

Asia-Pacific overview

By and large, however, the press in democratic Asia is threatened less by government action than by government inaction in the face of violent attacks against journalists. Seven Asian journalists were killed for their work in 2000, nearly all of them in countries with an aggressive independent press but weak or politicised law enforcement agencies

By KAVITA MENON

DESPITE press freedom advances across Asia in recent years, totalitarian régimes in Burma, China, North Korea, Vietnam, and Laos maintained their stranglehold on the media. Even democratic Asian governments sometimes used authoritarian tactics to control the press, particularly when faced with internal conflict.

Sri Lanka, for instance, imposed harsh censorship regulations during the year in order to restrict reporting on the country's long-running civil war. And in countries with a vibrant independent press, including India, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Indonesia, journalists were frequently subjected to physical assault and intimidation.

In some cases, commercial incentives have lured governments that resist political pressure, especially from the West, to reform restrictive media policies. This had happened in Malaysia, where Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad pledged not to censor the internet in a bid to attract high-tech investors to the country. Though his government still exercises tight control over the mainstream media, the rapid growth of internet journalism is changing Malaysia's political culture. In 2000, CPJ honored Steven Gan, editor of the online news site *Malaysiakini* (www.malaysajubu.com) with an International Press Freedom Award, recognising the pioneering role he has played to promote independent journalism in an authoritarian political environment.

However, across much of East and Southeast Asia, governments deflated the theory that economic liberalisation begets political liberties, including press freedom. China continued to open itself up to international trade, but further tightened its control over mainland media, while expressing open hostility toward the free press in Hong Kong. North Korea, Vietnam, and Laos followed suit, experimenting with increased links to the outside world while trying to maintain absolute control over news and information.

Especially in high-tech Asia, the internet has the potential to make independent news readily available in countries long dominated by official propaganda. Yet most hardline governments seem determined to defend their turf. Vietnam, Laos, and Burma have all issued decrees and guidelines to curb independent news and opinion on the internet. China has issued a slew of internet regulations in recent years, each more onerous and elaborately contrived than the last, in what the Committee to Protect Journalists believes is the most comprehensive effort by any government to control new media. The world's leading jailer of journalists, China, has imprisoned at least eight people or publishing dissent online.

Press conditions in Burma remain among the worst in the world. The ruling junta not only keeps domestic media on a tight leash, but also arrests its citizens for "crimes" that include listening to foreign short-wave radio broadcasts and using a fax machine. The isolationist junta has succeeded in blocking most information coming into or going out of the country, making it difficult to document press freedom violations. While CPJ has recorded the cases of eight journalists imprisoned in Burma, the actual number of those jailed for their journalistic work is thought to be much higher.

In September, Cheng Poh, a 77-year-old lawyer, was sentenced to 14 years in prison (having been jailed in July) for allegedly circulation photocopies of foreign news articles. Though he was released a few weeks after being sentenced, along with a group of elderly political prisoners, his case illustrates the vulnerability of anyone who tries to disseminate independent news in Burma.

Afghanistan ranks alongside Burma as one of the most information-poor Asian countries, but the ruling Taliban militia has at least begun to allow more foreign journalists into the country. The Taliban regime is eager for diplomatic recognition, and after more than 20 years of civil war, the country desperately needs foreign aid. Though Taliban leaders are divided about the value of international media attention, some apparently believe that without news

coverage, Afghanistan is doomed to slip off the global agenda completely.

North Korea, similarly, gambled that it might be in its strategic interest to grant limited access to correspondents from countries long deemed mortal enemies. Though foreign journalists were kept under close watch by government hinders during the carefully stage-managed visits of South Korean President Kim Dae Jung and, later in the year, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, they still caught vivid glimpses of daily life in one of the world's last totalitarian states. The local media, however, remain organs of state propaganda.

Coup attempts in Fiji and Solomon Islands resulted in harsher conditions for the media there in 2000 [*see details on page 88-96*]. One year after the successful military coup in Pakistan, the government made no overt moves to crack down on its critics in the press. Pakistan journalists were prone to self-censorship, however, given that they

Coup attempts in Fiji and the Solomon Islands resulted in harsher conditions for the media there. One year after the coup in Pakistan, the state made no moves to crack down on its critics. But journalists were prone to self-censorship.

work without constitutional protections or democratic safeguards.

