétariat international

5, rue Geoffroy Marie 75009 Paris - France

Tel: (33) 1 44 83 84 84 - Fax: (33) 1 45 23 11 51 - Email rsf@globenet.gn.apc.org

Sir Julius Chan
Prime Minister
Port Moresby
Papua New Guinea

Paris, 5th July 1995

Dear Prime Minister,

Reporters sans frontières, a worldwide independent organisation that defends press freedom, is troubled after your decision to cancel a program on *Kalang Radio*.

According to our informations, on the 28 of June 1995, the Prime Minister's office had state-owned *Kalang Radio* from broadcasting its popular Roger Hau'ofa Talk show. It was expected to discuss issues raised at the recent provincial and local level

RSF's protest letter to the PNG Government.

journalists have been murdered by fundamentalist extremists in Algeria. CPJ is urging the Algerian Government to investigate and prosecute these crimes. It has also asked leaders of the Islamic Salvation Front — the main fundamentalist group — to condemn the killings publicly.

'The gravest problem facing reporters is the risk of political assassination,' says CPJ's executive director William Orme. 'Homicide is now the leading cause of job-related death in the profession worldwide.' He notes CPJ's report documents 72 deaths of journalists during 1994 — 'the largest number since CPJ began systematically monitoring attacks against journalists a decade ago'.

'At least 58 of these deaths were murders, with evidence strongly suggesting a deliberate attempt to suppress critical reporting,' says Orme. 'What is most disturbing is that these crimes were carried out with apparent impunity. In none of the 18 countries where the murders took place has anyone been tried for these crimes.'

The other 14 killed journalists died while on assignment in battle zones — five in Bosnia, three in Somalia, two in Chechnya, two in South African townships, one in Angola and one in Rwanda.

Attacks on the Press focuses on a climate of repression in Indonesia and Malaysia, both countries with significant influence on the media in PNG and the

How violations are classified

CASES OF PRESS freedom violations described in the CPJ's annual report are investigated and verified by the agency's research staff.

Each account was corroborated by more than one source for accuracy and for confirmation that the attacks were against journalists or news organisations.

Journalists are defined as 'people who cover news or write commentary on a regular basis'.

Categories are defined as follows:

Killed

Killed or missing and believed dead with evidence of retribution for news coverage or commentary, including journalists killed unintentionally in the line of duty.

Imprisoned

Arrested or held against one's will, including kidnapped.

Attacked

Wounded, assaulted; a news facility physically attacked, raided or searched; non-journalist employees attacked in any way because of news coverage or commentary.

Threatened

Threatened with physical harm or some other type of retribution.

Harassed

Access denied or limited; materials confiscated; materials damaged; entry or exit denied; family members attacked or threatened; fire or demoted (when it is clearly the result of political or outside pressure); harassed in some other way.

Legal action

Credentials denied or suspended; fined; passage of a restrictive law; libel suit intended to inhibit coverage; sentenced to prison; visas denied or cancelled.

Expelled

Expelled or forced to leave a country because of news coverage or commentary.

Censored

Officially censored or banned; editions confiscated; news outlets closed.

Source: Attacks on the Press 1994, CPJ.

Pacific. Indeed, a Malaysian company owns one of PNG's two national dailies, *The National*. According to the report, at least half of the 12 countries that took part in the November summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Conference (APEC) in Jakarta last November were 'conspicuous violators of press freedom'.

Indonesia, the summit's host, banned three key weeklies and forced editors to sack members of the nation's only free media union — the Alliance of Independent Journalists. The three banned popular and distinctive weeklies — *Tempo*, *Detik* and *Editor* — had carried dissenting commentaries, covered political scandals and reported on labour and ethnic unrest.

Malaysia and Singapore took harsh legal action against critical British and American newspapers. While Malaysia's constitution guarantees free speech and expression, journalists were kept during 1994 to rigid boundaries set by government. Many journalists hesitated to pursue sensitive stories out of fear of retaliation. The Official Secrets Act effectively discourages investigative journalism. Many of the major English and Bahasa Malaysia dailies are owned by political parties in the government's National Front coalition. The government retained power to revoke publishing licences, ban publications and censor journalists. Throughout the year, controversial articles and news broadcasts about member countries of the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) continued to be censored.

In Singapore, reporters charged with breaching the country's press policies faced prosecution twice during the year. In March, two *Business Times* editors were found guilty of violating the Official Secrets Act for publishing an unofficial estimate of Singapore's economic growth rate. They were fined a total of almost \$5000 and released. Christopher Lingle, formerly a professor at the National University of Singapore, was charged in November and found guilty in January 1995 of contempt of court. His 'crime'? He wrote an article for the *International Herald Tribune* that ambiguously referred to 'intolerant regimes' in Asia and their 'compliant' judiciaries. He was fined almost \$7000.

On a positive note internationally, William Orme says it is "inspiring, and somewhat astonishing" to witness the spontaneous appearance of a critical press in repressive societies. He talks optimistically about the 'birth of a free press around the world.'

□ *David Robie is Lecturer in Journalism at the University of Papua New Guinea's South Pacific Centre for Communication and Information in Development (SPCenCIID). This article is reprinted from Uni Tavour of 5 May 1995.*