Censorship in various forms has been in force in Sri Lanka for more than two years, badly straining its democracy and preventing full public discussion of the war between the armed forces and the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The government has also refused to grant journalists regular access to the conflict areas effectively ensuring that coverage of the war remains scant in both domestic and international media. In India, journalists worried that proposed antiterrorism legislation would be used to stifle independent reporting on insurgencies in Kashmir and the Northeastern States. And in Nepal, the government signaled its intention to crack down on publications sympathetic to Maoist guerrillas fighting to topple the constitutional monarchy.

By and large, however, the press in democratic Asia is threatened less by government action than by government inaction in the face of violent attacks against journalists. Seven Asian journalists were killed for their work in 2000.,

KAVITA MENON

nearly all of them in countries with an aggressive independent press but weak or politicised law enforcement agencies, including Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines. A newspaper editor in Thailand, meanwhile, narrowly escaped assassination. In most of these cases, the journalists were apparently targeted for exposing political corruption or other criminal activities.

In post-Suharto Indonesia, the Jakarta-based Alliance of Independent Journalists documented more than 100 cases of attacks and threats against the press in 2000. Many of these attacks were led by angry mobs, one symptom of the country's political instability. Security forces also continued to pose a threat to journalists, particularly those reporting on independence movements in regions such as Aceh and Irian Jaya (also known as West Papua).

After winning independence from Indonesia in 1999, East Timor began the hard task of building independent media for scratch. The country seems poised to enjoy a free press.

Journalists reporting on the months-long hostage crisis in the southern Philippines fell victim to a new type of attack. Many of them were kidnapped and held for ransom in what became a lucrative sideline for their captors, members of a loose confederation of armed gangs that claim to be fighting for a separate Islamic State.

On a positive note, aggressive investigative reporting in the Philippines and Thailand provided a powerful example of the media's watchdog role. In Manila, during the impeachment trial of then-president Joseph Estrada on charges of bribery and graft, prosecutors introduced as evidence a series of articles published by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, documenting the accumulation of Estrada's "hidden wealth". In Thailand, the leading candidate for prime minister, telecommunications tycoon Thaksin Shinawatra, was indicted on charges of violating government rules on the declaration of assets after a Thai language business paper published a detailed account of his holdings.

Though Thaksin was elected prime minister in January 2001, his indictment remained before a constitutional court that could decide to force his resignation and bar him from politics. Meanwhile, the ongoing legal and media scrutiny has put Thai politicians on notice.

The move prompted *lam* to resign from the paper in anger, claiming that the *Post* planned to "depoliticise" its China coverage.

Several months earlier, the newspaper's majority shareholder, Robert Juok, had personally criticised *lam* in the *Post*'s letters section. The owner objected

to a column suggesting that Beijing had ordered several Hong Kong tycoons, Kuok included, to rally behind Chief Executive Tung. But even though Kuok dismissed the article as "absolute exaggeration and fabrication," Lam stood by his story. The *Post* denied that Lam's replacement as China editor had anything to do with pressure from either Kuok or Beijing, insisting that he was free to continue writing for the paper.

□ *Kavita Memon is the Asia-Pacific coordinator of the Committee to Protect Journalists. This article from the CPJ report 2000 is published with permission.*

East Timor

EMERGING from darkness and devastation, East Timor's journalists took their first steps toward building an independent press for the fledgling nation. The leaders of the new country have pledged to promote press freedom after they achieve formal independence (expected by the end of 2001). "We have no intention to interfere in any way with the press: it must be independent of government" Nobel laureate and East Timor political leader Jose Ramos Horta told CPJ in May.

Meanwhile, the country remains under the administrative guidance of the United Nations Transitional Authority for East Timor (UNTAET).

The brutal rampage by the Indonesian military and their militia allies that followed East Timor's vote for independence in 1999 left behind no functioning printing presses, hardly any usable office space, and no stocks of paper or other supplies in the territory. East Timor's sole daily newspaper, *Suara Timor Timur*, was sacked and burned.

Two newspapers and four magazines were launched in 2000, initially relying on photocopies and a few computers to produce limited, hand-distributed editions. When the journalists ran out of toner for the copiers, they often had to suspend publication and wait days for supplies to reach the capital, Dili, from Australia. With help from UNTAET, a printing consortium began operations late in the year, using refurbished equipment that the Indonesians had abandoned. Since then, local media have been able to publish regularly.

A public hungry for news and information relied heavily on Radio UNTAET, the voice of the interim UN administration. Two private stations, one owned by the Catholic Church and the other affiliated with the resistance movement that had opposed Indonesia rule, were also broadcasting throughout the year.

KAVITA MENON

In addition, *Suara Timor Timur* reopened in July as the daily *Suara Timor Lorosae*. Journalists also formed the Timor Lorosae Journalists Association, an independent press-advocacy organisation.

In September, UNTAET announced that it was investigating the 1975 murder of five foreign journalists during Indonesia's initial takeover of East Timor, which had just been abandoned by the Portuguese. Eyewitnesses and the families of the victims have claimed that the journalists were executed by the Indonesian military.

Meanwhile, UNTAET indicted suspects in the September 1999 murder of Indonesian journalist Agus Muliawan, on charges of "crime against humanity." On 11 December 2000, the UN accused an Indonesian special force commander and 10 others, mostly East Timorese members of the Tim Alfa militia, of murdering 13 people, including Muliawan and a group of aid workers.

Investigators have reported that Tim Alfa worked closely with the Indonesian army's Battalion 745, thought to be responsible for the assassination of Dutch journalist Sander Thoenes, who was killed just days before Muliawan. Both the UN and the Indonesian government launched investigations into the Thoenes murder, but prosecution efforts had faltered by year's end, mainly due to resistance from the Indonesian military.

Fiji

FIJI'S press, among the freest and most diverse in the Pacific region, endured a tumultuous year marked by a coup attempt that effectively dismantled the country's democratic foundations. While former Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry had been a harsh critic of the press during his brief tenure, journalists came under much greater pressure during the months of political uncertainty that followed his ouster.

The crisis began on May 19, when rebel George Speight seized control of the parliamentary complex in the capital, Suva, taking the prime minister and many members of his multiracial Cabinet hostage. Chaudhry was the country's first Indo Fijian prime minister, but his election in May 1999 clearly did not end tensions between Fiji's indigenous population and the island's ethnic Indians, mostly descendants of indentured laborers first brought in by the British in the late 1800s.

Speight, a failed businessman, was a skilled media manipulator in the early days of the coup attempt, disguising his bid for personal power as a crusade to help indigenous Fijians. Speight and his spokesman Josefa Nata, former

coordinator of the media industry training school Fiji Journalism Institute, held numerous press conferences within the besieged parliamentary complex, making themselves far more accessible to journalists than did representatives of the government or military.

Despite this media-friendly strategy, rebels loyal to Speight were responsible for numerous attacks against the press: shooting Australian cameraman Jerry Harmer, ransacking Fiji's only television station, and beating up photographer Sitevene Moce when he attended one of Speight's news conferences. Rebel violence also prompted the University of the South Pacific to temporarily shut down *Pacific Journalism Online*, a student-run web site that had been an important source of news about the crisis.

The government also contributed to an increasingly hostile climate for the Fijian press. On May 29, Fiji's military chief declared martial law. The next day, he suspended the country's 1997 Constitution, whose Bill of Rights guarantees freedom of expression. The military-backed interim government, which took over in July, seemed in no hurry to return the country to democratic rule.

In October, military authorities detained and interrogated three journalists from Radio Fiji, threatening to prosecute them for a report on political divisions within the military. The home minister warned that the journalists' actions threatened national security and were "tantamount to destabilization." Though the journalists were not prosecuted, their harassment underlined the vulnerability of the press under the emergency regulations. Additionally, the assistant commissioner of police announced that government lawyers were drafting legislation that would force journalists to reveal their sources.

When an army special-forces unit mutinied in November, many feared that the military might seize power outright to restore stability, which would likely have dire implications for press freedom.

The political landscape remained uncertain at year's end, with the interim government refusing to accept High Court judgements declaring that the administration was illegally installed and that the Constitution remained in force. Meanwhile, Speight and nine of his alleged co-conspirators were in prison awaiting trial on charges of treason and assorted other crimes committed in the course of the rebellion.

Cameraman Jerry Harmer's shooting figured prominently in a case that became a test of the immunity protections offered to the rebels under the peace accord. In the trial of Isoa Raceva Karawa, a rebel who faced three counts of

attempted murder for allegedly targeting Harmer and two government soldiers, a High Court judge reversed a lower court's acquittal, arguing that the rebels' failure to nullify the immunity decree.

Philippines

THE RAUCOUS Philippine press took center stage as President Josph Estrada faced mounting scandals and a televised impeachment trial in the Senate. The crisis began after a one-time crony of Estrada accused the former movie actor of accepting millions of dollars in illegal gambling payoffs. Estrada's predicament was a riveting media event, and press investigations into the president's murky personal finances helped prosecutors construct the charges against him.

In July, the respected Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) released a report on Estrada's hidden assets. Based on searches of public records, the report inventoried shell companies, houses occupied by Estrada's mistresses, and other properties. But because the presidential palace pressured numerous editors not to run the story, the PCIJ report went largely unnoticed at first. When Estrada's former gambling buddy made his allegations in early October, however, newspapers and television stations scrambled to use the well-documented PCIJ material, which widened the scope of the story. Government investigators also introduced a series of the Centre's articles on Estrada into proceedings against him.

The turnaround in Estrada's political fortunes was a rough sort of justice for many. Philippine journalists, who had complained that Estrada's operatives and allies used political and economic pressure to mute press criticism.

In late November, Estrada supporters demonstrated outside the Manila offices of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, the country's biggest daily newspaper, which had been at odds with the president for years. Similarly, press outlets viewed as pro-Estrada were subject to the decision of the beleaguered chief executive's opponents. Press advocates could take heart that, despite the seriousness of the charges against Estrada, the impeachment crisis was largely handled peacefully, through public debate and constitutional processes put in place since the overthrow of dictator Ferdinand Marcos in 1986.

Elsewhere in the Philippines, however, Muslim secessionists kidnapped 15 journalists, most of them working for foreign news agencies and attempting to cover a months-long hostage crisis on the remote island of Jolo. Most of the press hostages were released via substantial ransoms to the kidnappers, leading

some critics to accuse news agencies of unwittingly funding the secessionists and encouraging more kidnappings of journalists. In late July, most agencies temporarily pulled their crews out of Jolo to avoid new hostage crises. And on September 19, during a Philippine military assault against the rebels, the last of the hostages, Jean-Jacques Le Garrex and Roland Madura of France 2 television, escaped from their captors.

Despite its free and lively press, or perhaps because of it, the Philippines is one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists. Since democracy was restored in 1986, 35 journalists have been killed while practising their profession, most of them in rural areas. Almost all the murders remain unsolved. On November 17, outspoken radio commentator Olimpio Jalapit, Jr., was shot and killed in Pagadian City, on the island of Mindanao. A frequent critic of powerful local politicians, Jalapit received a death threat, sent a text message to his mobile phone, on the morning he was killed.

Samoa

THE CLIMATE for press freedom continued to improve, with the government of Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi apparently determined to shed the previous regime's reputation for corrupt and autocratic rule. One impetus for the turnaround were the high-profile convictions of two former cabinet ministers who had been charged with plotting the assassination of a reformist politician. During the trial, evidence emerged that one of the accused had also tried to murder the country's most prominent journalist, Savea Sano Malifa, editor and publisher of the *Samoa Observer*, the only local daily newspaper.

For years, the *Observer* had faced relentless pressure from the politically powerful, including former prime minister Tofilau Eti Alesana, for reporting on official corruption and abuse of power. That pressure most often came in the form of costly lawsuits, which nearly bankrupted the paper. Though criminal libel and defamation laws remain on the books, there were no new cases filed against journalists in Samoa last year.

The privately owned Radio Polynesia, which operates three commercial FM stations, resumed its local news service, suspended in march 1999 after years of political pressure. And in the summer, Supreme Court judge Andrew Wilson ordered the government to grant the political opposition access to state media, which have grown increasingly independent within the past year, according to local journalists.

Solomon Islands

SECURITY CONDITIONS for local journalists covering armed ethnic conflict in the Solomon Islands deteriorated markedly last year, as several reporters went into hiding after militants threatened them with physical violence.

A coup attempted on June 5 by the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF), a rebel group representing emigrants from neighboring Malaita Island to the archipelago's main island, Guadalcanal, eventually forced prime minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu to leave office. A new government, led by former opposition leader Manasseh Sogavare, was installed at the end of June. However, the MEF maintained de facto control of the capital, Honiara is the country's media center, most non-Malaitan journalists fled. Fighting broke out on Guadalcanal in October 1998, when a group now known as the Isatabu Freedom Movement began a violent campaign to secure indigenous land rights and drive out settlers from Malaita. The MEF was formed as a counter-force.

Despite a peace accord signed by the two sides on October 15, the situation remained extremely volatile. The new government did not impose formal restrictions on journalists, but repeatedly emphasized the need for the media to be "sensitive" about reporting on ethnic tensions.

FIJI

May 27

Jerry Harmer, The Associated Press

ATTACKED

Harmer, a cameraman for The Associated Press Television News (APTN), was shot in the arm while filming an armed confrontation between a dozen government soldiers and approximately 200 supporters of coup leader George Speight. The clash took place at an army checkpoint 100 yards (110 meters) away from the parliament compound in Suva, where Speight was holding more than 30 hostages, including Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry.

Harmer said that the rebels aimed directly at a group of journalists who were standing about 10 meters (11 yards) away from the fighting. Rick Rycroft, an AP photographer, saw that a shot was imminent and ducked; Harmer was hit instead. Harmer was treated at Colonial War Memorial Hospital in Suva, then flown to Australia.

Speight later stated that the media's safety was not his responsibility, saying that journalists were there "at their own risk."

Speight supporter Isoa Raceva Karawa was subsequently charged with three counts of attempted murder, for allegedly targeting Harmer and two government soldiers, and with illegal possession of firearms. On July 21, a local judge acquitted Karawa on all counts in accordance with a recent amnesty decree.

However, on October 2, Justice Peter Surman of the Suva High Court struck down the lower court's ruling, stating that the rebels' failure to turn in their weapons, as required by the peace accord, effectively nullified the amnesty. Karawa's lawyer appealed this decision.

May 28

FJI TV

ATTACKED

Rebel supporters of coup leader George Speight ransacked the headquarters of Fiji TV during a rampage through the capital, Suva.

Station staff estimated that equipment worth US\$300,000 was destroyed after rebels forced them to flee the building. The station was off the air for 18 hours and relied on military guards to secure its premises while repairs were made.

Local journalists said the attack appeared to be in retaliation for critical coverage of Speight on a current affairs programme called *Close-Up*, which aired an hour before the attack.

Speight and his supporters had seized control of the parliament compound on May 19 and were holding more than 30 hostages, including Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry. No charges were filed or arrests made in connection with the attack on Fiji TV.

May 29

PACIFIC JOURNALISM ONLINE

CENSORED

University of the South Pacific officials imposed a 30-day suspension on *Pacific Journalism Online* (PJO) a web site run by student journalists, without warning and initially without explanation.

Two days later, Vice-Chancellor Esekia Solofa said in a statement that the decision was made for "security reasons," but added that the shut-down would be temporary.

Rebel leader George Speight had launched a coup attempt on May 19, when

KAVITA MENON

he seized the parliamentary compound and captured more than 30 hostages, including Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry.

The *PJO* web site (www.usp.ac.fj/journ/) carried hourly updates on the unfolding coup. The last item posted before the university took down the site was the transcript of a Fiji TV program that had apparently provoked a rebel attack on the television station.

During the suspension, *PJO* articles were hosted on a web site run by the University of Technology in Sydney. On June 28, Solofa allowed the web site back on the university's server, but prohibited *PJO* staffers to post any news about the coup.

June 28 **HARASSED**

Rei Jeli, *The Fiji Times*

Leone Cabenadabea, *The Fiji Sun*

Virisila Buadromo, Radio FM 96

Trevor Whippy, Fiji TV

Michael Field, Agence France-Presse

James Regan, Reuters

Harry Burton, Reuters Television

Brad Schmidt, Network Nine

Guy Martin, Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Malcolm Brown, Sydney Morning Herald

Shona Geary, Radio New Zealand

Rebels loyal to coup leader George Speight detained several journalists inside the Fijian parliament compound for about two hours. At the time, Speight was holding more than 30 hostages inside the compound, including Fiji's Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry.

The journalists included Jeli, a reporter for *The Fiji Times*; Cabenadabea, a reporter for *The Fiji Sun*; Buadromo, a reporter for Fiji's Radio FM96; Whippy, of Fiji TV; Field, a correspondent for Agence France-Presse; Regan, a reporter for Reuters; Burton, a cameraman for Reuters Television; Schmidt, of the Australian broadcaster Network Nine; Martin, a radio reporter for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation; Brown, of the Australian daily *Sydney Morning Herald*; and Geary, a reporter for Radio New Zealand. Speight instructed the journalists, who had come for a press conference, to stay inside the compound for "safety reasons". When one reporter asked if they were free to go, Speight repeated his admonition. Another was stopped by rebels as he

attempted to leave. The journalists were eventually permitted to leave the complex, but some of them later told CPJ that they felt in danger of being taken hostage.

July 4

Sitivene Moce, *The Fiji Sun*

ATTACKED

Moce, a photographer for *The Fiji Sun*, was detained, threatened, and beaten by supporters of coup leader George Speight inside Fiji's parliamentary complex, where he had gone to cover a press conference. Rebels accused Moce of photographing them from a police barricade outside the parliamentary complex. Moce denied this, but was taken to a room where he was threatened with violence by armed men whom he believed were in contact with Speight by two-way radio. He was released after rebels conceded that they had mistaken him for someone else.

On his way out of the complex, Moce was again attacked, this time by some 30 rebel supporters, who beat him severely and robbed him of his camera equipment and personal possessions. On July 10, Speight's spokesman Josefa Nata, apologised directly to Moce for the attacks.

October 20

Francis Herman, Radio Fiji

Vasiti Waqa, Radio Fiji

Maca Lutunauga, Radio Fiji

HARASSED

Herman, chief editor and acting chief executive officer of the state-owned Radio Fiji, was interrogated and threatened with prosecution, along with news director Waqa and reporter Lutunauga, after the station reported dissension in military ranks over the appointment of an acting president.

The three journalists were told that Fijian military chief Commodore Frank Bainimarama had ordered them detained for questioning under the provisions of an emergency decree imposed after the May 19 coup attempt. Bainimarama had earlier phoned Herman to demand that he disclose the source for a report that said some officers in the military had opposed the appointment of Vice-President Ratu Jope Seniloli as acting president during Parisent Ratu Josefa Iloilo's impending visit to Australia.

The journalists were interrogated for almost five hours at army headquarters

KAVITA MENON

in the capital, Suva. According to Herman, the officers pressed them to reveal the unidentified military source for their radio report, but did not demand either a retraction or an apology. The journalists were then interrogated separately by police officers, taken to the Central Police Station, and released with threats that they could face charges under state security provisions of the emergency decree.

In a press release posted the same day on the government's website, Home Minister Ratu Talemio Ratakele stated that Radio Fiji had "acted in a manner which can be construed as seriously prejudicial to the national interest, public order and national security of Fiji," and said its actions were "tantamount to destabilisation". The three were not charged.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

May 26

Sam Seke, Freelancer

THREATENED

Seke, a freelance journalist who reported for Radio Australia and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), received multiple warnings that he was in danger of being killed by members of the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF), a rebel group. The threats followed an ABC programme about the MEF.

A friend of the militia's deputy commander stopped Seke in the morning, warning him to leave town because "the MEF are after you." Later that day, a colleague at the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation, where Seke was on the group's hit list, warned him. A police officer also telephoned Seke and urged him to flee the capital immediately.

On May 17, Seke left Honiara for the relative safety of Gizo, the capital of Western Province. Shortly after he left for the airport, MEF members arrived at his home.

MEF spokesman and legal adviser Andrew Nori wrote a letter to militia commanders urging them to allow Seke to work without fear of physical reprisal, but CPJ sources said his influence was limited. On June 5, the MEF led a coup attempt in Honiara, and the city rapidly descended into lawlessness. By September, the news agency Agence France-Presse reported that more than half of Honiara's 50,000 residents had fled the capital.

At the beginning of November, Seke left Solomon Islands for Australia, where he planned to seek political asylum. □